The Afghan Government continues to fail to deliver on its most important anti-corruption commitments

Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director

It has been over a month since the deadline set in the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan to produce an anti-corruption strategy has passed. There is no indication that a comprehensive strategy, that would have the buy-in from all the stakeholders, would be in place soon.

The Afghan Government’s efforts to fight corruption have been ad hoc. The existing anti-corruption institutions such as the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption and the High Council on Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption have failed to provide strategic direction to the anti-corruption efforts. Therefore, it seems the President himself has taken on the job to write the anti-corruption strategy. It is said that the strategy will be presented to the High Council for approval in a few weeks.

However, there has been no engagement of the stakeholders, even within the government. There is a widely felt discontent among stakeholders who feel the government has done nothing to engage them in the process. It is said that the strategy will be shared for consultation after it is approved by the High Council. However, such consultation would mean little if stakeholders are not engaged right from the outset. The anti-corruption strategy should be about building consensus, not just producing another stack of papers to be shelved.

If the Afghan government considers corruption a serious problem that threatens our national security, it has to build consensus and create an inclusive ownership of the strategy to fight this ubiquitous phenomenon. However, it is not clear for how long the Afghan government will try to fight corruption without a comprehensive strategy and a robust institutional arrangement. Despite some important progress, the government is losing time as well as the confidence of stakeholders within and outside the government about its ability and willingness to tackle corruption in a compressive manner.

The government should learn from the process of formulating the Afghan National Access to Information Strategy (to be presented this month) that included a workshop to co-create the strategy followed by several rounds of consultations with all stakeholders led by the Oversight Commission on Access to Information. The leadership of the government should commit to implementation of this strategy as part of the wider anti-corruption strategy. The Access to Information Commission, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, has also developed a revised version of the Access to Information Law based on international best practices. If adopted in its current form, it will become the best law in the world and will ensure the independence of the Access to Information Commission. In addition, the government should seriously consider the following:

- Immediately begin a comprehensive consultation to develop its anti-corruption strategy including all stakeholders from the government, civil society, and donors.

- Establish the long-awaited Independent Anti-Corruption Commission by adopting the new draft of the anti-corruption law. This can be done quickly through a Legislative Decree while the parliament is in recess. One of the first tasks of the commission should be to continue the dialogue on anti-corruption strategy and to create a consensus among stakeholders.
Empower the Oversight Commission on Access to Information ensuring its independence by adopting the revised draft of the Access to Information Law prepared by the commission.

Use the Afghan National Access to Information Strategy and the proposed mechanisms to ensure the independence of the Oversight Commission on Access to Information as a model for other institutions that have a direct role in the fight against corruption, such as the Civil Service Commission and the National Procurement Commission, to institutionalize the fight against corruption. Ensuring the independence of such institutions should be a core element of the new anti-corruption strategy.

Implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations will not only avoid the complete disappointment of the anti-corruption stakeholder but will also help the government find traction to address the most intolerable of the problems the Afghan people face on daily basis.

Afghan Civil Society To Hold Social Audit of the 119 Police Hotline

Jawad Dadbaan, Advocacy Officer

Integrity Watch Afghanistan along a number of other civil society, lawyers and police oversight organizations are exploring to hold a social audit of the 119 Police Hotline. The group is considering to conduct the audit in an inclusive and multi-perspective process by establishing a joint social audit committee. The social audit committee will be supported by the technical guidance of a small advisory board composed of police and public oversight bodies and experts on police issues.

The initiative is a first step to implement the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Integrity Watch and the Ministry of Interior in May 2017. It aims to provide stakeholder organizations an opportunity to review and assess the 119 Police Hotline’s performance and its social impact since its establishment, to measure the extent to which the organization has lived up to the mission, goals, and objectives it has committed itself to achieve, to strengthen accountability in its service delivery and to explore ways to improve its performance.

Social audit has been institutionalized and is being utilized as an important tool to address corruption and maintain social accountability in many countries. However, little is known about social audit and its benefits for improving social accountability in Afghanistan as it is almost new and has not been much utilized in the country. Integrity Watch and its partner organizations aim to institutionalize social audits in Afghanistan and expand conducting social audits in other public institutions in the future.

For the current initiative, Integrity Watch prepared a concept note, met the above-mentioned group of stakeholder organizations individually and conducted two consultation meetings with them this month to explore the feasibility of conducting a social audit of the 119 Police Hotline. As a result, a social audit committee and an advisory group were established in this process. The social audit committee will meet MoI officials and will start its practical social audit in the first half of August.

Regarding its methodology, the social audit will be conducted based on international audit standards and the tools and methods used will include document review, individual interviews, physical inspection, focus group meetings and so forth. The audit will also use best practices and experience of other countries in the area of social audit. The records, reports, and statistics will be selected based on specific percentages taking into account the time and resources available for the audit committee. All the activities including data collection, analysis, and report writing will be conducted in a collective manner.
Meet Abdul Karim whose efforts resulted in completion of a $120K building for school in Herat

Wahidullah Azizi, Communications Specialist

Abdul Karim Raufi is a 63-year old Integrity Volunteer from Herat. A school near 12th district had no building for many years. Therefore, he advocated for the cause. In a matter of four years, the help came from the nearby communities and individuals. The school has got a brand new three stories building now. The high school has over six thousand students in three shifts. With about 90 percent of work completed so far, the newly built building costs over $120,000.

Abdul Karim who also runs a private business has described his volunteerism in the community as a “passion” and described the community engagement an “effective way” to solve the issues impacting their lives. He also emphasized more coordination amongst the Integrity Volunteers and the government departments that provide basic public services. To prevent corruption, Abdul Karim suggests that it would be better if building materials are provided instead of cash money.

Abdul Karim closely monitors the school construction and other issues including provision of textbooks for the students. Abdul Karim says the extent of cooperation he has received from school’s principal and administration is encouraging.

Community-based monitoring of schools program in Herat covers more than 50 schools with a total of more than 192,000 students, more than half of whom are girls. Integrity volunteers are actively monitoring from 50 boys and girls schools in the province. Of the fifty schools, 30 have Integrity Clubs with 300 Integrity Volunteers that are directly engaged with students. More than 323,000 people benefit from the program directly and indirectly.

The Community Based Monitoring of School (CBM-S) Program was initiated in July 2014 in three provinces in order to bring more coordination between communities and government departments, increase transparency and accountability, enhance the quality of education services through community monitoring, collaborate in information sharing, and solve problems of schools. The aim of this program which has expanded to nine provinces so far is to make officials more responsive, encourage communities to support education sector and advocate for policy change at local and national levels.

Abdul Karim is a 63 years old passionate Local Monitor who is committed to transparency and fighting corruption in his community in Herat province. To bridge the existing gap between people and government departments and solve issues that community faces, more coordination are needed.
Platform is set for developing Afghanistan’s first ever OGP National Action Plan

Obaidullah Abdi, Advocacy Assistant

A two-day conference was held at Government Media Information Center on 12 July 2017 for the election of Open Government Partnership (OGP) Afghanistan Selection Committee. Civil Society elected a 7-member committee to select the civil society representatives for the OGP forum.

The meeting was organized to raise awareness of civil society about the OGP and its decision-making processes, and to finalize a mechanism for inclusion of CSOs. Subhan Raouf Deputy Head of Monitoring and Evaluation at AOP who is the focal point for OGP in Afghanistan expressed government’s desire in fighting corruption and “empowering citizens to demand government reforms”. Speaking at the event, Integrity Watch’s Executive Director, Sayed Ikram Afzali said, “Afghanistan did not get OGP membership by chance, it was a result of advocacy by CSOs including Integrity Watch and support from its partners from within the government”. He added that the civil society and the government will have to take concrete steps to push for government reforms. He also stressed that the civil society and the government should ensure that only capable and committed CSOs are selected for the OGP Forum.

The Afghan Government gained OGP membership in December 2016 and established a secretariat in June 2017. OGP secretariat’s major duties as described by OGP guidelines is to harmonize efforts and organize a platform for debate on civil society and government. One of the major parts of OGP is the OGP forum, as the forum will be the decision making body for finalizing Afghanistan’s first ever National Action Plan. National Action Plan covers a set of commitments for 2-year period aimed at making government more transparent, accountable and citizen-centric.
Community Monitoring results in removal of unqualified engineer

Pashtoon Nahzatyar, Provincial Coordinator - Parwan

Have you wondered, your engagement in your community can bring positive changes? Our local Integrity Volunteers have proven this. After noticing irregularities in a construction of Zarbia High School for Girls, Ali Ahmad Ayar shared the issue with the stakeholders which resulted in fixing the problems and removing the construction engineer to ensure quality and proper implementation of the project in the future.

Along with some other issue such as misusing concrete molds by workers, engineers acted irresponsibly and neglected low quality or work. Mr. Ayar documented the issues and shared with the Education Department of Parwan province. It was also shared with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). On the request of the monitor, the construction company replaced irresponsible engineers and workers with new staff.

Mr. Ayar believes proper coordination with the implementing partners is an effective way to highlight irregularities in a project and to take timely decisions. He and other monitors voluntarily oversee construction of 10 projects, most of which are for the education sector.

The $240,000 worth construction project of Zarbia High School for Girls is funded by South Korea while UNOPS is the implementing partner. After completion of the project, the school will have eight classrooms. It has 500 students in different shifts. More than 5000 people will, directly and indirectly, benefit from the project of whom 61 percent are female.
Your personal encounter of corruption

Have you ever been asked for a

BRIBE

to access a public service?

Write us about your experience and perceptions of corruption through the following address and we will get them published in our publications.

In the fight against corruption, every voice matters.

Phone: 0786106106  |  Email: report@efshagar
Facebook: Efshagar.af  |  Twitter: @EfshagarA
Community monitoring improves quality of school constructions in Jalalabad city

Mohamad Hanif Hashimi, Provincial Coordinator - Nangarhar

During the construction period, the Local monitors discovered that the sand used to build the school was of low quality due to a high quantity of soil that was not needed. Knowing their right to monitor and access to information the volunteer monitors shared the issue with the construction company which resulted in improving the quality of construction materials. The local monitors along with local council had received, contract, map and other necessary information about the project beforehand. The construction company replaced the sand after the monitors examined the low quality of the material that was not according to the project documents they received.

The money for the public high school was provided by UNHCR that cost a total of $180,000. The decision for the construction was taken after realizing that previous building could not support the huge number of students. Students now can enjoy studying in the new classrooms protected from sun heat and raining.

To ensure that taxpayers money is not wasted in the public construction project such as schools, libraries roads, and hospital, community monitoring by people is an effective way. Integrity Watch is actively helping local communities across Afghanistan to have access to information and the tools needed to monitor public construction projects.

With the help of Integrity Watch Afghanistan, local monitors ensured the quality construction of Shaheed Angeeza high school in Jalalabad city.