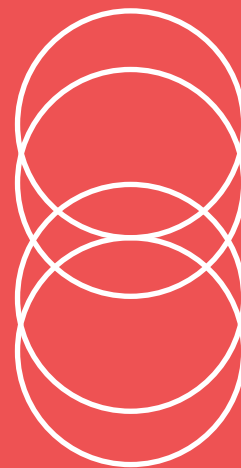




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Belarusian education on the way of change

Summary



EDUCATION GOVERNANCE REFORM: CONTEXT, PRINCIPLES, SUBJECTS AND PRIORITIES

Vilnius 2021



The online expert discussion using elements of the Delphi methodology, was organized in order to:

- ∞ introduce a distinction between the educational process itself and the education (education system) governance through the formation of the discussion structure;
- ∞ clarify political priorities in ensuring democratic, transparent and accountable coordination of educational institutions and initiatives (as an important condition for the effectiveness of discussions on education reform) by fixing the positions of experts.

The discussion topics were formed around the three key aspects:

- ∞ *principles and models of education governance (second round of the discussion)*
- ∞ *“actors” (individuals, groups and institutions) of the reforming (third round of the discussion)*
- ∞ *priority goals for the education governance reform (fourth round of the discussion).*



In addressing these issues, the overall context of social, economic, political and environmental changes that determine the global transformation of education was taken into account (first round of the discussion).

The discussion was designed in such a way as to introduce a clear distinction between the educational process itself and the education (education system) management. Therefore, the first round included two clusters of issues: the impact of global trends on (1) education in general; (2) on changes in education governance. In the second round, the principles and models of governance that should be followed when designing the education governance reform were discussed. The third round was devoted to assessing the stakeholders' readiness for the governance reform. The topic for the final round was the proposed reforms agenda; conditions conducive to the success of the reform, and factors that can serve as incentives to initiate the reforming.

A total of 8 experts took part in the discussion, selected by the organizers in such a way that specialists in various fields were represented — education itself, sociology, political science, law, business. The discussion included 4 rounds and lasted for 37 calendar days (from June 3 to July 10, 2021). Each round lasted 6 calendar days.

The analysis of experts' assessments allows to propose for discussion a number of aspects that are crucial for the preparation of a strategy and a plan for the education

governance reform.

⌘ ***The education reform priority is the decentralization of the education governance system; the primary goals are to reformate the the scope of authorities and the principles of management.***

In the process of discussing the agenda, the experts identified a number of important goals in relation to the educational process: changing the content of education and the educational process; reformatting, revision of occupational requirements for teachers and managers; expansion of social guarantees in the education system; reorganization of the structure and typology of educational institutions, etc.

However, the education governance system decentralization and the reformatting scope of authorities and the principles of management were considered the priority goals by experts.

⌘ ***Fostering emergence of active subjects actors through the stakeholders' self-identification.***

The general position of the experts is as follows: at the moment, not a single stakeholder has a clear program and an action plan for reform of the national education system governance and sufficient qualifications for this. Consequently, none of the stakeholders is an active subject in the reform.



Personal motivations, formal organizations and initiatives, processes imitating communication create the illusion of the presence of subjects ready for the reforms. On the screen of mass consciousness, as well as on the individual, expert one, attitudes towards the “other” subject are vague and superficial. As a result, collective actions are built on conjectures and illusory ideas about competitors and partners.

Therefore, the organization of interposition negotiations and discussions is fundamentally important. In these negotiations and discussions, goals and objectives, achievements and aspirations, experience and motivations for various stakeholders’ actions can be publicly fixed.

⌘ ***Agreement on the basic principles of good education governance, taking into account the national context and the goals of the education reform.***

The narrow character of discussions on the education reform, in which the emphasis is put on the discussion of the learning process organization in specific sectors (in school, university, etc.), while the challenges of managing both the reform process and education as a whole are not addressed, is one of the reasons for the inconsistency of the expert assessments of good management principles and models.

Although a conditional consensus was reached on the principles of democratic management, a common position hasn’t been

formed in the discussion of the instrumental principles. The discussion participants noted the need to agree basic principles. This means that serious meaningful work, and long and in-depth communication is yet to be done in various formats – both as expert discussions and dialogue with all the stakeholders.

⌘ ***Discussion and design of the optimal combination of market, social and technological elements in the education model.***

When discussing the desirable education governance scheme (models), experts agreed on that “pure” governance models (market, social, technological) are not entirely viable. In reality, a certain combined model will be applied. But today it is not possible to answer unequivocally which combination will be optimal. If preference is given to the combined model, the question arises what kind of components, and how these can be considered in the design of the combined model of education governance.

⌘ ***Ensuring favourable conditions for the reforming of education governance: decentralization of public administration, shaping public participation in governance, and professionalization of the managers in education system.***

An education governance reform is not implemented in a vacuum. The potential for the change is largely driven by the overall political context. From the participants’ point



of view, expressed in the absentee expert discussion, the basic conditions for the effective reform implementation are:

- ⌘ decentralization of governance in general;
- ⌘ shaping public participation in governance and professionalization of the education management.

The experts also named the dissemination of the practice of multilateral partnerships based on the stakeholders' equality in social problems solution and the increase in the volume of spending on social programs as important circumstances.

⌘ *Ensuring conditions for the synergy of education transformation drivers.*

According to the experts, the main sources of development in the Belarusian education and the incentives for the governance transformation will be:

- ⌘ innovators (advanced schools, universities, research centers, individual teachers, and researchers);
- ⌘ new customers' requirements linked to the changes in business environment and lifestyle (including business, government, family, NGOs requirements, etc.);
- ⌘ new standards: regulators and supranational structures.

The key issue in the reform coordinating (governance) is ensuring the synergy of these drivers.

⌘ *Development of communication formats with all the educational process participants and "external" stakeholders.*

It is known that global trends determine the general direction of reforming that is concretized in the format of priorities determined by the national context. When discussing the dynamics of this global context influence on the national education system, the experts agreed that social trends (demographic changes, value transformations, urbanization processes, etc.) have a major impact on changes in education today. In this situation, the goals of education can and should be formed not at the level of administrative institutions, but at the level of society as a whole, as well as specific communities ("mini-publics"). Consequently, when planning the preparation for the reform, it will be necessary, in the first place, to concentrate on the development of communication formats with all the educational process participants and with the so-called "consumers" of education, that is, in fact, to change the educational policy.

⌘ *Raising the expert community awareness of the impact of global economic, political, technological changes on the national education transformation.*

With regard to the assessments of the impact of global economic, political, technological changes on the national education transformation in general and on education governance, in particular, the positions of experts diverged radically.



Disagreements testify, of blurring and conceptual ambiguity: no discussions on these topics have taken place; it hasn't been discussed who, to what aim, how and when can/should design changes in education taking into account the global transformations. Raising awareness of the expert community in this area is an important stage in the preparation of the reform strategy.