*March 2, 2015*

**Soros Foundation Kazakhstan**

**Portfolio Review by Social Inclusion Initiative**

**Focus/Project: “From one school to network of schools - building the network of inclusive education schools in Akmola region”**

Ainur Shakenova of the Social Inclusion Initiative, and Saule Kalikova, SFK Policy Advisor, shared their reflections on the theory of change used by SFK since 2010 to promote inclusive education. This theory of change is based on the idea that best practices established in one school can be replicated on an increasing scale. Originally there was one pilot school in Akmola oblast, a few years later the number of pilot schools has increased up to 5, and currently there is a network of 19 schools implementing inclusive education practices in Akmola oblast. The aspiration is that in a few years the majority of schools in the oblast will follow the suit and start implementing the model of inclusive education; once this is done, the success in one oblast will generate replication across the country. Generally at this stage SFK’s aims to work at the implementation level (with schools), because the policy of Inclusive Education already exists and legal framework for its implementation has been created, but there are still no real changes in most of schools, and children still diverted from mainstream schools if they require special support in learning process.

**Observations by the PR participants:**

* How much success of this project depends on goodwill of individuals (in this case school administration and teachers) – is our reliability on personalities can be considered as a risk to our project?
* Building the network of participating schools is one task, while achieving endorsement of inclusive education by the majority of oblast schools is much more difficult task – will we need different tools and approaches to tackle more schools?
* Parents of healthy children can be an obstacle to the spread of inclusive education unless we work with them and win their understanding and support.
* It would be useful to study if there is any difference between schools in Akmola oblast (pilot region) and other regions.

**Questions and summary of responses:**

* How can we measure the progress? *This is a pilot project – quantity and quality increasing will be observed at the end of the project. So far we can say that the vibrant and active network of 19 schools will be success at the end of this project but the long-term goal is to achieve large-scale replication in future.*
* Do we work with parents of children with special needs? *Parents are the first advocates of their children, they should lobby their rights (at kindergarten, school etc.). SFK has a history of working with parents associations but now we do not work directly with them.*
* Is lack of money a problem for project implementation? *The government still allocates more money to “special” schools and such approach holds back the process of IE implementation in mainstream schools.*
* What about Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools? Are there any children with special needs? *There are no children with special needs at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools although inclusion is one of the principles of their curriculum. The state emphasis on supporting elite schools seems to be the wrong approach as it widens the gap between them and ordinary schools.*

**Conclusion:**

* SFK often use the theory of change, so it is important to see and analyze prerequisites for real social changes - in this particular case it will be the best practice of inclusive education in one region which can be replicated in the future at the rest 13 regions of RK.