2nd Integrity Volunteers Conference organized with the theme of “Cultivating Culture of Integrity in Afghanistan”

On June 30, 2018, in Kabul, Integrity Watch hosted a national conference on cultivating integrity in the public institutions, Afghan society and the international community.

Executive Director of Integrity Watch, Sayed Ikram Afzali, who opened the conference stated that if there were a strong sense of integrity among the stakeholders in Afghanistan’s reconstruction since 2001, the country would have been self-reliant by now. He added that the solution to the current crisis of trust and pervasive corruption is not quick impact projects to increase transparency but a long-term vision and mission to cultivate integrity in the Afghan government and society as well as international community.

John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) appreciated the efforts of Integrity Watch to hold its government accountable and promote integrity. He stated, “We have been eyes and ears of US taxpayers in Afghanistan and Integrity Watch has become eyes and ears of us in this mission.” Mr. Sopko added that, “Our times is like the Tale of Two Cities of Charles Dickens: it is the best of times and worst of times. It depends on the Afghans to utilize the opportunity to lead their country to prosperity or the
dragons of terrorism and corruption would stay."

"We have been eyes and ears of US taxpayers in Afghanistan and Integrity Watch has become eyes and ears of us in this mission."

*John F. Sopko Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*

Speaking at the event Minister of Public Works H.E. Yama Yari said, “There is a need for a coalition of reformers within the Afghan government, civil society, media and religious leaders to fight the menace of corruption.” He called on his fellow Afghans that “There is a need to stand side by side in the fight against corruption as you stand side by side every day to offer prayer to the Almighty.”

Hundreds of civil society activists from across the country and the capital had a productive discussion with a panel of distinguished speakers from the Afghan parliament, Ministry of Education, and Supreme Court. The conference provided an opportunity for participants to initiate a dialogue on cultivating integrity in public institutions.

**Integrity Dialogue discusses justice sector reform in Balkh province**

*Wahidullah Azizi, Integrity Watch Afghanistan*

Following the successful conduct of the first Integrity Dialogue in Kapisa, Integrity Watch held another Integrity Dialogues for the first time in Balkh province. Judges, prosecutors and police representatives presented their reform efforts, heard civil society and public concerns, and answered their questions.

In his opening remarks, Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director of Integrity Watch Afghanistan said, “Lack of integrity in public institutions, especially in justice institutions, undermines the legitimacy of the state.” He added that the government is suffering from “a trust deficit” between the government and the Afghan public. “In a society where justice is not served, peace and prosperity will remain an illusion,” he added. However, he praised the recent efforts of the Supreme Court to restore public trust in the formal justice system by appointing clean judges in many of the provinces. Mr. Afzali presented the findings of a study by Integrity Watch on the conduct of open trials in Kapisa, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar and Balkh. According to the study based on data from Community Based Monitoring of Trials by local volunteers, one of the key challenges is lack of transparency concerning judges’ detailed verdict which is not published and in some cases is not even announced in the presence of accused and victims. However, data shows that there are more open trials compared to the past despite security and logistical challenges that the courts face.
Mohammad Sharif Fani, Head of Appeals Court of Balkh applauded the community-based monitoring initiative which has assisted the court authorities to “know what is going on in the courtrooms which was not always possible without the initiative.” On the issue of open trials Mr. Fani stated that: “Except for a few cases that the law does not allow, the rest of trials have been conducted in the presence of the public.” In a question raised by people about the absence of prosecutor in a trial session, he said: “if there is no prosecutor present at the court due to legitimate reasons we do not hold the trial until the prosecutor becomes available.” However, some defense lawyers indicated that such cases have happened in the past and many others unqualified prosecutors have presented cases before the court in a very unprofessional way. Participants raised their concerns over the politicized role of the police leading the police to fail to prevent major crimes or to arrest perpetrators. Some also accused the prosecutors of letting criminals, supported by influential people, to avoid justice.

The Integrity Dialogue is a series of public events that Integrity Watch organizes to facilitate public dialogues around crucial issues including justice sector and municipality services. The Dialogues are supported by evidence-based research findings by Integrity Watch.

“Lack of integrity in public institutions, especially in justice institutions, undermines the legitimacy of the state.”

Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director—Integrity Watch Afghanistan
Community volunteers revive school environment in Kabul

Pashtoon Nahzatyar, Provincial Coordinator, Kabul

Billions of dollars in aid money have been spent in the education sector in the last one and a half decades. But that does not mean problems of schools can be solved without community contribution. Even in Kabul, many schools are in a desperate position. Mohammad Akbar, an Integrity Volunteer from Kabul donated trees to make the premises of Shah Dushamsheera High School green. Mohammad, who is also a social activist and leader of his community worked closely with the management of the school to make sure the newly planted trees add to the beauty and a clean environment for the school. Mr. Akbar is a committed social volunteer trained by Integrity Watch to monitor the quality of education services delivered by public schools in his community.

His volunteerism and passion for community work won him support of his community, including Ahmad Fazel Rasikh’s, the newly appointed schoolmaster who promised to work with volunteers like Mohammad to improve quality of education in the school. Among the new initiatives at the school is resuming the School Management Shura (SMS) meetings, building an inventory to keep record of school assets, and keeping record of donations and expenditure to enhance transparency and accountability in the school.

Encouraged by actions of Mohammad and other volunteers, Inayatullah, a teacher at the school donated more than $300 for greenery and leveling the school’s courtyard. Also, another teacher from the same school painted the computer lab and repaired the broken computers with some help from the students. Also, a student who preferred to remain anonymous donated a projector to the school. The schoolmaster instructed his team to register the new donations into the newly developed inventory register.
Integrity Watch started its Community-Based Monitoring of Schools (CBM-S) program in Kabul in early 2017. Since then, it has facilitated monitoring of twenty schools by twenty Integrity Volunteers (IVs) who are led by three Integrity Leaders (ILs) in the city and outskirts of Kabul. In 2017 alone, 1905 problems were solved out of 2702 in 251 schools monitored by Integrity Volunteers in Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Kapisa, Parwan and Kabul where the program operates.

Integrity Dialogue brings Mazar-e-Sharif citizens and municipality closer to discuss service delivery

By: Wahidullah Azizi, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

On July 3, 2018, Integrity Watch organized Integrity Dialogue with Mazar-e-Sharif Municipality where citizen groups, local representatives and Mayor of Mazar-e-Sharif participated discussed municipal services and public satisfaction rate based on Integrity Watch’s Citizens’ Report Card 2017 findings.

Mr. Naser Timory, Head of Advocacy and Communications at Integrity Watch Afghanistan who presented major findings of Citizens Report Card said that public participation is key to improving quality of municipal services. He stated that Mazar-e-Sharif ranked third among the nine cities surveyed in the report, scored above average in the sixteen indicators including among others, waste management, public cooperation, maintenance of infrastructure, tax collection, and drainage system. He added that municipal service can improve through paying attention to governance indicators especially making information available to the public. He proposed to Mazar-e-Sharif municipality to paint budget information on municipality walls and billboards.

However, other indicators such as Car-parking and Bus Stands were scored much lower than others. Most importantly, governance indicators such as access to information, public participation in decision-making, and
handling public complaints, Mazar-e-Sharif municipality scored just above average indicating that the municipality is more focused on service delivery but governance indicators do not get the same attention.

During the Integrity Dialogue, citizens raised their concerns over municipality services. They particularly raised issues with street vendors occupying main roads and streets. They asked the municipality to find an alternative space for the street vendors. Mayor of Mazar-e-Sharif renewed his promise to improve service delivery through public participation. He also promised to solve the issue of street vendors. Deputy Governor of Balkh province, Mohammad Bashir Touhidi, urged the municipality to use the Citizens Report Card as a benchmark for improving service delivery.

The Integrity Dialogue is a series of public events that Integrity Watch organizes in order to facilitate public dialogues around critical issues including justice sector and municipality services. The Integrity Dialogues are supported by evidence-based research findings by Integrity Watch.

**Students in Kapisa and Parwan take responsibility to improve education quality**

*Mohammad Mashouq Safi and Wahidullah Azizi*

In June 2018, Integrity Watch provided training to four hundred student volunteers in Kapisa and Parwan provinces on the methods of promoting transparency and integrity through monitoring of their schools’ operations.

In 2017, Integrity Watch facilitated a community monitoring program in nine schools in Kapisa province where volunteers were supervised on weekly basis by Integrity Watch local staff in their efforts to monitor school operations. Since Integrity Watch moved to new schools in 2018, it created Integrity Clubs, a group of ten students in each school to continue the same monitoring with little or no supervision by Integrity Watch.

Designed for efficiency and engaging students to look after their school where they study, Abdul Zahoor Hakim, a schoolmaster in Parwan said, “there is need to have more Integrity Groups across the province’s school.”

The students will continue monitoring of schools’ operations including monitoring of potable water, hygiene of toilets, student and teacher attendance, availability of books and others. The clubs will be monitored and assisted through Integrity Leaders who are trained and experienced community volunteers having worked with Integrity Watch for many months. The new members of the clubs promised to monitor their schools and try to find solutions to the problems faced by the students.
Shkiba, a student of 9th grade and a member of Integrity Club expressed her appreciation of the initiative and said, “Integrity Clubs are very helpful when it comes to solving the problems of our school.” The clubs also provide students an opportunity to be role models, she added.

Integrity Watch started its Community-Based Monitoring of Schools (CBM-S) program in July 2014 to bring more coordination between public and education departments. The program is running in Kapisa, Parwan, Balkh, Nangarhar, Herat, and Bamiyan. In 2017 alone, management of 90 Integrity Clubs was handed over to schools. Through the clubs and monitoring of more than 250 schools in the mentioned provinces, 1905 problems were solved out of 2702.