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GEORGIA PRIMARY EDUCATION PROJECT

SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT
SEPTEMBER 20, 2011 – MARCH 31, 2012

Contract No. AID-114-C-09-00003
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CONTENTS

Acronyms	3
Introduction.....	4
Section I: Accomplishments by Project Component	6
Output 1: Reading fluency and comprehension outcomes improved in grades 1-6	6
Output 2: Math competencies improved in grades 1-6.....	11
Output 3. Teacher training delivery systems strengthened.....	14

ACRONYMS

COR	Contracting Officer’s Representative
DIRP	Department for International Relations and Programs
EGMA	Early Grade Math Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
GEDD	General Education Development Division
G-PriEd	Georgia Primary Education Project
IRI	Informal reading inventory
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
NCEQE	National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
NCGEDD	National Curriculum and General Education Development Department
PDL	Professional development leader
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
TPDC	Teacher Professional Development Center

INTRODUCTION

This semi-annual report for the Georgia Primary Education Project (G-PriEd) presents overview of the project's progress and accomplishments between September 20, 2011 and March 31, 2012. The progress is reported against the work plan outputs. G-PriEd would like to acknowledge the invaluable support of the project's Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), Medea Kakachia, and the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, in particular those from the National Curriculum and General Education Development Department (NCGEDD), National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), Teacher Professional Development Center (TPDC), General Education Development Division (GEDD), and the Department for International Relations and Programs (DIRP).

Contract Background

On September 20, 2011, USAID/Georgia awarded the Georgia Primary Education project to Chemonics International. USAID/Georgia appointed Medea Kakachia as Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) on September 21, 2011. G-PriEd is a five-year project, extending to a completion date of September 20, 2016.

Project Overview

G-PriEd's five-year activity will provide comprehensive assistance to the primary education system to improve reading and math competencies of Georgian and ethnic minority students. This will be achieved through supporting instructional improvements, testing and improving standards, use of technology, and development of subject experts in reading and math in schools as well as in the education departments of Georgia's universities. Specifically, the project will:

- Improve reading outcomes for grades 1-6, including reading outcomes in Georgian language for minority students
- Improve math outcomes for grades 1-6, including math outcomes for ethnic minority students
- Strengthen capacity to develop and implement pre- and in-service teacher training programs for teaching reading and math

Administrative and Technical Start-Up

During project start-up, G-PriEd staff organized a series of meetings with the MES and its related agencies to establish working relationships and to identify clear links between agency priorities and G-PriEd's Scope of Work. These meetings were followed by a stakeholder workshop (held at the Tbilisi Teacher House), where G-PriEd staff presented an overview of the five-year G-PriEd program, identified the alignment between the MES and G-PriEd activities, discussed potential constraints to implementing G-PriEd activities and the strategies for overcoming them, and identified critical activities, products, or events for the first year of work.

This workshop, together with the earlier meetings with MES and its stakeholders, served as a foundation to refining the Year 1 work plan, which was submitted in draft form to USAID in early November. However, it took a little bit of time for the project

and the Ministry to come to agreement regarding the content of the first-year work plan. In early December, G-PriEd staff (with USAID staff) met with the Minister of Education and Science to secure his concurrence with G-PriEd activities (which he gave). Later in December, G-PriEd staff made a formal presentation of G-PriEd's Year 1 work plan to USAID/Georgia's Mission Director, COR, and other USAID staff.

Due to the project's delayed start of implementation activities (which began in full force in January following the presentations at the MES and USAID), it became clear by February that it would not benefit the project to adhere to the rapid roll-out of project activities initially envisioned in October. For example, the project had planned to start training professional development leader teachers in March. In consultation with USAID, the project revised its timelines (pushing training for professional development leader teachers back to the next school year in September).

Accomplishments Summary

Administrative Start-Up Accomplishments

- G-PriEd office established and operational:
- Administrative and financial policies established (including personnel policy, branding/marketing policy, and emergency plan)

Technical Start-Up Accomplishments

- G-PriEd Year 1 Work Planning Workshop held with counterpart attendance
- G-PriEd Year 1 Work Plan submitted for USAID approval
- G-PriEd Year 1 Performance Monitoring Plan drafted and submitted
- MES has agreed to move forward with the project-developed sampling strategy to identify schools that will participate in the G-PriEd pilot
- MES has agreed to create two working groups charged with developing diagnostic assessments (one in reading and one in math)

SECTION I: ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY PROJECT COMPONENT

During the project's first six months, staff established working relationships with project counterparts, conducted work planning, and began technical implementation per its work plan. This section summarizes the most important developments and accomplishments. The report follows the tasks outlined in the project's contract.

Output 1: Reading fluency and comprehension outcomes improved in grades 1-6

Input 1.1: Reading instruction improved

Create Reading Working Group (Task 1). At the beginning of project implementation, the MES was somewhat hesitant to organize ongoing working groups and was more receptive to ad hoc groups meeting to address specific short-term tasks. Given this circumstance, G-PriEd staff met with MES representatives as needed to discuss, review, and advance reading-related tasks in the work plan.

A major accomplishment of the project's first six months was a joint decision by G-PriEd and MES, in close coordination with the project COR, to set up a reading task force to work on diagnostic assessments for use in the classroom. Beginning in the second half of Year 1, task force members will meet regularly to develop clear methodologies, guidelines, and validation procedures for the reading diagnostic assessment. Task force members will include MES representatives and various experts (i.e., a child development specialist, psychometrician, gender specialist, elementary school classroom teachers, etc.). The scopes of work for the task force and its members are under discussion with the NCEQE.

Facilitate activities of the working group in applying national reading standards and developing assessment tests for each grade between 1 and 6 (Task 2). G-PriEd staff began work under this task by looking to USAID's Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and seeking to adapt it to the Georgian context to serve as a classroom diagnostic assessment tool. In January, G-PriEd engaged four language specialists to develop (1) Georgian-language test passages for the EGRA tool, (2) a plan for producing a list of the most frequently used words in Georgian texts, (3) a conceptual matrix for creating the Georgian version of EGRA, which describes the purpose of Georgian diagnostic assessments, their role in the overall formative assessment process, components of the assessment tool, and their links with the national curriculum, and (4) a draft sample of the Georgian-language EGRA test for grade 2.

Conceptual issues arose from the fact that the Georgian literacy context was substantively different from the contexts in which EGRA had been previously introduced. The most significant outcome of these preliminary discussions was the conclusion that ultimately what was needed was a diagnostic assessment that retained the basic skill components found in EGRA but that also built up to address higher grade level skills and competencies not normally assessed by EGRA. Based on advice from G-PriEd's international technical experts and local experts, a technical decision was made to develop an expanded classroom diagnostic that combined the EGRA framework with that of the traditional informal reading inventory.

As described under Output 2, in March, G-PriEd staff held a workshop on the concept of diagnostic assessment in order to help MES personnel better understand the underlying concepts associated with diagnostic assessment (and its role in diagnostic teaching). As a result of this workshop, MES staff agreed to establish the reading task force. Following it, G-PriEd staff, in collaboration with NCEQE and supported by the project COR, developed a detailed plan for developing a diagnostic assessment for reading. This plan outlined the components of the assessment (i.e., conceptual framework, methodology, administrative procedures, test items organized by curriculum components, and validation procedures), a set of guiding questions to be addressed in each component, and a tentative timeline of activities with milestone deliverables. It also included a description of the task force, roles and responsibilities of task force members and the minimum job qualifications for each task force member according to his or her role and expected contribution.

The reading task force will create diagnostic assessments for each of Georgia's first six grades. As a preparatory step, G-PriEd staff, short-term experts, and MES staff identified the range of competencies necessary for basic and higher-level elementary grade reading, building on the information in Georgia's new language-arts curriculum. A draft matrix was developed that illustrates the interrelations among the five basic reading components in the Georgian curriculum and expected reading outcomes (with associated indicators). This draft matrix will support task force members to identify (1) student skills to be tested through the diagnostic reading assessment and (2) teaching skills and techniques to be included in the professional development modules, accompanied by relevant sample lessons. Task force members will revise it as needed for their work.

- *Readability and readability standards.* G-PriEd staff has also held discussions with NCGEDD subject area specialists to develop shared knowledge of readability issues in Georgian, which is a key foundation of the diagnostic reading assessment. It is possible that readability will become one of the target topics for the Diagnostic Assessment Task Force or that a separate working group will form to address this topic. The objectives of the work on readability are to identify the best international practices in identifying readability measures, develop a set of readability criteria for each grade, and field test the passages that meet the readability criteria. This process will be carried out in close cooperation with the NCGEDD and NCEQE and the project COR.

*Facilitate activities of the working group to review current teacher guidelines in reading for Georgian and ethnic minority students (Task 3).*¹ G-PriEd, together with the module writers, reviewed the teacher guidelines published by TPDC, NCGEDD, and Norwegian Refugee Council to identify the best instructional techniques to highlight in the supplementary materials that will accompany the reading professional development modules (such as paired readings, important word exercises, readers' theater, word pairs, completing-the-sentence exercises, story maps, etc.). These techniques will be incorporated into these modules (to be used to train national trainers, professional development leader teachers, and teachers in general).

¹ Note: any work with the ethnic minority schools will depend on the needs of the MES.

In addition, G-PriEd is in the process of procuring subcontractor support to publish grades 5 and 6 of the new textbooks created for minority-language students studying Georgian.

Facilitate the activities of the working group to develop paper-based and electronic instructional content (Task 4). G-PriEd staff have developed a preliminary plan to develop supplementary reading materials. Staff presented this plan to the project COR, who had a number of helpful suggestions, and the project is revising its plan for re-submission in April. In addition, project staff met with local organizations that have already developed supplementary reading materials for Georgian-language and is exploring the possibility of publishing some of these already developed resources in tandem with G-PriEd-developed resources. With respect to math, the project is in the process of developing a plan to create supplementary materials.

With MES and working group, identify pilot schools through a stratified random selection (at least 270 Georgian and 50 ethnic minority schools) and launch pilot (Task 5). Per G-PriEd's contract, the project's initial plan was to select 270 Georgian-language schools and 50 minority-language schools. In January, G-PriEd staff met with MES representatives to discuss how the project would select schools to participate in the G-PriEd pilot. Chief of Party Jim Wile described the rationale for selecting the sample of pilot schools and discussed how achieving a representative sample (i.e., a sample representative of different size categories, student populations, etc.) would affect the outcomes of G-PriEd's planned impact assessment. Following this meeting, it was agreed that G-PriEd staff would work with the MES' Education Management Information System (EMIS) Agency to establish the various categories of schools that should be represented in the sample.

In February, G-PriEd engaged Dr. Iago Kachkachishvili to develop a rationale for G-PriEd's sampling strategy, in close collaboration with the project's COR. For the Ministry's consideration, Dr. Kachkachishvili developed three sampling models: the first was based on the number of schools, the second on the number of teachers, and the third on the number of students. After several discussions among G-PriEd staff and the project's COR regarding the pros and cons of these various options, it was decided that using students as the foundation of the strategy was the best way to create a meaningful distribution of schools.

Georgia currently has approximately 300,000 elementary school students in 1,847 public Georgian-language schools, 272 public minority-language schools, and 248 private schools. In the end, the project selected 316 schools as its pilot sample, which is slightly below our contractual target of 320. In the project's sample, 209 schools are Georgian-language schools (185 public and 24 private) and 107 are minority-language schools (106 public and 1 private). The document describing the detailed sampling strategy of the pilot school selection has been finalized and shared with both USAID and the MES. One of the major accomplishments of the project's first six months is that the project secured approval of this sampling strategy from MES.

After MES approval, EMIS Agency staff created an Excel program to select a random sample of schools based on the agreed-upon sampling strategy. In March, EMIS Agency staff provided G-PriEd the list of the selected Georgian and non-Georgian schools (318 in total). Changes in the number of non-Georgian schools were required

to ensure sufficient quantities to support reliability of data. These changes were made in consultation with USAID.

Pilot teacher training (Task 6). As part of its strategy to spread effective techniques to teach reading and math throughout Georgia’s primary grade schools, G-PriEd will support the creation of professional development leader (PDL) teachers within the schools. To do this, G-PriEd will train a cohort of national trainers (affiliated with TPDC and its Teacher Houses) to deliver training to selected PDL teachers in diagnostic teaching methods and how to coach other teachers to use these methods. Below we describe the process to date of (1) developing the training modules to be used to train both national trainers and PDL teachers and (2) creating the model for PDL teachers.

- *Create teacher professional development materials in reading.* During the first six months of the project, G-PriEd staff and short-term consultants have been working to develop seven training modules (three for reading, three for math, and one for coaching) that lay out a diagnostic approach to teaching. For reading, the three-module series follow the general outline below.

- Teaching reading in elementary grades
- Teaching reading across the curriculum, and
- Creating environments that support reading

To start developing the modules, G-PriEd staff reviewed best practices in teacher education in reading and school-based professional development. Working with short-term international experts, G-PriEd staff created the conceptual framework for each module and developed a draft matrix illustrating the proposed content of each module and its links to (1) the Georgian national curriculum in reading and math and (2) Georgia’s teacher professional development scheme. These matrices were developed in collaboration with staff from the TPDC and NCGEDD.

To create the content of the modules (which include instructional content as well as model lessons), G-PriEd staff and short-term experts drafted the modules, including the framework of the diagnostic teaching approach. These contributions included the development of model lessons in diagnostic teaching, conceptual information, revisions of pre-tests, and suggested teacher education activities. Then G-PriEd staff held module writing workshops, with international experts on Skype and local short-term experts as well as NCGEDD and TPDC experts on site in January and February. The local experts were selected in collaboration with TPDC (as they are expected to continue to work with the project and TPDC as national trainers).

After reviewing the draft content of the modules, workshop participants developed sample lessons based on the diagnostic teaching approach for each of the three modules (working in reading and in math). The local experts were also asked to develop training material specific to the Georgian context (i.e., specific to Georgian phonics, number systems, classroom constraints, and the Georgian curricula for reading and math).

In the period of January 23-27, the module writers field-tested the sample lessons in different schools and wrote reports on the impact of the lessons they observed.

Based on these observations, the writers revised the draft lessons and developed the new sample lessons. (See section on math training modules below for further information.)

- *Create teacher professional development materials in coaching.* For the module on leading professional development for teachers, G-PriEd staff followed a similar approach as the one described for reading and math above. The initial draft of the module was created by G-PriEd staff and short-term international experts and then reviewed and revised during the writers' workshop held in January. At the workshop, the module writers also designed the main goals and topics of the module, in-class and take-home activities, and a glossary of the terms. The module covers three topics: (1) the role of the PDL teacher, (2) activities that PDL teachers can use to support teachers and their work, and (3) communication and interpersonal skills that are essential for PDLs to be successful in their work.
- *Defining the role of the professional development leader (PDL) teacher.* PDL teachers — who can serve as resources and coaches for their fellow teachers as they apply new, more effective teaching strategies — are a critical component of school-based professional development, a key element of G-PriEd's interventions. Because this role is new within Georgia, in the first six months, G-PriEd staff took several steps to delineate the role and expectations for PDL teachers.
 - *Concept paper on PDL teachers.* To define the role of PDL teachers within school-based professional development programs in Georgia, in March, G-PriEd staff began drafting a concept paper on the program, in close collaboration with the project COR. The paper will be discussed with the representatives of the MES and its agencies in April. The document outlines the framework of the new proposed school-based professional development and highlights the main features of the model and its links to the existing in-service teacher professional development.
 - *PDL job description.* In December, G-PriEd drafted a description of PDL teachers' roles and responsibilities. G-PriEd staff then organized a roundtable meeting with 11 principals to get their feedback on the job description. In general, their feedback was good. G-PriEd staff then revised the job description and sent it to TPDC for their feedback in January. The resulting document specifies the required qualifications of PDL teachers as well as their roles and responsibilities at schools.
 - *PDL nomination form.* PDL teachers in reading and math are expected to be nominated by their principals. In January, G-PriEd staff designed a PDL nomination form. The form includes the PDL selection criteria with corresponding questions to be answered by principals in making their selection.
 - *PDL evaluation.* In February, G-PriEd staff developed a comprehensive list of portfolio items and a draft rubric that can be used to evaluate the quality of PDL teachers' assignments during their training sessions with national trainers. The rubric is based on three criteria: (1) relevance of materials to the topic, (2) understanding of coaching demonstrated by the materials, and (3) completeness of the materials. The rubric uses the following ratings: excellent, good and needs

improvement. It also contains specific performance characteristics arranged in levels indicating the degree to which the expectations were met. The evaluation protocols were developed with significant input from G-PriEd's international experts and representatives from TPDC.

- *PDL standards.* G-PriEd staff drafted a set of standards that can be used to evaluate PDL teacher performance while on the job. The draft contains six main standards covering (1) subject matter knowledge, (2) curriculum and instruction, (3) assessment and evaluation, (4) diversity, (5) literate environment, and (6) professional learning and leadership.

Input 1.2: Reading delivery systems improved

Facilitate working group to study the national reading assessment methodology (Task 7). Initially, the project faced some challenges to engage the NCEQE in assistance designed to improve Georgia's national assessments. However, the NCEQE and Minister of Education and Science has recently requested assistance in this area. G-PriEd is providing technical support to the implementation of national assessments in grades 1 and 4. Specifically, the project is bringing a consultant to Georgia mid-April to advise NCEQE on strategies for test security, test administration, training of test administrators, and procedures for collecting and cleaning data. In addition, the NCEQE has requested more comprehensive support to improve the national assessment process, specifically support for the printing of test materials and for the training of test administrators. Project staff will issue a request for quotations for vendors to print test materials and expects to finalize the procurement in April. With respect to the training of test administrators, G-PriEd will respond to the NCEQE's request after receiving additional information about the specifics of the requested training.

Develop remediation and promotions programs (Task 11). The Ministry has recently expressed interest in securing project support to identify a model Georgia can use to (1) engage parents more broadly in their children's education, and (2) engage parents specifically in the benefits of supporting their children's learning of reading and math skills. G-PriEd will support the visit of a parent engagement specialist in May to help the MES develop a cohesive national plan. G-PriEd also expects to support the fielding of a communications expert to advise the MES regarding ways to effectively implement its plan.

Output 2: Math competencies improved in grades 1-6

Input 2.1: Math instruction improved

Create Math Working Group (Task 1). As in the case of reading, the MES had some initial reluctance to create standing working groups. As a result, G-PriEd staff have held regular ad-hoc meetings with various MES representatives and the MES agencies to discuss, review and advance the math-related tasks in the work plan. Again, a major accomplishment of the first six months was the MES' agreement to establish a math task force that will develop the diagnostic assessment in math. This decision followed a workshop on diagnostic assessment held on March 14 (discussed below). The task force members will meet on a regular basis to develop clear methodologies,

guidelines, and validation procedures for diagnostic assessments in math. Similar to the reading task force, the members will include MES representatives and experts in a variety of relevant fields, such as psychology, child development, psychometrics and validation, gender equity, mathematics, and teacher education. The scopes of work for the task force and its members are under discussion with the NCEQE.

*Facilitate the activities of the working group to review the teacher guidelines in math for Georgian and ethnic minority schools and support development of guidelines for ethnic minority students (Task 2).*² G-PriEd staff, short-term experts, and MES partners have identified the core competencies necessary for Georgia's new primary-grade mathematics curriculum. These core competencies constitute the basis for the development of the diagnostic assessment in math, as well as the teacher professional development modules.

Facilitate the activities of the working group to develop paper-based and electronic instructional content (Task 3). G-PriEd is in the process of developing a plan for the development of these materials.

Pilot new technology-based math methodology for grades 1-6 in 270 Georgian and 50 ethnic minority schools (Task 4).

- *Create teacher professional development materials in math.* During the project's first six months, G-PriEd staff developed three math modules intended to illustrate the diagnostic approach to teaching. These three modules include drafts of all lesson plans and training materials, and cover the following three topics:
 - Teaching math in elementary grades
 - Teaching math across the curriculum, and
 - Creating environments that support math.

To develop the math modules, G-PriEd followed a process similar to that used to develop the reading modules. Staff and short-term international experts first prepared a draft of the modules (including the main demonstration lesson plans along with the presentation guidelines for the trainer), and then held a writers' workshop in January with local math experts, who developed the sample lesson plans based on the diagnostic teaching pedagogy. The workshop was also attended by the MES representatives, who will review and comment on the final draft materials.

The project's COR has reviewed the first math module and provided extensive feedback on the organizational structure of the math program, the limitations of the presentation of the diagnostic teaching approach, and the limited presentation of differentiated instruction, among other concerns. G-PriEd staff are working to address these concerns in the math module as well as to revise the corresponding reading module in line with her comments.

² Note: any work with the ethnic minority schools will depend on the needs of the MES.

- *Defining the role of the professional development leader (PDL) teacher.* Please see the discussion under Component 1 regarding the following activities to define the role of the PDL teacher.
 - Concept paper on PDL teachers.
 - PDL job description.
 - PDL nomination form.
 - PDL evaluation.
 - PDL standards.

- *Develop classroom assessment tools.* As with work to develop a reading diagnostic assessment, G-PriEd staff began work on the math diagnostic assessment by closely examining other instruments used to assess the math abilities of students in grades 1-6. Early on, the project focused on the Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA), USAID-developed tool used by similar USAID-funded projects worldwide.

In the project's first quarter, a number of meetings were held with the NCEQE to present EGMA, its purpose, individual components and their alignment with the Georgia's national standards in elementary grade math. In January, G-PriEd held a workshop intended to adapt the EGMA tool. G-PriEd described the components and purpose of the assessment, and participants then incorporated the components of EGMA into subsections of the training modules. However, as with reading, in the end G-PriEd decided to create a Georgia-specific diagnostic assessment that covers all grades from one to six.

In addition, G-PriEd staff developed a matrix that included different competencies that elementary school math teachers should have based on various international standards as well as a matrix that linked proposed assessment content to Georgia's math standards. In addition, the project collected information on existing international practice in diagnostic assessments in math in different countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Sweden.

In March, G-PriEd hosted a workshop to share information on diagnostic assessments in general and preview the new Georgian diagnostic assessments in math and reading. Following the workshop, through discussion with USAID and the MES' NCEQE, a decision was made to set up two task forces in reading and math, which will be charged with developing the Georgian classroom diagnostic assessments. Each task force will include the representatives of MES agencies, psychologist/child development specialists, psychometricians, gender specialists, elementary school classroom teachers, and school principals. G-PriEd is working closely with the NCEQE and the project COR to develop the scopes of work for the task forces and the field of activity experts under each Task Force.

In addition, at the request of MES, in February G-PriEd developed a draft Conceptual Framework for Diagnostic Assessment in Mathematics. G-PriEd, in close consultation with the project COR, finalized the conceptual framework for diagnostic assessment in mathematics and submitted it to MES. The feedback received from MES is positive with a few suggestions. The task force, which will be set up to develop the Georgian classroom diagnostic assessment in math, will further elaborate this document. The task force will also work to review the test

items that have already been drafted for grades 1-6 (with NCGEDD comments incorporated).

Output 3. Teacher training delivery systems strengthened

Input 3.1: Teacher retention policies improved

Advise the MES in creating effective induction and retention programs for teachers (Task 1). This activity will start in Quarter 3.

Propose effective mechanisms for developing a professional cadre for rural and mountain schools (Task 2). This activity will start in Quarter 3.

Input 3.2: In-service training improved

Help establish Teacher Houses, develop clear policies, and effective professional development approaches (Task 3). This activity will start in Quarter 3.

Support the Teacher Houses in attracting at least 10 reading and 10 math experts (Task 4). This activity will start in Quarter 4.

Support the Teacher Houses in nurturing at least 10 reading and 10 math experts (Tasks 5). This activity will start in Quarter 4.

Provide series of ToT sessions to at least 50 teacher trainers of reading and math (Task 6). In December, G-PriEd staff met with members of TPDC to develop a profile of the teacher trainers that will work with the project, the TPDC, and Teacher Houses. In collaboration with TPDC, G-PriEd staff identified the required qualifications of these individuals, and issued a call for expressions of interest to fill these slots. Initially, the project selected 56 candidates (32 from Tbilisi and 24 from the regions). However, afterwards, it was decided that the sustainability of project operations would be better served if a higher percentage of trainers came from the regions in which they would be expected to train. As a result, the project team re-issued the call for expressions of interest and is in the process of identifying additional trainers from outside of Tbilisi.

Input 3.3: Pre-service training improved

Review current education programs of universities (Task 7). This activity will start in Quarter 3. In the interim, G-PriEd has held a preliminary discussion with the Director of International Relations of MES and the Deputy Minister for Higher Education. G-PriEd has developed a preliminary proposed schedule of activities.