After months delay, finally, the draft anti-corruption strategy is out. The High Council on Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption (HCAC) discussed the draft strategy that was prepared by close aides to President Ghani. Despite obvious reluctance from the National Unity Government (NUG) to take on corruption seriously, the draft strategy proposes important undertakings. Many of civil society recommendations that were made in the last three years, have now been taken into account such as establishing an Independent Judicial Services Commission, revising Access to Information Law to meet international standards and strengthening Oversight Commission on Access to Information, and appointing a High Oversight Board to oversee the appointments and promotions in the security sector among others. In addition, the strategy seems clear and focused. Instead of trying to deal with everything, it prioritizes the security sector and ministries with the highest revenues and expenditures.

Nevertheless, there are three major issues that the strategy suffers from including the constricted strategy development process, weak institutional arrangements, and expanded timelines for achieving the benchmarks.

The government should have organized wide consultations within and outside the government to formulate the strategy. However, the whole strategy development process was restricted to a couple of corners of the Presidential Palace. While there is no information on consultation with the government bodies, civil society representatives were only invited to a one-hour meeting to give their views while they should have been part of the strategy development process right from the outset. The meeting was more of a window dressing than real consultation since neither the draft of the strategy was shared with the civil society ahead of the meeting nor the government representatives seemed interested to consider what civil society proposed in terms of institutional arrangements. This is evident in the draft strategy that came out since major concerns of the civil society were completely ignored.
The second major issue in the draft strategy is the weak institutional arrangements. The NUG has backtracked on its most important anti-corruption commitment: the creation of an independent and strong anti-corruption commission. The strategy does not discuss the establishment of an independent anti-corruption commission, a commitment that the NUG made three years ago in London Conference on Afghanistan. There is no clear explanation about the NUG’s proposed institutional arrangements instead of establishing an independent and expert agency to fight corruption.

The strategy gives the central role to Attorney General’s Office (AGO) for prosecution and Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) for prevention while it mentions that an ombudsman will be established under the President’s office. The HCAC has been assigned the role of coordination. None of the three agencies meet the UNCAC and/or Jakarta Principles on the independence of anti-corruption agencies as well as legal provisions that ensure adequacy of resources. AGO and IARCSC leadership do not have fixed term in office nor they are selected through a non-political process. They are very vulnerable to political backlash from within and outside the government if they really act independently. The HCAC has proved to be an ineffective platform for coordination since it did not meet regularly and it is too high level requiring the President to chair it. The HCAC secretariat suffers from lack of leadership by the HCAC. In addition, there is a major accountability gap in the proposed institutional arrangements since HCAC is comprised of the same institutions that are supposed to be monitored by the anti-corruption body. By not creating independent institution to fight corruption, the government does not want to vest power in institutions that can act in an apolitical manner. This is a clear sign of weak political will to go after the mafia and the corrupt networks that have captured the institutions. Instead, the NUG seems determined to politically control the anti-corruption institutions and to use them for political deals. The NUG does seem to be in a mood to seriously shake the current elite settlement that has resulted in the institutionalization of corruption.

The third issue with the draft strategy is the extended timelines to achieve the benchmarks. While the NUG only has two years left, majority of the benchmarks are in 2018 (out of 34 benchmarks 19 are in 2018 out of which 14 are not before mid-2018). Practically speaking, one would not expect that the government would be interested in fighting corruption while it is already preparing for the next elections. After all, attention will be already on the electoral politics and not much will be delivered in terms of fighting corruption. In addition, the NUG’s track record has been really good when it comes to making anti-corruption commitments. The problem has been with implementation. Out of 31 commitments made at the London Summit in May 2016, the NUG has been able to implement only three of them. There is a widespread concern that the NUG is only interested in buying time and delivering minimum of its commitments. If this were not the case, the NUG would have come up with shorter timeframes for achieving the benchmarks and a clear plan to establish the independent anti-corruption commission.

MoPH trouble and confused after health report by Integrity Watch Afghanistan

On 23rd of August 2017, Integrity Watch Afghanistan publicized its report “Life Matters: Caring for the Country’s Most Precious Resource.” Integrity Watch inspected 184 public clinics and hospitals in 8 provinces that were built or operated with donor money. The report indicates that despite hundreds of millions of dollar invested by the donor community in the public health sector, health facilities across the country suffer from major deficiencies. More than half of the facilities experience structural and maintenance problems, the majority of which needs urgent repair. Almost half of the facilities were in poor hygiene and sanitation conditions with one-quarter of them not having toilets. Four out of ten facilities did not have potable water while one in every five facilities had no electricity at all. Access to health facilities has been pointed out as a major problem. Two-thirds of the facilities did not have ambulances, contributing to difficulties in accessing the clinics and hospitals. But, despite the imperfections, a significant percentage (99%) of the facilities remain operational during the day time.
As a response, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) initially seemed very upset and launched a media campaign against Integrity Watch and its report and threatened to take action against the organization. In a review circulated a week later, the MoPH rejected the findings of the report stating that “the study does not provide rationally equipped findings to assess the health service delivery status in the country.” The review also called the report “opinionated and judgmental.” However, later the Minister of Public Health reportedly contradicted this view in a meeting of the High Council of Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption, stating that such reports would help the MoPH to reform health service delivery in the country.

The study was designed to assess capacities of public health clinics and hospitals to deliver quality (not necessarily “high” quality) basic health care. The capacity of the health care delivery centers was assessed with 5 simple indicators: (1) Physical condition and maintenance of the facilities from where health services are delivered; (2) Hygiene and sanitation conditions at the health care facilitates; (3) On-site availability of equipment and medications; (4) Presence of trained medical and health care workers, including female professionals; (5) Accessibility to health care facilities. The study assessed the capacities of facilities by applying these indicators using tools of limited inspection, interviews with on-site staff members (service providers) and community members or the clientele (service users).

“Theater of the Oppressed” reaches Balkh province

Integrity Watch, in collaboration with Afghanistan Human Rights Development Organization (AHRDO), conducted the first “Theater of the Oppressed” in Balkh province. More than 500 (men, women, and children) participated, not only as audience but also took part in the acts as characters, to learn and reflect how courts function. Participants appreciated organizing of “Theater of the Oppressed” and asked Integrity Watch to conduct more of such engaging events in the future as well. Integrity Watch Afghanistan earlier conducted the theater in Kapisa and Nangarhar provinces and intends to expand it to more provinces.
Theater of the Oppressed uses theatrical forms that the Brazilian theater guru Augusto Boal first used in the 1970s starting in Brazil and later spreading to Europe. Boal used theater as a tool to promote social and political change. His techniques mainly focused on getting the audience involved in the act by analyzing the play, expressing their views about their own realities, and performing the act in the way the audience themselves thought they could transform the realities they lived in.

In 2014, the first community-based monitoring of trials program was introduced in Balkh province. Ever since the inception of the program in the province, Integrity Watch has strived to enhance the capacity of local communities, civil society networks and citizens to engage with local courts through monitoring of open trials and sharing their observations with the court officials. This has resulted in more openness of courts to the public, increased the percentage of open trials, and improved compliance with the fair trial guidance.

**Integrity Volunteers prevent additional construction on a cracking ICU roof in Herat province**

*Ahmad Sohail Hafezi, Provincial Coordinator—Herat*

Integrity Volunteers, supported by Integrity Watch, have reported serious problems in the construction of the Regional Hospital of Heart province. One such issue was building a two story building on an already existing one that was built five years ago. The ICU built in 2012 had cracks in its ceiling and therefore could not support additional construction. The volunteers spotted the issue and shared with Integrity Watch provincial office. Integrity Watch contacted stakeholders including the construction company, the donor representative, and the Directorate of Economy in Herat provinces to take notice of the fault. Additionally, Integrity Watch consulted the Hospital’s Council which had not met in months.

Following, the construction company decided to rebuild the roof. To make sure the construction goes according to the agreed terms by the construction company, the volunteers monitored the project on weekly basis.

Community Based-monitoring of Infrastructure is active in nine provinces including Herat, Kabul, and Balkh where Integrity Volunteers promote social accountability, through community mobilization and social audit. Through the program, local communities are empowered to monitor public infrastructure projects in their area. In 2016 more than 200 projects were monitored in Balkh, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, and Herat alone.
Female members of Integrity Club address school problems in Charikar

The Bayan High School for Girls is located in downtown Charikar City (some 70 km from the north of Kabul). The half century old school is situated on a main busy road connecting the city center to the neighboring district. Because the school had short boundary walls facing the road, traffic on the road caused enormous noise and safety problems.

To solve the issue, Integrity Club members put forward the issue before school’s Management Shura (council). After follow-ups by the Club, one of the local community members volunteered to pay $2000 to the school to increase the height of the walls. Haji Noor Agha, the school principal is very happy about the new addition in his school and said, “The students now can study in a secure environment since one of the major problems is solved.” Students were also happy for the new construction in their school since they can now focus on their studies more freely.

The school has 400 students and 17 teachers out of which seven are female. The school has a functional Integrity Club since last year. Integrity Clubs are student groups that were created by Integrity Watch in schools as an exit strategy after two years of the Community-Based Monitoring program that actively worked with communities to monitor schools and address their problems. The Clubs function independently of Integrity Watch now and have proven to be effective in solving issues in their schools.

The World Bank case study of our Community-Based Monitoring of Schools program is now published in the ‘Citizens As Drivers of Change’ report. The report talks how effective the model is for bringing change, particularly education quality improvement. An excerpt from the report says ‘Citizen engagement can have particularly strong positive effects on service delivery, including healthcare and education, by giving voice to the less powerful and in turn improving the accessibility, coverage, and quality of service delivery’ Access full report at https://doi.org/10.1596/27653
Empowering a New Generation of Integrity Champions in Afghanistan, to build a just and equitable world where citizens act with and demand Integrity

Afghanistan - Learning Paper - 2016-2017

Ellen Goldberg

Empowering a New Generation of Integrity Champions in Afghanistan, to build a just and equitable world where citizens act with and demand Integrity

Our partner Integrity Action, has published a learning paper on our Integrity Champions (ICs), studying the new generation of Afghans demanding Integrity and fighting corruption in their country.
To access the paper visit http://bit.ly/2wQFjNd
The report by Integrity Watch Afghanistan analyses the state of public health facilities in the country. The report indicates that despite hundreds of millions of dollar invested by the donor community in the public health sector, health facilities across the country suffer from major deficiencies. Integrity Watch inspected 184 public clinics and hospitals in 8 provinces that are built or operated with donor money. To read the full report refer to this link: http://bit.ly/2vpT2ce