Addressing the drivers of insecurity and conflict in Afghanistan

Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director

Recent tragic security incidents in Kabul, Balkh and elsewhere in Afghanistan that took many lives and left many others devastated remind us that security will be the number one priority of the Afghan people for the foreseeable future. But these incidents are only symptoms of deeper problems. While there are external drivers of insecurity (such as the presence of safe havens in neighboring countries), the internal drivers that have created the environment for insurgents inside Afghanistan are more critical and need more immediate attention. In particular, corruption and the criminal economy are critical drivers of insecurity which allow insurgents to grow and sustain their presence in many parts of the country.

The links between weak rule of law and security are direct and powerful. Elements within the security forces use their positions to collude with insurgents who capture mines and tax the drug-trade. In other cases, locals have invited the insurgents to take over the area due to illegal mining by powerful local warlords who deprived communities of any benefit. Revenue from drugs and illegal mining are the two major internal revenue sources of the insurgents.

Corruption in appointments, promotions, and transfers of high-level and lucrative positions within the security forces has been the norm in the last decade and a half. Corruption has also led to losses in procurement, the selling of weapons and ammunition to insurgents, the theft of food and supplies needed by the security forces, and the collecting of illegal road toll by elements within the security forces.

Corruption in security institutions erodes public trust, creates a sense of irresponsibility among soldiers, feeds the insurgency, and finally creates a war economy. It worsens the deficit of trust between the public and government institutions. In our recent survey, around 40% of the respondents believed people turn to the insurgents because of corruption in service delivery, including in the security services. More than half of the respondents believed that corruption facilitates the expansion of the insurgency.

While there has been a lot of talk about these drivers of insecurity, much has not been done to address them. Nevertheless, the Afghan government has increasingly expressed commitment to address the issue of corruption in the security sector. It is time to turn those commitments into tangible actions to build public trust through public engagement and to professionalize the security institutions through institutionalizing the fight against corruption.

The latter would require review and restructuring of internal and external oversight mechanisms such as the inspector generals’ offices in Ministry of Interior (MOI), Ministry of Defense, and National Security Department. Establishing independent mechanisms for merit-based appointments, promotions, and transfers within security agencies would assist in reducing political interference and corruption in appointments within security agencies. For instance, an independent police service commission, including civil society as watchdogs, is crucial for reforming of the Afghan National Police.
Public engagement is key to addressing corruption in any sector. Establishing regular feedback mechanisms to address public concerns within security institutions, carefully assessed for effectiveness and impact, is a first step. The Ministry of the Interior has made a welcome commitment to carry out a social audit of the 119 hotline. In addition, regular engagement of the public through community policing is key. Putting in place a “citizens’ report card” for police performance, and making key decisions such as promotions and transfers of police commanders based on the survey findings, would not only improve police accountability to the public but also increase public trust in security agencies – leading to better cooperation among public and security agencies.

There is also a need for a comprehensive strategy to block key insurgent revenue sources such as illegal mining. Security agencies should prioritize the security of strategic areas that are used by insurgents to gaining the profits of the minerals trade and to garner public support from locals who provide labor for the mines. More community engagement is vital – especially the creation of financial incentives for communities to support legal mining and to monitor mines for their own benefit. Giving communities a stake in legal mining is very feasible, and has the potential to turn their support to the government and keep out abusive actors.

**Government-civil society conclude first-ever joint assessment of $400 million rural road program**

Jawad Dadban, Advocacy Officer

A joint committee of government agencies and Integrity Watch, appointed by President Ghani last year, recently completed an assessment of the National Rural Access Program (NRAP) of the Ministry of Public Works. The initiative is the first of its kind in Afghanistan allowing civil society to participate in a joint audit of government programs. The committee has presented its final report to President Ghani and it is expected that the government will make the report public in the near future.

The assessment found that unconformities and irregularities were prevalent in the conduct of NRAP and UNOPS during the years covered by the assessment which has had adverse effects on the transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the program. The comprehensive assessment examined all areas of NRAP including its human resources, procurement, financial and technical/engineering affairs. It covered NRAP activities from 1391 through 1395 and its focus was mainly on assessment of transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of NRAP activities and performance in the above-mentioned areas during these years; NRAP’s performance conformity and adherence to laws, regulations, rules of procedures, guidelines, international standards and contractual requirements; and the efficiency and effectiveness of its organizational structures and internal systems especially its Tashkil and internal control systems.

The National Rural Access Program is Afghanistan’s leading program in the construction sector, specifically in the construction of roads in rural areas especially the construction of roads from provincial capitals to districts and roads between and within districts. It was established as one of Afghanistan’s national priority programs by an agreement between the transitional government of Afghanistan and the World Bank in 2002. Since then, it has implemented more than 1400 construction projects and has spent hundreds of millions of dollars throughout the country. It has been funded by the World Bank (WB), European Union (EU), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Italy and Spain Governments.

Joint audit of such program does not only strengthen the integrity of the audit process, it also provides an opportunity for exchange of knowledge, expertise, and perspective between the public sector and civil society enhancing the capacity of both sides to hold the public institutions accountable for their actions. It is believed that such initiatives would also help in improving public confidence in public institutions in the country. Similar initiatives have been promoted under the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in other countries such as the Philippines. Therefore, it is expected that such joint audits will increase in the
Integrity Watch to support the Government to clean up “the heart of corruption”

On May 24, 2017, Executive Director of Integrity Watch signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Deputy Minister of Support of Ministry of Interior to strengthen collaborative efforts for the fight against corruption in the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Afghan National Police (ANP). Earlier this month President Ghani described the MOI as the “heart of corruption” considering other security institutions. Speaking to the third annual anti-corruption conference hosted by the EU, the president vowed to focus more on the MOI this year.

The MOU will facilitate collaboration between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the MOI to identify, detect, expose, and follow-up of corruption cases. Integrity Watch and other CSOs will assist the MOI to identify legal and institutional factors and deficiencies that lead to corruption at national and local level through joint inspection and assessments as well as social audits conducted.

The partnership will also include establishing organizational, administrative, and regulatory and control mechanisms to prevent corruption. Moreover, it aims to improve MoI’s internal corruption reporting mechanisms and promote an open and transparent system of service delivery at the Ministry of Interior and the Afghan National Police.

The MoU is signed for a three-year period of time and will be implemented based on an action plan which is going to be developed in June.
Persistent monitoring efforts by volunteers ensure quality construction of Jalalabad Public Library

The project has been under close monitoring of integrity volunteers. After many advocacy efforts, the construction company shared project information with volunteer monitors including a map, list of specifications, the project budget, and most importantly, the contract. Equipped with the information gained, local monitors started monitoring the construction process.

Integrity volunteers initially noted that the company brought low quality and stained steel to be used in the project. The volunteers informed the provincial Department of Economy and raised the issue with the construction company and project donor which resulted in preventing the use of stained steel.

The volunteers noticed again that instead of using Uzbekistani steel in pillars other brands were used which was against the contract. It was prevented by sharing the issue again with the company and Ministry of Information and Culture which is the donor of this project.

Recently, local monitors noticed that quantity of cement used was far less than required amount. As the local monitors had the contract and other necessary documents, they shared the issue with the engineer supervising the construction work. The company corrected the mixed design by increasing the amount of cement.

The public library in Jalalabad is due to be completed in August next year. Upon completion, the one story building will cost a total of $265,000 which is paid from the development budget of Ministry of Information and Culture.

Integrity volunteers are the second generation of Integrity Champions who have received training and mentoring support from Integrity Watch and have been active in 9 provinces of the country.
Courts in Kapisa initiate accountability to the public

Ali Ahmad Mashal Afrooz

Provincial Appeal Court of Kapisa held the first ever accountability-to-the-public session reporting to people on their anti-corruption initiatives. The audience included representatives of various sectors including the office of the provincial governor, government officials, civil society, and the general public. The Head of Appeal Court thanked Integrity Watch for engaging communities in court transparency and urged other government departments to engage with civil society and local communities to create a feedback mechanism for improving service delivery. He also insisted that there is the need for more cooperation between Integrity Watch and local government departments to fight corruption.

Participants from government and non-government sector including Deputy Governor of Kapisa province praised the initiative of the Appeal Court and promised to foster the culture of social accountability in all government departments. Following the initiative of the Appeal Court, Provincial Chief Prosecutor and Justice Department of Kapisa province also reported their activities.

Integrity Watch has been working with courts in Kapisa province since 2011 to improve judicial transparency through community engagement in the monitoring of open trials.
Community action in Herat enable students enjoy a roof over their head

Aziza Rahimi, Local monitor of CBM-S program, Herat

Khalailullah Khalili secondary school is located in Herat city. It was founded in 2011 and has more than 2400 students. With four shifts, the newly established school did not have enough classrooms to accommodate students of one shift. As a result, in every shift, 10 classrooms had to study in the open air under the sun. The students were not happy with the situation. They faced many issues that interrupted their study including dusty air, rain, and hot weather conditions. Lack of classrooms increased absenteeism and even caused many students to transfer to other schools far away from the area.

In February 2017, the school was selected for monitoring under the Community Based Monitoring program of schools by Integrity Watch and local Shura. Firstly, the volunteers organized a gathering where the principal of the school was also present, others included members of community development council, parents of students, community elders and the local monitors. The participants were briefed about the issue. It was decided to divide the district into six parts and people in every part should make an equal financial contribution to the construction of additional classrooms. With the cooperation of the local community, six new classrooms and two guard rooms with a total value of $5,800 were constructed.

The school environment is now satisfying for both students and teachers. The students are not studying outdoor anymore. Most importantly, it has made the locals aware of the important role they can play in the monitoring of their own communities and solving their problem than relying on outside sources.