NUG must clean the mess of institutions to win the fight against corruption in Afghanistan.

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According to recent surveys by Integrity Watch and the Asia Foundation, people report higher level of corruption and an ever higher level of dissatisfaction with the government. This is largely due to the National Unity Government’s (NUG) inability to deliver on their promises.

The quest for more power has weakened the NUG

The NUG has wasted two years in infighting over sharing government positions. While CEO Abdullah has pushed for strengthening his camp’s grip over many of the institutions that were already captured, President Ghani pushes back by keeping currently ineffective leadership in place, leaving positions open, or even trying to bring people from his own camp. The recent appointment of President Ghani’s top aide to lead the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) has created a stalemate while the public sector remains corrupt and ineffective. Disagreement between the two NUG leaders has led to a leadership vacuum at the Ministry of Local people go above and beyond to pay for expansion and maintenance of their school.

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Mines and Petroleum while mines are being looted and the public is being robbed of important revenues. These are just a few of many examples.

**NUG leaders’ infighting has prevented meaningful reform**

The infighting and lack of a national vision among NUG leaders has led the President: (1) to stop reform of anti-corruption institutions such as High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption (HOO), Supreme Audit Office (SAO), and IARCSC, to name a few, and (2) to abandon creation of independent institutions to fight corruption such as the Independent Anti-Corruption Commission. Despite promising during the London Conference two years ago to create such a commission, President Ghani has instead tried to build institutions around himself such as the High Council on Governance, Rule of Law, and Anti-Corruption (HCAC) and the recently established Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC).

**The test of political will**

Experiences from around the world show that in extremely corrupt countries, independent institutions backed by political will (not political interference) can play a major role in preventing corruption, ending impunity, and engaging the public in the fight against corruption. There is an increasing demand for such institutions and countries such as Mexico are taking bold steps in this direction.

While both NUG leaders have shown tremendous promise, they have failed to overcome internal disagreements leading to an ineffective fight against corruption in terms of action. The test of their political will to fight corruption is if they agree on establishing an independent anti-corruption commission with membership from among citizens (not politicians) and which takes into consideration key international standards such as the Jakarta statement on Principles for Anti-Corruption Agencies and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

In addition, a strong anti-corruption law to establish anti-corruption institutions, clarify their mandates, sanction corrupt practices, and promote integrity must be developed through broad-based consultation. In addition a national strategy to fight corruption followed by institution-specific anti-corruption plans needs to be developed sooner rather than later. Despite promises at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, there are no signs of moving forward on this. In addition, the anti-corruption plans developed by five revenue generating ministries are of substandard quality and were only meant to showcase progress on commitments at the Brussels Conference.

The NUG has to stop this mess. Failing to deliver on their promises to establish strong and independent anti-corruption institutions would not only result in failure of anti-corruption efforts but would also fail the NUG in general. Survey results constantly showing Afghans’ lowering confidence in the NUG should be taken as a warning sign.
Local people go above and beyond to pay for expansion and maintenance of their school.

Community-based monitoring program of schools in Kapisa province

Mohammad Hakim Shaheed High School was built on land donated by the local people of Khushtakan village of Kuhistan II district in central Kapisa province. Local communities have been very supportive of this school as they also contributed the funds required to build a second floor of the school. However, due to lack of monitoring, local people did not know much about the condition of the school or did not pay attention to it.

After Integrity Watch started the community-based monitoring program in the area, local monitors reported to the community that the school building was degrading fast and if attention was not paid to maintenance, the school building would face irreparable damage costing the community its school. When volunteer local monitors reported additional problems to the local community, people again came forward with support to their school. This time the locals paid for construction of a meeting hall and walkways within the school. They also paid for additional maintenance of the whole school such as the fixing of broken windows and painting of the school.

The school which accommodates 800 students, badly needed some cash for repairs which the administration raised from local communities. They also raised funds by selling off USD1,000 worth of construction material which was left over from the construction of the second floor to the school building. The money was then used for renovation. Both students and teachers served as volunteer laborers, completing the entire work themselves. Local communities say that the process of spending the money was so transparent that locals have promised to contribute to the school again in the future.

Community-based monitoring of schools was launched almost three years ago and has covered 150 schools in three provinces so far. Integrity Watch plans to expand this program to more provinces in the near future.
Local volunteers prevent construction of substandard cold storage in Balkh.

Community-based monitoring program of infrastructure projects in Balkh province

Volunteer local monitors in Sart Village of Khulam district in northern Balkh province recently found that substandard material was being used in construction of a cold storage facility in their village. The construction company used muddy material instead of cement in the stonework of the project which would be less weather resistant and would likely cause early deterioration of the walls. Two local monitors, Jan Mohammad and Mohammad Nawed, reported this problem to Integrity Watch and to the Balkh Agriculture Department who was paying USD 40,000 for construction of this cold storage facility. As a result, the construction work was immediately stopped.

Later on, this matter reached members of the local people and they, along with local monitors, expressed their views and demands to the construction company. Considering the local people’s demands, the construction company, Afghan Cooling, destroyed the completed work and restarted it by using cement instead of the muddy materials. This was a very satisfying outcome for the local community, particularly since this is the only cold storage facility in their area despite demands expressed for after many years by local people for such a facility.

Local monitors who volunteer to monitor construction projects on behalf of their communities have proven very effective in monitoring of about 1,100 projects identified by Integrity Watch. Most of the problems identified have been addressed at the local level indicating that local communities can play a critical role in preventing corruption and waste in community infrastructure projects.
Ghori Cement Project: Establishing trust between community and extractive company.

The Community Based Monitoring- Mines Program (CBM-M) - Baghlan Province

More than six months ago, Integrity Watch started its Community-Based Monitoring of Extractives (CBM-E) program in communities around Ghori Cement Factory to engage local communities in monitoring of this mine. After developing awareness about mining among local residents about mining, the program selected four local volunteers to monitor the operations of the company and to ensure the rights of the local people.

After the program started, local communities through their volunteer monitors are now able to directly contact the company and share their problems. However, before the program, people were not even allowed to visit the mining site and the factory. One of the issues of concern for the local people was the thick smoke coming out from the factory that badly impacted the surrounding residents. This was discussed with the company and while the company initially resisted taking action they later promised to take some measures to address this problem.

Other issues such as safety of mineworkers and increasing employment opportunities for local people was also discussed with the company. As a result, the company has taken some steps to improve the safety of workers and has been increasingly relying on local labor instead of bringing workers from outside the area.

Establishing such relations with the company has not only paved the way for solving some of the current problems, it also empowered local communities to monitor the extractive process and to raise their voices directly with the company.

Ghori Cement Factory is one of the important sources of cement in Afghanistan. This industry is located in Pol-e-Khumry city, in the center of Baghlan province. It was established in the 1980s with financial support from the government of Czechoslovakia. Initially its production was 1,200 tons of cement in 24 hours. The factory was a state-owned enterprise that was later privatized during the Karzai government in a shoddy deal involving President Karzai and VP Fahim’s brothers.
Mock trial educates public on formal court procedures in Balkh province.

The community-based monitoring program in Balkh province

Integrity Watch team in Balkh province organized a mock trial to educate the public on formal criminal and civil procedural matters. Organized on 27 October, 2016 the trial was attended by a large number of participants including high ranking court officials, prosecutors, members of the council of religious scholars and civil society members. The trial was organized also to encourage people to participate in trials, fight against corruption, and encourage courts to hold more trials openly, as required by law. The mock trial was based on a hypothetical murder case. Participants at the end said that all standards of court trial were considered.

Wajeh-ul-Din, the head of city court, expressed his appreciation of Integrity Watch’s work and stated that such programs play an important role in the raising awareness of public and other concerned judicial and legal agencies. He emphasized that the courts in Balkh province are determined to address the issue of corruption. He encouraged people to inform the courts of any corruption or other wrongdoings within the courts.

A member of the religious scholars’ council and a member of the Integrity Network of Balkh, Mula Mohsen Danish, said that “fighting against corruption is a religious and national duty.”

The Community-Based Monitoring of Trials Program (CBM-T) has been active for more than two years in Balkh province and has covered three courts in the province: the appeals court, the city court, and the district court of Nahr-e-Shahi. In addition to facilitating the regular monitoring of trials by local monitors, this program also organizes mock trials in order to raise awareness and to mobilize communities for monitoring of courts.
In what ways can public access to information help reduce corruption?

Head of Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan (Nai), Sediquallah Tawhedi says:

When people access information, the government cannot make anything secret from them, and people will be able to make their own judgments about contracts and development programs; this can help prevent high ranking and low ranking officials from undertaking illegal activities.

When every citizen knows about government activities, they can make the government accountable. For example, when people know who is implementing a project, what the project amount is and who the beneficiaries of the project are, and how much it adds to national revenue, this would lead to reduction in financial corruption because people will know about everything. Whenever projects are implemented secretly, there are possibilities of huge financial corruption. Also, when people know which country contributes in which sector, officials cannot misuse donor funds.

Information is critical in the fight against corruption and without information the fight against corruption is not possible because people will not know where the money is and how officials have misused the money.