



Corruption & Afghanistan's Education Sector

Part 2 of a 6-Part Series on Corruption & Anti-Corruption Issues in Afghanistan

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*This report is part of a six-week series addressing corruption and anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan. This piece reviews the prevalence and effects of corruption on the education sector in Afghanistan and explores the ways in which the Afghan government is working to address this problem. Related information is available at www.cimicweb.org. **Hyperlinks to source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the text.***

Corruption is widely perceived to be a [key obstacle](#) to development in Afghanistan. The importance of implementing corruption reform programmes is being increasingly stressed as the Afghan transition process becomes reality. Like most facets of society, the [education sector is prone](#) to corruption, and Afghanistan is certainly no exception. Over the last several years, the Afghan government has implemented a number of reform efforts in order to reduce corruption and improve the quality of education at all levels (i.e., from primary to tertiary). This report examines corruption in Afghanistan's educational sector and describes current reform efforts being taken by the Afghan government, especially the Ministry of Education ([MoE](#)) and Ministry of Higher Education ([MoHE](#)) with the support of the international community.

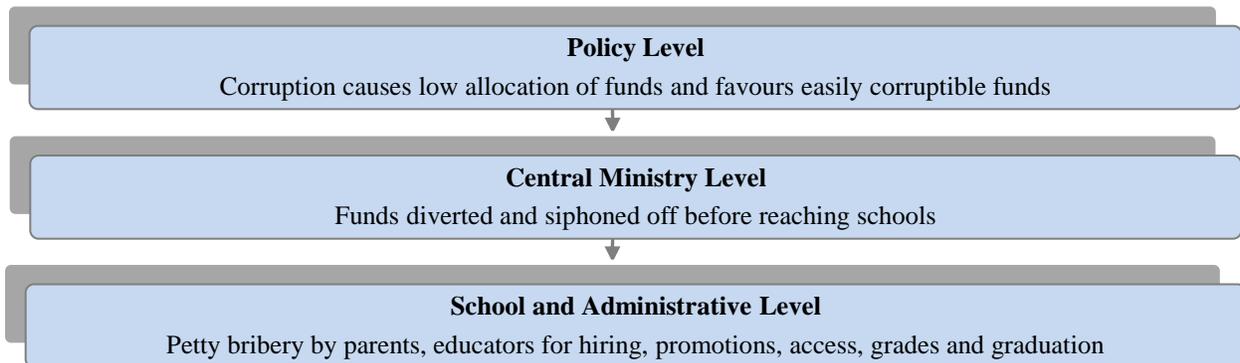
Corruption and Education: A Broad View

Corruption in the education sector in developing countries is widespread and harmful. The [U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre](#), a Norway-based institution that assists international development professionals in addressing corruption, [indicates that education](#) is particularly susceptible to corruption given that it is often the largest or second largest public expense in most countries. Hence, the sector's large budgets present opportunities for corruption and other forms of misappropriation. U4 identifies more than 20 forms of corruption that can take place in the education sector, including those related to bribery, embezzlement, favouritism and the exploitation of students and parents. In its report, U4 distinguishes the types of corruption that occur at different levels, from grand corruption at the highest level down to petty corruption at the local level (*see Figure 1, next page*).

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Figure I. Types of Corruption by Level



Source: U4 Resource Centre, [Corruption in the Education Sector](#)

According to a report on education and corruption in the *Sectoral Perspectives on Corruption* series commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), “pervasive, petty” corruption at a low level produces the most [serious consequences](#). This type of corruption trains generation after generation of students to view personal success as a function of “favouritism, bribery, and fraud” rather than effort and ability, according to USAID.

The aforementioned [U4 Report](#) also distinguishes between common categories of corruption in the education sector. Each of these categories is briefly described below.

- *Planning & School Management*: In this category, planning and funding decisions made for personal and political reasons rather than based on objective technical criteria.
- *Procurement*: Poor quality materials and equipment are purchased due to corrupt bidding process. This form of corruption also influences hiring of contractors to build and rehabilitate school buildings.
- *Accreditation*: Public and private institutions pay bribes to gain accreditation which they otherwise may not have received.
- *Admissions/Examinations*: Corrupt practices become routine, particularly during oral tests and entrance exams, which are particularly vulnerable to bribery.
- *Teacher Management & Professional Conduct*: Unqualified personnel are hired, retained and promoted due to systematic bribery rather than on the basis of merit. Misconduct by bribe-paying teachers and other education professionals may go unpunished.

Stephen Heyneman and others in an article in the *Comparative Education Review* argue that [rapid decentralisation](#) can greatly enable corruption due to sub-national officials’ lack of experience and their lack of familiarity with regulating private educational institutions, in particular. According to Heyneman, decentralisation leads to regional and local education offices with greater responsibility but little experience in working with sectors such as private education, which had formerly been managed by central government institutions. This situation can lead to all forms of education (but particularly higher education) being insufficiently regulated, thereby allowing for corruption to emerge.

The USAID report also highlights that [successful education sector reform programmes](#) must include provisions intended to increase objectivity in measurement and transparency in addition to incorporate civil society involvement in education. Elsewhere, Shinichiro Tanaka of the Japanese international development consulting firm [PADECO](#) adds that [corruption reform strategies](#) for education should be preventative, tailored to local circumstances and customs but focused on the primary goal of protecting students. Preventative strategies, Tanaka



argues, work by systematically anticipating and preparing for potential problems, which allows for advanced diagnoses of and preparation for local conditions. Student protection is the primary goal because students are directly and indirectly vulnerable to “corrupt practices of teachers in the classroom”.

Corruption in the Afghan Education Sector: Have Things Changed?

The problem of corruption in the education sector in Afghanistan appears to be significant. The International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP), in its research paper “[Education and Fragility in Afghanistan](#)”, calls corruption “entrenched in the education system”. It identifies two types of corrupt practices common to Afghan education: teachers having to pay bribes to their superiors to receive salaries and the phenomenon of “ghost teachers”. “Ghost teachers” are those who do not come to work but who nonetheless receive a salary or those who are double-registered and thus receive two salaries for a single day’s work. According to IIEP, the the existence of “ghost teachers” results in large classroom sizes given that a school has far fewer teachers than policymakers and high-level civil servants may perceive based on payroll records. The lack of teachers within schools also results in classes being cancelled and contributes to a “general lack in faith in an educational system”. IIEP notes that, with the education system being one of the most common and visible manifestations of the Afghan government, corruption within local schools tends to breed a broader lack of trust in the country’s public institutions.

In addition to “ghost teachers”, a USAID report titled “[Assessment of Corruption in Afghanistan](#)” lists several additional ways in which corruption affects education directly. The most common are work disincentives (inadequate salaries driving teachers to focus more on private tutoring), bribes for grades and lack of teacher competency. Furthermore, the study notes the higher the level of education (e.g., primary, secondary and tertiary), the worse corruption tends to be. For instance, students can, according to USAID, buy both entrance into and graduation from many universities in Afghanistan. With regard to teacher salaries, the report notes that payments were, until recently, made in cash, which led to money being “siphoned off” at each step of the distribution process between the Ministry of Education (MoE), provincial offices, district offices and individual schools. The same document also points out these problems have been exacerbated by the [dramatic increase in the number of students](#) enrolled in public schools since the overthrow of the Taliban. The report notes that under the Taliban, there were less than one million students in public schools given that girls were barred from school and given that insecurity led families to hold their children back from school or leave Afghanistan. The number of students in Afghan schools has increased to approximately six million since 2001. During this same time period, the Afghan government has sought to decentralise education. According to a 2004 report on [education development](#) by the Afghan MoE, the educational system inherited from the Taliban was centralised. The ministry sought to decentralise in order to get local communities, especially parents, more involved in education. As noted earlier in this report, such rapid decentralisation has the potential to enable corruption given that resources pass from office to office (e.g., from the ministry to the provincial education department to the districts, etc.) and given that local officials may be inexperienced with education sector management.

An article in the Kandahar based newspaper *Surghar Daily* provides illuminating details about [education in Kandahar](#) province. According to the article, Kandahar’s education sector is “mired in corruption”. The article says talented students are held back by corrupt practices that favour connections, bribes, influence and power. Several problems are identified, such as inadequate curriculum, students bribing their teachers for good grades, corrupt officials, incompetent teachers and excessive absenteeism by students, teachers and officials alike. The piece highlights that the effects of corruption on the education system in Kandahar are compounded by the lack of local security. Another article from February 2004 by Daniel Del Castillo of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* focuses upon university exams. Del Castillo finds that cheating on the exams was widespread – and recognised by authorities – but that it was rarely punished. The former Minister of Higher Education, Mohammad Sharif Fayez, [acknowledged that many](#) of the applicants who sit for the university entrance exam are not even high school



graduates. The minister further noted that one-third of medical students were expelled for having been found to have falsified entrance documents.

Despite the examples of widespread corruption in Afghanistan's education sector noted above, a [January 2010 report](#) by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that bribery within the Afghan education sector is less common than in many other sectors. According to the report, the percentage of survey respondents claiming to have paid at least one bribe to a teacher over the last 12 months was less than 5%, compared to over 25% for police officers and close to 15% for doctors. The average bribe paid to teachers was about USD 60, compared to over USD 100 for police officers and over USD 200 for judges. The survey also found that while more men than women report having paid a bribe – 53% vs 39%, respectively – women have to pay bribes more often than men in the education and health sectors specifically. A February [2011 report](#) on Afghanistan published by a coalition of NGOs notes that a recent national survey found that 11% of all Afghans say corruption plays a role in education. The NGO report, like the UNODC publication, notes that the amount of corruption in education is low relative to other sectors but describes its prevalence as “still deeply concerning”.

Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Education Sector

The Afghan government has publicly [recognised the problem](#) of corruption in education and acknowledged the need to make institutional reforms intended to reduce and prevent its occurrence. The government has created a number of overlapping programmes involving multiple ministries, including the MoE, the MoHE and the Ministry of Finance (MoF), many of which are supported by the international community. The Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) serves as Afghanistan's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) as part of efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations; as such, it is the guiding document for development efforts in Afghanistan. The ANDS treats corruption as a cross-cutting issue and notes the issue is being “addressed with institutional strengthening programs in all Ministries” and adds that accounting and procurement procedures are being implemented as well. The Afghan government has put in place multiple education reform programmes. For instance, the Office of Social Sector Development (OSSD) has begun a [number of programmes](#), including the Basic Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST) programme as well as specific initiatives designed to modernize the university entrance exam system, develop an [electronic bank transfer system](#) for teacher salaries and create forgery-proof university diplomas. The MoHE was able to push through legislation on the MoHE's oversight responsibilities for “nascent” private universities, as noted in the USAID [Assessment of Corruption in Afghanistan](#) report. The MoE [has developed](#) an Education Management Information System (EMIS), which monitors education indicators and planning; it also registers employees by position, profession and duty station in order to address the previously discussed challenge of “ghost teachers”. The MoE is working to expand EMIS capabilities to the local schoolhouse level to cover student enrolment, exam scores, attendance and teacher attendance. The MoE has also incorporated the Afghanistan Financial Management Information System (AFMIS) created and implemented by the Ministry of Finance (MoF), “to track expenditure on education programs at national and sub-national level”.

The MoE, additionally, produced a National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) for the years 2010-2014.¹ Corruption reform is a recurring theme throughout the document. The NESP is divided into five programmes. While four of the programmes deal with general educational issues, much of the fifth programme – Education Management – is designed to tackle problems related to corruption. The NESP also devotes a chapter to implementation and monitoring and evaluation, again specifically singling out the need to attack corruption. As part of the NESP, for instance, an Education Academic Council is to be created, with significant responsibility in reducing corruption.

¹ The [National Education Interim Plan](#) for 2011-2013 is intended to serve as an achievable baseline level of institutional reform as a stepping stone to implementing the NESP. It too gives extensive attention and priority to items intended to address corruption reform.

**Box.1 Case Study in Reform: Public School Teachers in Paktika**

A [corruption scandal](#)² in [Paktika](#) province involving more than USD 1 million led to teachers in the Waza Kwah school district not being paid. The teachers threatened a mass walkout; in response the Paktika Director of Education, Ehsanullah, and Governor Moheebullah Samim responded quickly in order to ensure that the teachers were paid, thereby preventing the walkout. Ehsanullah created a registration system for all area teachers and principals that increased efficiency and transparency. According to Ehsanullah, “Corrupt officials no longer have a role in the process and will not have an opportunity to steal the pay”. Governor Samim then made sure the teachers were provided back pay they were owed.

Basic Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST)

The BESST programme is a [USAID-funded initiative](#), designed to reform education via systems intended to aid, train and evaluate teachers. While not described as an anti-corruption initiative, many of BESST’s specific components pertain to corruption. For instance, the programme addresses low teacher pay, a lack of standardisation and transparency and non-merit-based hiring, all of which typify or enable corruption within the education sector. The programme was designed to be completed in August 2011 but would continue after that with follow-up projects and activities.³ Among the items undertaken by BESST were management training for principals, creating and administering competency tests for principals and teachers, developing organisational charts and human resource databases and manuals, creating human resource policies and standardising job descriptions in addition to developing community involvement via “school improvement councils”.

The ACT Programme

According to a [July 2011 UNDP quarterly report](#), the Accountability and Transparency (ACT) programme, which was broadly designed and being implemented by the Afghan government and international community, is centred around four components: (i) institutional reforms intended to bolster the national anti-corruption strategy; (ii) activities aimed to increase “accountability, transparency and integrity”; (iii) public awareness initiatives intended to education citizens regarding corruption; and (iv) enhanced monitoring capabilities. While most efforts appear to be aimed at non-educational sectors, there have been some very significant developments in education. One of these was the establishment of the [Office for Anti-corruption Implementation Plan](#) at the MoE. The UNDP quarterly report describes another development as the creation of six complaint offices in Kabul in the following directorates and ministries: Directorate of City Education, Deputy Ministry of Technical and Vocational Education, the Kabul Province Education Directorate, the Deputy Ministry of Islamic Education, and the Deputy Ministry of Literacy and Teacher Training Directorate. These offices were collectively able to “properly resolve” 168 out of 216 new complaints received in the second quarter of 2011, the most common of which concerned delays in service, abuse of power and bribery. Complaint offices in Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Jalalabad were expected to be completed by the end of the third quarter of 2011.

Conclusion

This report has described the situation regarding corruption in the Afghan education sector. Corruption presents a significant challenge for this sector, according to publications from USAID, UNODC, NGOs, the Afghan government and a range of other sources. However, as this report has demonstrated, the Afghan government, with

² No details of what caused the corruption scandal were given in the article.

³ It is not clear from publicly available information if BESST was completed on time.



the help of the international community, recognises the challenge and has over the past several years put in place many institutional reforms intended to respond to this situation.

Annex A. Key Documents

Readers seeking additional materials on corruption and education, particularly in Afghanistan, may wish to review the documents listed below. To open the publication, please click on the hyperlink embedded in the document's title.

- Ministry of Education, [Draft National Education Strategic Plan](#) for Afghanistan (years 1389-1393/2010-2014), March 2010.
- Ministry of Education, [Education Management Information System](#) (EMIS) Summary Report of Education Situation, Year 1388 (2009-2010).
- Ministry of Education, [National Education Interim Plan](#) 2011-2013 (January 2011)
- UNODC, "[Corruption in Afghanistan Report](#): Bribery as Reported by the Victims".
- USAID, "[Assessment of Corruption in Afghanistan](#)" (March 2009).
- U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, "[Corruption in the Education Sector](#)" (2006).