ED/GEMR/MRT/2017/C1/22

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Global Education Monitoring Report

Country case study prepared for the 2017/8 Global Education Monitoring Report

Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments

Integrity and Accountability in Education in Tajikistan

This paper was commissioned by the Global Education Monitoring Report as background information to assist in drafting the 2017/8 GEM Report, Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the Global Education Monitoring Report or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: "Paper commissioned for the 2017/8 Global Education Monitoring Report, Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments". For further information, please contact gemreport@unesco.org.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY

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2017

This brief case study draws on the author's years of experience living and working in Central Asia, secondary analysis of interviews, focus groups, and documents gathered through ongoing research in Tajikistan (Lapham, forthcoming), and academic literature related to accountability and integrity in education as well as international assistance and globalization in comparative education. It begins with a brief country profile followed by a deeper discussion of accountability in the education sector that draws out some of the challenges applying formal accountability frameworks to a context where formal and informal accountability overlap significantly and may be at odds. It ends with recommendations and suggestions for a way forward. [1]

1. Country profile

Tajikistan is a land-locked country located in south-eastern Central Asia, sharing borders with the Kyrgyz Republic, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and China to the east. More than 93% of the country is mountainous, and nearly three quarters of the population live in rural areas near river valleys' small areas of arable land. It has a population of around 8 million people and is currently experiencing rapid population growth, with an estimated 51.6% of the population under 25 years of age and 32.6% younger than 15 years of age (CIA, 2016). Tajikistan remains deeply affected by conflicts at the start and end of the 20th century. It became a Soviet republic following the Bolshevik conquest of Central Asia in the 1920's. A period of rapid cultural change followed that included the introduction of Cyrillic script, bans on the traditional veil worn by Muslim women (*paranja*), collectivization of agriculture, and other mandates associated with the Soviet project (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2013). The conflict and cultural disruption of this period was intensified by migration and was characterized by power struggles among regional groups within the Tajik SSR throughout the Soviet period (Niyozov & Bahry, 2008). Tajikistan declared independence in 1991, but civil war among regional groups soon followed lasting until a cease-fire in 1997 with localized skirmishes continuing into the 2000's. The faction led by Emomali Rahmon, with a power base in the southern agricultural region of Khatlon, claimed victory and has ruled ever since, solidifying single-party rule in 2015 by outlawing the last remaining credible opposition party, and subsequently arresting as many as 200 associated political activists.

Tajikistan has the lowest GDP in Central Asia at US$2,700 per capita in 2015, although The World Bank reports steady economic growth from 2000 until a contraction that began in 2014 driven by low commodity prices and a sharp decrease in remittances from labour migrants affected by Russia's faltering economy. Remittances from labour migration are estimated at up to 50% of GDP with up to 1/8 of Tajikistan's population working abroad (CIA, 2016). This is significant for the education sector because child poverty is likely to increase with a decrease in remittances and because high rates of labour migration have been shown to decrease family investments in children's education (Bennett et al, 2012; Yamada, 2015). Informal income from narcotics trafficking may be as large as 30-50% of GDP (CIA, 2016). Unsurprisingly, there are serious challenges with corruption. Transparency International ranked Tajikistan 136 of 168 countries in 2015. There are also challenges to accountability throughout systems of finance and public service (IMF 2016). Although these figures relate to the economy as a whole, they set the stage for corrupt and corrosive practices throughout public service by normalizing the idea of a criminal elite intertwined with government, the burying of large amounts of money in the shadow economy, and the reality of many communities left to meet their own needs.

[1] Written by Kate Lapham, Deputy Director, Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations

Tajikistan inherited its education system from the Soviet Union. As the first foray into mass education, the Soviet Union's education policies through the 1940's were primarily concerned with convincing parents in Central Asia to send their children to school rather than employing them in the household (Whitsel, 2011). These trends continued in subsequent education policies as the USSR sought to extend educational goals beyond universal literacy to make up for the substantial losses to the labour market of the war period (Kaser, 2006). The result at independence was a highly centralized system of formal schooling with clear lines of accountability from the school to the district education department to the provincial education authorities to the Ministry of Education. Although municipal budgets, including for education, have been slowly decentralized, accountability for curriculum and teaching practices remains within this formal structure (Whitsel, 2011). The literacy rate in Tajikistan is estimated officially at 99.5% (TajStat, 2016), but these figures are not consistent with the high dropout rate from primary education beginning as early as third grade, which UNICEF (2007) estimates at more than 7%. Furthermore, there is evidence of gaps in education attainment, particularly among women in conflict-affected areas during the years of the civil war and economic collapse (Shemyakina, 2011). However, it is difficult to chart the trajectory of learning achievement in the education system because there is little data available.[2]

2. Formal and informal accountability

There is still pride in the accomplishments of the Soviet era, and admitting or publicly addressing setbacks since independence would be a loss of face, particularly when resources to meet these challenges are lacking. At the same time, challenges in the education sector are widely known even if they are left to communities or individual institutions to address as best they can. In this context, accountability becomes a complicated concept where formal and informal structures overlap, intersect, and sometime contradict each other. The word 'accountability' in Tajik has two inter-related translations. Both terms are related to formal and informal understandings of accountability that encompass elements of legal or financial compliance, requirements, expectations, and loyalty. The first (*ҳисоботдиҳӣ*) relates to financial accounting for resources. This term is more formal and corresponds well to English-language understanding of transparency and financial accountability. The second (*масъулият*) connotes taking responsibility for one's actions or having responsibility for a set of duties or obligations. This term corresponds to the English-language understanding of legal accountability or responsibility within formal structures, but it also encompasses informal webs of accountability with the social context that are often absent or supplemented by additional explanations when discussed in English.

Formal, legal accountability refers to the responsibilities for officials, administrators, and teachers defined in regulations and standards. As significant spenders of public funds, like any other network of government agencies, education systems are accountable to taxpayers for the transparency and efficiency of expenditures. However, education systems should be accountable beyond this purely fiscal definition. They are also accountable to the students who participate in education, the families of students' who support them, and the communities they serve for the richness of the learning experiences provided and for outcomes that can only be measured and appreciated many years in the future (Schweinhart et al. 2005; McMahon, 2004). Inherited from the well-resourced and highly centralized Soviet system, regulations and standards are detailed and often impossible to implement in Tajikistan's current context

[2] In time, the National Testing Center founded in 2012 with support from the World Bank and the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation in Tajikistan may yield such data, at least for those who remain in the school system long enough to qualify for university admission.

because infrastructure has deteriorated, learning materials are not universally available, and education institutions must often make compromises, such as working in shifts or sharing furniture and textbooks - challenges that are not foreseen in existing standards - to accommodate students with the resources available. Thus, formal accountability is complex enough on its own.

Informal accountability, or the social norms of responsibility and reciprocity to one's family and community, adds a further layer of complexity (Tuncer-Kilavuz, 2009). The ways that the expectations of the community align with the type and quality of education that the system is able to provide determines to a large extent the integrity of the system, including the gaps or conflicts between formal, legal accountability and informal (or less formal) accountability to those directly participating in education (Milovanovitch, 2013). Informal accountability in Tajikistan related to family, community, and social networks is strongly felt and certainly plays a role in the way that the education system negotiates compromises between what is formally required, what communities want for their children, and what is possible to keep the school system functioning. Mechanisms of informal accountability also provide space for citizens to be heard in the education system, particularly at the community level.

For example, standards related to health and hygiene are set by the central government. They require schools to be heated during the winter months and presuppose sufficient resources from the public budget to maintain a functioning boiler and radiant heating system in the school building. In reality, schools do not receive sufficient resources from municipal budgets for maintenance or fuel. Teachers often use small stoves to heat individual classrooms. The danger of students burning themselves, fire hazard, and carbon monoxide build-up from improperly vented stoves sets this practice against the formal standards, but the alternative is suspending schooling or a freezing classroom. Furthermore, schools often ask students' families to contribute fuel to burn in the stove – a contribution that is not explicitly regulated because its necessity is not foreseen in the formal standards of school governance.

At the same time, formally, parents (and often grandparents in the case of families affected by labour migration) are formally accountable for ensuring that their children attend school through the end of ninth grade by the Law on Parental Responsibility. Informally, they are responsible for safeguarding the health, security, and livelihood of the family. In practice, school personnel and families must negotiate compromises and contributions, perhaps combining classes in the winter months, excluding or shaming students whose families cannot afford to contribute fuel for heating, or unofficially suspending classes during the coldest periods.[3] All of these are violations for which teachers and principals could conceivably be held accountable by the municipal government (in the case of parent's informal contributions) or the accountability structures of the Ministry of Education (in the case of school closing or combining classes). However, it is unlikely that school personnel would be called to account on a systemic scale because so many schools are affected, but selective enforcement is possible if someone higher on the ladder of authority perceives a political threat from the school or is otherwise motivated to intervene.

This example illustrates how official measures of accountability must sometimes be overlooked for the system to continue functioning, but can also easily be invoked for selective enforcement or used to capture resources for personal gain. In many circumstances, informal accountability supersedes the formal, but reflects the social and political relationships within each community in the ways that rules and

[3] The academic calendar is set centrally by the Ministry of Education and follows a September to May school year despite evidence that unheated schools in winter and the necessity of agricultural work during the planting and harvest seasons in rural areas have a serious effect on attendance (Saidov and Whitsel, 2007; ICG, 2011).

regulations are invoked or applied. Thus, accountability in Tajikistan's education system is a combination of selective enforcement through official channels and adherence to social norms. The section that follows examines the specific challenges of formal accountability faced by the central government, donors and international partners supporting the education sector, and the teachers and administrators working in kindergartens and schools. In addition to understanding how actors at different levels cope with overlapping accountability structures, it is also important to understand the implications for students and, in particular, those who belong to marginalized groups. Examples drawn from interviews with stakeholders are interspersed throughout and a mini-case addressing overlapping accountability for children with disabilities follows.

3. Actors and accountability:

Central government

The tension inherent in this arrangement is intensified by Tajikistan's highly centralized policy environment. The legal system is monist with agreements signed by the President entering into national law. In the education system, the Ministry of Education and Sciences makes most decisions regarding implementation of services. Article 41 of the Constitution and Article 6 of the Law on Education guarantees all citizens of Tajikistan the right to free education through the 9th grade and equal access to education thereafter. Legislation is formally approved by the Parliament and signed by the President after a vetting process in the Ministry of Education and Sciences and the Cabinet of Ministers. Regulations are the purview of the Ministry with implementation carried out by 5 provincial (*veloyat*) / city and 62 district (*nohiya*) education departments where appointments to executive offices are made by the central government with the approval of elected local councils. In some cases, the Presidential Administration may take direct responsibility for a specific initiative, as with the establishment of the National Testing Centre in 2012, although there is no truly independent regulatory or auditing body overseeing the education system. The national government has developed the National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan (2006-2015), adopted in 2005 and then updated in 2012 as the National Strategy of Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan till 2020 with support from the donor community because the public budget available from official revenues is insufficient to meet the needs of the education system.

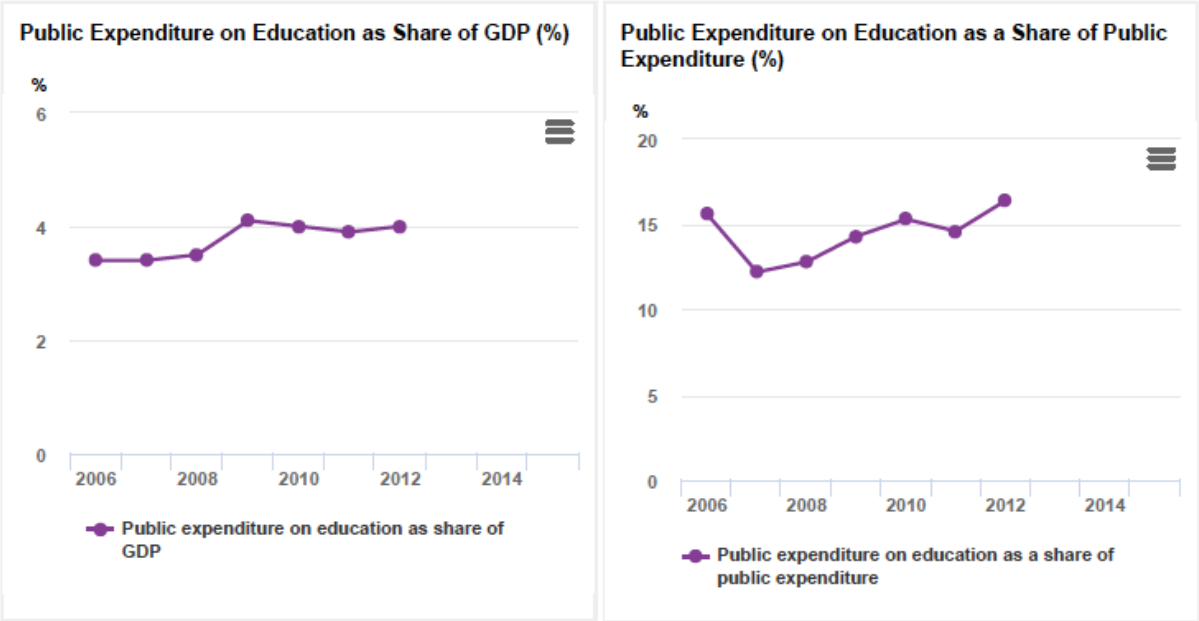
Further challenging the mechanisms of formal accountability, compiling data from the education system is extremely difficult. Statistics can vary widely between sources and can even be unclear or inconsistent within the same source. For example, the Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (TajStat) publishes annual data on the numbers of educational institutions and students. In the figures released in 2016, the total number of schools for the 2013-14 academic year matches the disaggregated figures presented for the 2014-15 academic year. This, in turn, calls into question the data presented elsewhere as possibly spanning or mixing different academic years and muddling analysis of drop-out, girls' attendance, and education for children with disabilities – data that is much more difficult to collect than the number of public schools. Similarly, the figures presented in the National Strategy for Education Development (NSED) in 2012 do not match the TajStat figures for the corresponding academic years. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the education system, but all data should be treated as approximate.

Table 1. Structure of the education system in Tajikistan

Stage	Duration	Number (NSED, 2012 for 2010-11 AY)	Number (TajStat, 2015 for 2013-14 AY)
Preschool education	up to 7 years		
Day nursery	up to 4 years	-	7
Kindergarten	up to 3 years	488	512
General education:	11 years	3,747	3,836
primary	4 years	549	456
general basic	5 years	2,496	2,602
general secondary	2 years	702	577
Gymnasium (28 private)		89	85
Lyceum (6 private)		58	65
Private or Non-government		12	-
Vocational education:			
primary	1-3 years	66	-
secondary	2-4 years	49	51
higher	4-6 years	30	34

As the government of Tajikistan has become increasingly authoritarian, education policy has become increasingly centralized in terms of curriculum, assessment, and appointment of loyal school principals and district officials (Niyozov & Bahry, 2006), which has likely intensified following the crack down on the IRP. At the same time, fiscal responsibility for education has legally devolved to the local level following recommendations from the World Bank in the wake of a near-complete collapse in centralized revenue collection that has not recovered from the post-independence civil war (Niyozov & Bahry, 2006; ICG, 2011). Thus, the government remains faithful to its commitments to formally decentralize education without relinquishing actual political control. This is further complicated by a chronic lack of resources.

Figure 1: Spending on education (Global Partnership for Education, accessed 11/26/2016)



This graph shows the decrease in real terms in education spending, which has not recovered since independence in 1991 and the civil war that followed. In fact, significant additional investment is necessary to repair the damage to infrastructure wrought by the civil war, both in those schools that were on the front lines and among those that simply deteriorated due to lack of maintenance during this period.

As in the example above, local governments and individual schools fill these gaps as best they can, resorting to dangerously deferred maintenance of infrastructure, reductions in staffing, searching for a 'sponsor' or wealthy graduate from the business community, and collection of formal donations through an association or the district education department and informal payments from parents (Lapham, 2016). Although school district budgets are widely known and acknowledged inadequate, local officials are responsible for providing education in accordance with national standards and can be called to account for failing despite impossible circumstances. For example, when the Minister of Education visited a school where I was working, he publicly dressed down the teaching staff for failing to ensure that every student in the classroom had a textbook and threatened them with loss of their posts if they did not remedy the situation. In fact, no one was fired but the teachers were effectively silenced, placed in a position where they believed that any plea for resources would be turned back on them. The tension between these phenomena is visible in the tight control of schools on one hand and the willingness of officials to look the other way in the face of malpractice and even corruption because they recognize that these practices keep the education system functioning.

International community

International actors active in education in Tajikistan include IFIs (World Bank, Asian Development Bank), multi-lateral organizations (UNICEF), bilateral donors (USAID, GIZ), and international NGOs (Save the Children, Mercy Corps). Since these actors bring significant financial resources to Tajikistan, they also have

a voice in the development and implementation of education policy that is dependent on both their funding and their ways of working. There are two challenges to the integrity and accountability of Tajikistan's education system inherent in the size of donor contributions relative to the overall state budget. First, there is always the possibility that international assistance will displace domestic spending on the education sector (Heynemann & Lee, 2016), although this is very difficult to measure, particularly in a country awash in illicit funds and receiving multiple aid flows across multiple sectors. Most direct government support is channelled through the Ministry of Finance and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Sciences, although significant projects such as the ADB's vocational education support, is implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Migration, and Employment of the Population. According to reports available from the Ministry of Finance, the state spent $81.6 million on education in 2015 (MinFin, 2016) with the lion's share funding operating costs like teacher salaries.[4] Accountability within these frameworks is challenging due to donors' perception of low implementation capacity and a high degree of risk (GPE 2016).

Displacement is less likely when funds are not provided directly to the state budget. However, accountability also shifts with fiduciary responsibility for funds. For example, USAID negotiates a memorandum of understanding with the national government to cover all its assistance but provides funds to contractors to implement projects. In the education sector, this approach has meant that USAID has more contact and influence with provincial and district education departments than other donors. International NGOS (iNGOs) implement their own projects in cooperation with local CSOs, also usually based on a signed agreement with national or local government, often in hopes that the approaches at the local level will be scaled up nationally.

The second danger, even more acute when projects are controlled by iNGOs and contractors at the local level, is that education "policy becomes de-territorialized and becomes reframed as an 'international standard' or a 'best practice' that is everyone's and nobody's reform simultaneously" (Steiner-Khamsi 2016, p. 389) so that ownership of reforms stays with the projects where they were initiated and accountability is reduced to accounting for funds. Indeed, the national government prioritizes the goals of international stakeholders, in particular UNICEF and the World Bank, which manage large flows of direct assistance for education (see Table 2). A great deal of time and resources are spent negotiating these priorities, often mediated through Western consultants, with ongoing discussions and resolutions reflected in the evolution of multiple sector plans since 2005. Often projects focus on education quality with an underlying rejection of the previous system (Niyozov & Dastambuev 2012) but do not directly address accountability and the chronic lack of resources in the education system. In turn, these donors provide ratings within interim reports about the success of the government in implementing agreed reforms. This has been a rocky process for Tajikistan with low ratings for implementation in the last GPE interim report (GPE 2016) and tense negotiations between each funding cycle that reflect alternating resistance and dependence on donor contributions to education in Tajikistan (Niyozov & Dastambuev 2012).

[4] 549.1 million TJS using an exchange rate of 6.73/$ (MinFin, 2016)

Table 2: Major donor contributions to education in Tajikistan.

Donor Agency / Project	*Funding*
Global Partnership for Education / Grants for education	$18.2 million for 2006-10 $13.5 million for 2010-13 $16.2 million for 2013-17
USAID / Quality Reading Project (American Institutes for Research) **USAID / Reading for Children (Aga Khan Foundation)**	$8.2 million for 2013-17 (budget unspecified)
GIZ / Supporting Reform of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training System in Tajikistan	(budget unspecified) 2008-16
Asian Development Bank / Strengthening Vocational Education and Training Project	$15 million for 2015-21 (with an additional $2 million from the Clean Energy Fund and potential for $15 million in loans)
UNICEF / Basic Education and Gender Equity	Budget unspecified, 2010-15

Sources. Websites for the Global Partnership for Education, USAID Central Asia Regional Mission, GIZ, Asian Development Bank, UNICEF

Principals, teachers and school personnel

School principals are formally responsible for implementing government policy in education but are also informally part of a political machine aimed at maintaining stability, monitoring political activity, and advancing government policy. A school united in pursuing a reform project, particularly within a supportive community of parents, is at risk of being dissolved and reconstituted (Niyozov & Bahry, 2006) because it represents an alternate locus of power to an authoritarian government with difficulty maintaining control of the entire territory of the country (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2013). Thus, education providers, and school principals in particular, walk a fine line between maintaining sufficient connection and engagement with the community to ensure the continued functioning of the school through help with repairs and informal payments on the one hand and maintaining official lines of subordination and accountability on the other.

Teachers in Tajikistan also occupy a difficult position. Low salaries and sharply reduced benefits make the profession unattractive for young people choosing a profession. Graduates of pedagogical universities often work in other fields even if they are forced to teach for two years after graduation (ICG, 2011), leaving work in schools to those with vocational pre-service training or no formal teaching qualifications at all. Once a respected professional field credited with the huge literacy gains and other accomplishments of the Soviet period (Niyozov & Bahry, 2006), teachers work in dramatically reduced circumstances with multiple lines of formal and informal accountability. Niyozov (2008, p. 53) likens them to “meek dictators” controlling their classrooms with little authority and few resources beyond the possibility of giving low marks.

Formally, teacher performance is evaluated by the school principal and through school inspections carried out from the district education department. Each teacher should demonstrate participation in in-service training at least once every five years and can be evaluated at that point for promotion to a higher pay grade. In fact, these mechanisms seldom result in helpful continuing education, feedback or mentoring.

Instead, they are conducted pro forma or used to demonstrate the exertion of political control. In an extreme example of lack of professional discretion, for a time teachers were forbidden from working with students in groups because it would have meant that some would be sitting with their backs to the portraits of the president and other heroes of Tajikistan (Niyozov, 2008). This limited autonomy, seen in other education systems in the region (Milovanovitch et al., 2015), means that anyone can hold teachers accountable for everything, placing them in a vulnerable position such that they can easily be coerced into malpractice.

Civil society organizations

The (re)building of the civil society became one of the central goals of post-Soviet transformations, reflecting the idea that grassroots movements embedded in NGOs and professional associations could "in turn provide impetus for democratic reforms" (Adamson, 2002, p. 178). In the education area, this translated into the efforts to strengthen community participation in schools through boards of trustees, parent committees and school funds, which was seen as "a fundamental element of democratic civil society development" (Fomina, 2005, p. 1). Along with the decentralization of funding for schools to the local level, the development of these associations was supported by the World Bank and USAID. Such associations or school boards can provide a mechanism for collecting contributions from parents within a formal accountability structure (World Bank, 2010). In practice, they have remained weak and inactive once the project that sparked their creation is complete (Niyozov & Bulbulov, 2013). Although there are some exceptions, like the national coalition of parents of children with disabilities (Whitsel and Kodirov, 2013), for the most part there is little space for citizens to voice concerns about education at the provincial or national levels.

The other side of civil society development in education was support for the growth of independent service providers, often built through donor-led projects that challenged the state monopoly on some aspects of education and often became semi-permanent contractors for implementation of donor-funded projects. Although they are formally accountable for transparent management of funds, these organizations operate outside the formal mechanisms of accountability where schools and other education institutions exist, contributing to informal networks of access to resources that include project funds and connections to international expertise and travel.

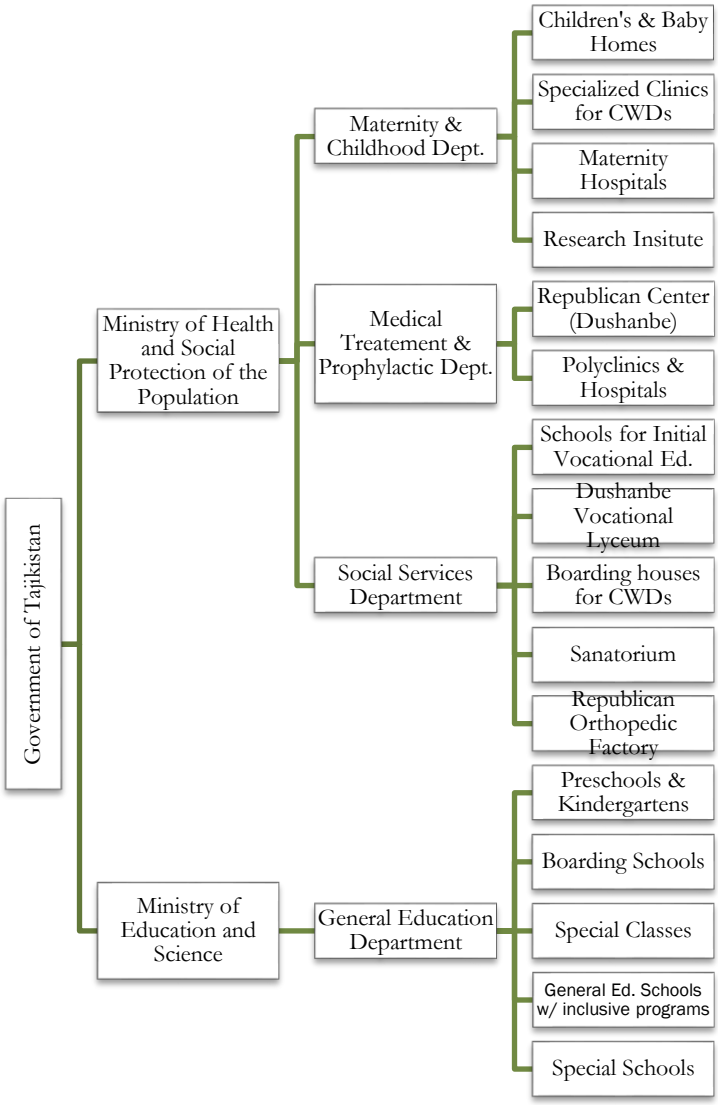
4. Accountability for exclusion: Disability, fear and inclusive education

Following a brief review of the challenges to the accountability of different actors in the education system, this case study explores the way that overlapping frameworks of accountability affects a particularly vulnerable group of children – those with disabilities. The tension between formal and informal accountability manifests for this group in an interesting nexus of accountability and discrimination. As discussed above, accountability before the community of parents and students through social norms can be necessary in keeping the system functioning and ensuring the right to education for the majority. However, selective enforcement cuts both ways. In the face of stereotypes and discrimination that have become normalized in society, the fear of enforcement where formal and informal norms of accountability reinforce each other can result in aversion to risk and adherence to the most conservative interpretation of regulations and standards, providing cover to perpetuate discrimination. This short case explores that ways that formal and informal accountability come together in ways that can discriminate against children with disabilities.

4.1 Disability in Tajikistan – stigma and the legacy of defectology

Tajikistan's education system inherited defectology from the Soviet Union as a way of thinking about programs for children with disabilities. Defectology has a 100-year history as a school of thought on disability and continues to be influential in Central Asia (Daniels, 2005). At the same time, Tajikistan was one of the poorest republics and did not have a strong system of special schools when the Soviet Union disintegrated. During the turmoil of civil war many of the teachers and specialists trained to work with children with disabilities left Tajikistan. For the most part they had been educated outside Tajikistan and worked using Russian as their primary language of instruction, giving them both stronger networks in other places and less connection to processes of Tajik nation-building. As a result, teachers and administrators who have remained do not feel qualified to work with children with disabilities, particularly those with sensory or intellectual disabilities, and have few places to turn for support. Although the 2011 Concept on Inclusive Education and the 2013 revision of the Law on Education provide some space for inclusive education at the initiative of school personnel, they do not provide much guidance for implementation and certainly do not constitute a requirement for mainstream schools to work with children with disabilities (Lapham, 2017).

Figure 2: Structure of social services for children with disabilities in Tajikistan (updated from OECD 2009)



UNICEF (2011) estimates that a child with a disability living in its Central Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS) region, which includes Tajikistan, is almost 17 times as likely to be institutionalized as a typically developing child. Furthermore, the number of children in institutional care in this region has increased between 2000 and 2007, with approximately 60% of all institutionalized children registered as children with disabilities. UNICEF (2011) further estimates that approximately 1.1 million children with disabilities in this region are not included in nationally collected statistics and thus, are likely not to be receiving any formal education or other public services.

This phenomenon is likely skewed toward poorer areas within the region, like rural or remote areas of Tajikistan, where home births that may not be registered until the child reaches school age are common (TajStat, 2013).[5] Research by civil society organizations and DPOs offer some confirmation, finding in a shadow report submitted to the OHCHR that as many as 64% of women with disabilities in Tajikistan have never had access to formal education of any kind (Public Organizations, 2013). In Tajikistan, as in much of the rest of the region, restriction or exclusion also takes place through segregation of children with

[5] The 2012 Demographic and Health Survey estimates that about 25% of births in Tajikistan occur at home with significantly higher rates (33-35%) in rural and remote areas (TajStat, 2013).

disabilities into special schools or classrooms by type of disability (deafness, blindness, impaired mobility, etc.).

Table 3. Educational institutions for children without parental care and children with disabilities (NSED, 2012; TajStat, 2015)

Type of Institution	Institutions (NSED, 2012)	Institutions (TajStat, 2015)	Students (TajStat, 2015)
Special education institutions	104		
Boarding preschools	33	-	-
Special preschools	13	-	-
Orphanage	21	22	6,120
Sanatorium - boarding school	5	3	342
Special school	14	12	2,046
Mixed social boarding schools	18	-	-
Boarding schools under other ministries	-	4	1,240

NB: According to TajStat, only four of these are not directly included in the school system under the Ministry of Education and Science; however, the difference in the categories of schools counted contributes to the opacity of the system..

The legacy of defectology reinforces many of the norms and ideas about disability strongly rooted in Tajikistan's historical and cultural history. Acknowledging a disability within the family can be profoundly shameful. Gatling and Juraeva (2013) find in Tajikistan that "many traditionally minded Tajiks maintain a folk belief that a child's congenital abnormalities are the result of the birth mother engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage or other behaviour considered 'antisocial.' Thus the community can see a child born with a disability as 'evidence' of such behaviour" (Gatling & Juraeva, 2013, p. 24). This is a very serious loss of face for the entire family that is seen to be deserved by the community in a context where fidelity and child-bearing are two of the most important to fulfil social norms for women (Harris, 2004, pp. 86-87), creating a strong incentive to hide children with disabilities from the rest of the community (Katsui, 2013).

This shame and stigma isolates families, and especially mothers, as well as children and leads to a poor understanding of what may be possible for children with disabilities.[6] The person with a disability is seen as helpless, having, at best, only the right to food and basic care but not to participation (Katsui, 2013). This is, in turn, further reinforced in the language of modernity and science through defectology's focus on medical assessments, rehabilitation, and the things that people with disabilities cannot do (Ahuja &

[6] It is very difficult to find accurate statistics for the numbers of children with disabilities in Tajikistan. Given the population under 15 years of age (CIA, 2016) and the World Health Organization estimate that 15% of people have some form of disability and up to 4% have profound difficulty with some domain of daily functioning (WHO, 2011), it is safe to estimate that 407,000 children have some form of disability and 108,500 have a profound or complex disability. In sharp contrast, official figures list 9,748 children studying in boarding schools or special provision, including orphanages, in the 2013-14 school year (TajStat, 2015).

Pirzado, 2006).[7] There are efforts to address this social stigma, especially among associations of parents of children of disabilities, who have organized a national coalition.[8] Progress is slow but significant, giving hope for the future (Lapham, 2016). The legal framework for the inclusion of children with disabilities has evolved from the Law on Social Protection of People with Disabilities in 2010 to a revision of the Law on Education in 2013 to provide additional space for those schools and parent groups seeking to include children with disabilities in education on an equal basis with others. However, there is a great deal of work remaining even if Tajikistan ratifies the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2017 as rumoured.

4.2 Exclusion from mainstream schools

As a result, children with disabilities in Tajikistan have limited options for education and related support services (physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, access to assistive devices, etc.). Families can seek an institutional placement, but this will often be far from their home and conditions are very poor. Special schools can also refuse to accept children with disabilities who do not meet minimum standards (Lapham, forthcoming). Parents can engage teachers to come to their home on a private basis if they can afford to pay for this or rely on home-based education services in their school district.

Since children with disabilities are viewed as simultaneously less valuable and more fragile than other children, the ever-present fear of selective enforcement of standards and regulations provides a powerful incentive for schools to exclude them. During a visit to a rural school, a head teacher showed me a large hole in the second floor of the building. She indicated that this would be dangerous for children with disabilities because they could fall through it and be injured. In fact, anyone in the school could easily be injured. However, responsibility for injury of children without disabilities could be passed on to the district education department because they were aware of the problem and neither closed the second floor of the school nor allocated funds for the repair. The head teacher feared that accepting a child with disabilities without the express instructions of the district education department or Ministry of Education would turn the responsibility for that child's potential injury back to her decision to act on her own initiative and enrol the child (Lapham 2016). Better to avoid the risks of selective enforcement from the district education department reinforced by the informal accountability mechanism of the possible disapproval of other parents altogether and provide home tutoring for the child with disabilities even though she acknowledged the isolation and inferior learning opportunities of this situation and expressed genuine regret.

Gatling and Juraeva (2013) report a very similar situation for a mother trying to enrol a child with a physical disability in a school in Dushanbe.

> Firuza always knew that her son had the ability to succeed in school. Indeed, she knew that without a rigorous education, he would be relegated to a life of poverty, and without the financial support of her children in her old age, she too would struggle to survive. But the director of the

[7] Certainly, there are also prejudices and beliefs about the nature and causes of disability in Europe and North America. The purpose of providing the information above is to provide a specific context of interacting ideas. Similarities, differences and trajectories of beliefs in other places is an important research area beyond the scope of the current case.

[8] For more information, please refer to the website of the National Coalition of Associations of Parents of Disabled Children: www.mutakko.tj/en

> village school, outside the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, refused to allow her son, Umed, to study with his peers. The only thing that distinguished Umed from other boys his age was that he needed assistance walking long distances and sometimes did not have full control of both hands…. The director declared that Umed could not study until the director received written permission from the district office of the Ministry of Education that would absolve him of any responsibility if other children became ill as a result of his attendance or if Umed fell. Furthermore, he maintained that if Umed was injured while on school property, the director would be to blame. For the director, Umed was not "healthy," and his school was a place for healthy children. For children like Umed, there were special boarding schools. … [Firuza pursued official documents and multiple levels of government with support from her father and] four years later, Umed is thriving in the third grade of his village school, earning top marks in all his subjects and maintaining good relationships with his classmates (Gatling & Juraeva, 2013, pp. 21-34).

This example shows misconceptions about disability (as contagious) as well as fear of formal responsibility but also of informal accountability to the parents of other children. A similar fear of taking the initiative to work inclusively and getting it wrong is reflected at the district education department level in discussions about implementation of the Concept on Inclusive Education and confusion about the provisions of the 2013 revision to the Law on Education (Lapham, 2016; Lapham, 2017). Just as the examples above illustrate the ways that informal accountability structures can hold the system together in the face of unworkable formal accountability frameworks, this example demonstrates how the same overlaps of accountability can perpetuate discriminatory social norms.

5. Policy recommendations

The policy changes necessary to bring formal and informal accountability structures into harmony are outside the education sector. These include addressing the grand corruption of the narcotics trade and state capture, perhaps looking to Portugal's drug policies and Ukraine's attempts to address grand corruption comprehensively as examples. However, noting that there is much to be done elsewhere does not mean that there is nothing to be done in the education sector.

- At the most basic level, standardizing the categories and definitions of data collected across ministries and the Agency for National Statistics would make the education sector more transparent. As the tables above demonstrate, this is inconsistent even in the ways that different types of schools are counted, to say nothing of more complex demographic data. National data collection through the census and demographic and health survey also should be updated to include indicators that are important for equity in the education sector, such as the disability-related questions advocated by the Washington Group. Gathering better data less frequently is preferable to collecting poor quality data annually.

- Address the problem of selective enforcement by simplifying the regulations and standards governing the education sector to reflect the best possible practices in the current reality and putting a stop to the use of schools as instruments of political control. The first step is for the central government to publicly acknowledge this problem and commit to its solution by using the opportunity of developing an Education Codex to simplify regulations and standards as well as closing gaps in the legal framework. Educators must be included in the category of professionals who are formally banned from political activities, like judges and prosecutors. Schools should not be used as polling places with teachers maintaining responsibility for ensuring that the community

turns out to vote. This will be a difficult road in Tajikistan because the ruling family has strong incentives to continue using schools in this way. Therefore, efforts must be multi-sectoral and involved members of the international community more typically focused on support for the Ministry of Justice and President's Administration. In the education sector, the channels for preferential treatment to loyal education institutions must be identified and closed. The Ministry of Education must also reduce the vulnerability of teaching staff summary dismissal through stronger labour protections and thus reduce teachers' susceptibility to external pressure (Milovanovitch et al. 2015).

- Develop mechanisms for the transparent use and reporting of contributions from parents and sponsors that are currently informal. This would make such contributions more transparent, bringing together formal and informal accountability mechanisms into a more coherent harmony. In addition, it would make the real costs incurred by the education sector more explicit, which could lead to improved policy and financing decisions by both the government and donors providing international assistance for education. In order to function well, these mechanisms must be built on the informal mechanisms that already exist in close consultation with those involved. The result may not resemble a PTA or civil society organization from another context, but providing for more formal accountability is more important that conforming to a specific model.

- It is important that people from Tajikistan have the capacity and opportunity to engage in debates in the education sector. The participation of civil society organizations is important, particularly for representing the interests of specific constituencies who may face discrimination in education and for providing services that might be unavailable in the formal education system. However, support to CSOs alone is insufficient for ensuring robust policy debates that would introduce greater accountability as well as a more contextualized approach to accountability into the education system. There are no universities in Tajikistan with doctoral degree programs in education, leading to a dependency on universities abroad for Tajiks seeking degrees and external support, often from international donors, for research (Niyozov and Bahry, 2006). Thus, there is little capacity for original, locally-generated research that would provide the evidence needed for a nuanced treatment of accountability in the education sector.

In conclusion, there is too little effort dedicated to negotiating the tensions between formal and informal accountability into discussions of policy and international assistance to education. The recommendations typically included in such documents, related to training and compensating teachers, renovating infrastructure, updating curriculum, and increasing investment in the education sector are valid and necessary. However, without the political will from government and donors to look honestly at the real, practical challenges to integrity in the education system, progress toward the latter is likely to be poorly directed and to have unintended consequences that may exacerbate tensions between formal and informal accountability, further challenging the integrity of education in Tajikistan. Supporting efforts to develop, and in some cases return, this expertise in Tajikistan is vital to the design of policy that would bring together formal and informal accountability mechanisms over time and for the benefit of the education sector.

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