



Mary Ward Loreto Think Tank for Systemic Change in Albania

Focus: The Education System in Albania

Summary:

“Albania, as an official EU candidate country, has much progress to make toward the EU’s education benchmarks before its accession. While education improvement in Albania is supported by its government and growing economy, the country still faces many obstacles to matching the educational outputs of its neighbors in Western Europe....The bigger gaps in educational opportunity are based on geographic location and economic status. Throughout primary education, children living in rural areas have higher rates of participation than those children living in urban areas. Rural children have higher attendance rates, higher enrolment rates, and higher survival and completion rates. However, by secondary school the situation changes dramatically. Half as many rural children (13.6%) attend secondary education as urban children (27.2%), and rural children’s attendance rates (13.6%) are half that of urban children’s (27.2%) in secondary school... The priorities of Albania’s education system are to:

- Reform governance systems and strengthen system management capacity with special focus on policy development linked to research and EMIS data, as well as on decentralization, school autonomy and accountability issues;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning processes with special emphasis on a demand driven curriculum model, which focuses on acquisition of necessary skills for the labour market; and
- Improve the efficiency of education financing with special emphasis on mechanisms, leveled financing and budget preparation. ” (UNICEF)

It is because of these vital issues that the Mary Ward Loreto Think Tank, has decided to choose the field of Education as their focus to work for systemic change in Albania. The action will include research, inclusion of all stake holders to implement change, multi-faceted approach to effect change at every level of the education system.

Goal:

To expose the weaknesses, the corruption, and the strengths of the education system in Albania and then to define the priorities and challenges in the future for the Mary Ward Loreto Think Tank.

Objectives:

- To research the reality of the education system from Kindergarten to University level revealing the reasons why the system is not functioning for the benefit of the students and the desires of the parents and to note any good qualities which might emerge in the research.
- Research and measure the competence of the teachers in the implementation of the curriculum in the education system.
- Research the role and influence of the parents in the implementation of the education system.
- Raise awareness of the findings of this research and the reality it exposes of the standards and ethics controlling the education system in Albania.

We will listen to the findings of this research and let this inform our next step.

Background

Education in the Republic of Albania is public and private. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, private education must be in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The structure of the Education System in the Republic of Albania is divided into the following: Pre-school education, Basic education (primary level, lower secondary, special education), Upper Secondary education, Higher Education. As an official EU candidate country, Albania has much progress to make toward the EU's education benchmarks before its accession. While education improvement in Albania is supported by its government, the country still faces many obstacles to matching the educational outputs of its neighbors in Western Europe. Albania has a per capita GNP of \$5,316 USD (PPP) per child for their education, which is the lowest in South-eastern Europe and among the lowest in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Less than 3 % of the government budget goes to education and this fact brings many problems in the development of a strategy which will invest in education. It is no surprise that parents in Albania are left aside in the process for the development of the education curriculum. They feel confused about their role in this vital aspect of their children's lives. There is therefore, an urgent need to research how to involve the parents in the development of an education system in Albania and benefit from the expertise and knowledge which they have of their children's educational needs.

Albania's education system actually has to deal with the following priorities:

- A Reformation of governmental systems and the strengthening of management capacity. This would need to be with a special focus on policy development linked to research and EMIS data, as well as on decentralization, and school and university autonomy.
- An improvement in the quality of teaching and learning processes with special emphasis on a demand driven curriculum model. The focus would need to be on the development of the necessary vocation skills related to the labor market.
- An improvement in the efficiency of education financing with special emphasis on mechanisms, leveled financing and budget preparation. Build capacity and develop human resources.
- A developed and applied national standard for teacher training programs.
- An application of a rights-based policy that prevents and reduces marginalization in education for all excluded groups, including Roma, Egyptian and special needs children.
- A better implementation of the Bologna System.
- A promotion of a child-centered pedagogy and institutions for career development.

Methodology:

To devise any methodology for systemic change in the education system certain elements have to be recognised to effect this change :

Recognise that the current system is not effective and needs to be changed.

Awareness: Multiple stakeholders become aware that the current system is not working, as well as it should, and are unclear about what is needed instead.

Exploration: Educators and policymakers study and visit places that are trying new approaches. They try new ways of teaching and managing, generally in low-risk situations.

Transition Period: The scales tip toward the new system; a critical number of opinion leaders and groups commit themselves to the new system and take more risks to make changes in crucial places.

Emergence of New Infrastructure: Some elements of the system are operated in keeping with the desired new system. These new ways are generally accepted. Predominance of the New System: The more powerful elements of the system operate as defined by the new system. Key leaders begin envision even better systems.

Awareness of the above has led to the creation of the following methodology which it is hoped will lead to effective change, little by little, in an already untenable system.

- To produce a leaflet which will advertise the work, the goals and objectives of Mary Ward Loreto Think Tank.
- Research a wide percentage of the population of Albania through using virtual ways in social networks. For security and for safe action a carefully worded, digital and interactive very simple questionnaire will be written and uploaded on a safe and secured Facebook page or on other safe social networks. This approach will be to gain popular opinion and comment.
- Analyse the impact of the use of social media in the research
- Use other methodology to seek information regarding the reality of people's experience of the education system, at every level, in Albania:
Questionnaires, analysis at an academic level, interviews, focus groups
- Focus groups: Teachers, Parents, Directors, Students, ministry of education ISA, ICAP
- Involve TV and the media in this research.
- Research the present curricula: the advantages and disadvantages in the light of the Albanian culture and reality. Involve the parents in this research.
- Examine the role of business in the education system: has the education of the children/students in Albania become a business?
- How is the present education system impacting the psychological and human development of the students - for good or for bad? Involve a team of psychologists in this work.
- Ensure the facilitators of the research have an effective training to do their job
- To write effective questionnaires which will produce results which can be analysed effectively by the employed specialist in this field and which can be effectively linked with the SPSS Programme
- To ensure this questionnaire provides: a) needs analysis. B) what we are looking for as an honest and transparent response to the education needs in Albania
- There needs to be an assured good methodology and assured sustainability
- The National Government and the Local Municipalities will be engaged in the whole process. They need to have a trust in the process and the results of the process. Therefore a good document explaining all has to be produced to gain their trust and the methodology has to be followed
- A mutual agreement or memorandum of understanding has to be made from the beginning, between the expert from the government in the field of education, and the Think Tank.
- An action plan needs to be made to implement this methodology.
- A conference will be organised with all stake holders at which the results of the research will be presented. A specialist will be appointed to facilitate the whole process.
- The media and press will be involved in the marketing process

- The findings of the research will be published in as many fields as possible including the web page of the government
- An on-going assessment process will be devised by the Think tank to ensure the sustainability of the research findings.

The Mary Ward Loreto Think Tank will move forward step by step with a wisdom which will engage all interested parties at every step. In this manner the fruitful outcome will be achieved.

Expected Results:

- The ministry of Education will not just publish the results of the research but the research will be used as a reference document for good practice into the future
- The policy of the ministry of Education will be guided by this research and will move towards effecting changes in the law to ensure the guidelines are put into practice and will ensure the upgrading of the education system in Albania.
- A budget will be provided in Albania which will support this up grading at every level of the education system in Albania.
- A Manual with guidelines based on the findings of the research will be produced by the Think Tank and their stake holders in Three Parts:
For Teachers
For students
For parents

This will enable the practical implementation of the research into good practice in every classroom

- TV will produce more effective education programmes based on the agreed curriculum, at every level, to be used in schools and universities.
- An on-going assessment process will be produced to ensure the sustainability of the Think Tank process.

The Members and their Statement of Purpose: