Spotlight

Afghanistan's membership suspended by Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

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On January 18, Afghanistan was suspended from membership of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) – a key international mechanism for improving transparency in the extractive sector.

Afghanistan joined EITI in 2009. But since then it has failed to make satisfactory progress on data comprehensiveness and quality, timely reporting, and generating public debate – factors that led the Norway-based organization to find Afghanistan’s performance “inadequate.”

The lack of progress in implementing EITI standards over many years meant the suspension was not a surprise – even though there have been some signs of progress more recently. The EITI assessment commended Afghanistan’s efforts to improve “transparency in the management” of its extractive sector, but said this was not enough given the lack of overall progress. In its official
statement, the EITI urged the government to continue implementing reforms in the sector and aim to meet the Standard in the next 18 months.

The government’s promise of re-admitting the country to the initiative by June 2019, is welcoming. But what matters most is action instead of promises. Integrity Watch and Global Witness issued a press release which highlights deep concerns that the government still does not provide full data on the country’s extractive sector – something which calls into question the ability of the government to manage the extractive sector in an accountable manner.

Afghanistan needs to make urgent progress under all EITI standards to comply with the standards within the self-imposed deadline of less than six months. The problem is that genuinely transparency will threaten the interests of those who have benefitted from corrupt exploitation. It has been promised many times before and never delivered. Whatever the good intentions of the Minister, at this stage only one thing matters: is the data published, and published regularly, reliably, and comprehensively? Continue reading...

Communities attending trials becoming normal despite court's lack of resources

Pashtoon Nahzatyar, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

On January 28th, fifteen community volunteers and a huge number of citizens participated in an open trial conducted by Primary Court of Kabul. During the trial, the participants observed court proceedings which included observing the uniforms of judicial staff, the presence of an advocate representing the
defendant, the presence of witnesses and the reading out the sentence by the judge by the end of the session.

Najibullah Ahqaq, leading judge of Kabul Primary Court, indicated his appreciation of the participation of volunteers as citizens observing court proceedings and called it a step towards “transparency”. Mr. Ahqaq encouraged citizens to attend open trials as permitted by law and to suggest improvements. He called the sessions an “opportunity” for citizens observing a trail to share their findings with court officials for the betterment of court affairs.

Humaira Farahmand, one of the fifteen community volunteers, who observed these court proceedings in the Kabul courts, called the session “unprecedented.” According to her, the session was one of the best she has observed during last year.

Despite this court proceeding observation by the volunteers, being satisfactory, the lack of proper courtrooms where trials can take place remains an issue. There is a lack of proper witness stands, defendant’s docks and prosecution counsels’ benches are only a few of the issues regarding having proper courtroom facilities.

To help to make open trials where citizens can attend occur, Integrity Watch works with court officials and communities in Kabul. Conducting fair and open trials plays a key role in boosting the confident of the public in the official judicial system.

Local volunteer in Herat helps build quality irrigation system for his community

Hafizullah Shams (3rd from left) identified lack of use of proper machinery such as cement
Zohre Amin Poor, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

Hafizullah Shams, works with local community elders to make sure that construction of Urdu Khan Farm is carried out in accordance with the project design. He is one of the volunteers who monitors construction projects on behalf of his community.

Construction of canals for Urdu Khan Farm is a major agricultural project designed to change the lives of many people living in Herat Province. But as with a majority of large projects in Afghanistan, rampant corruption and lack of oversight resulted in the compromise of the quality of the construction.

Mr. Shams identified lack of use of proper machinery such as cement mixers. During his monitoring of the construction of the canal, he also observed the use of poor-quality materials. Determined to improve quality of the project that affects thousands of people in his community, he raised the issue with the company several times in an effort to make them use better quality materials and proper construction machinery but to no avail.

Despite threats, Mr. Shams shared the results of his monitoring with the local Council. Realizing that there was an issue, the council managed to stop the work and urged the company to use better quality construction materials and proper machinery in the building of these canals. Mr. Sham’s regular monitoring and persistence has resulted in an improvement in both the quality of the construction and the timely delivery of the project.

To ensure that public money is not wasted and the quality of the project is at a satisfactory level, Integrity Watch trains community volunteers who in turn monitor the construction of projects within their communities.
2018 in Numbers

173 media appearances.
2 Advocacy campaigns conducted.
12 newsletters (English) disseminated.
8 small scale researches and assessments:
  - Policy Brief on the National Budget 1397 and 1398
  - Civil Society Position Paper for Geneva Conference on Afghanistan
  - Ministry of Health Call Center Procurement Procedural Assessment
  - MOH Call Center Procurement Technical Assessment
  - Ministry of Technology (Telecom) Contracts Assessment
  - Tackera & Passport Office outsourcing of contract assessment
  - Salang Pass Directorate Overall Assessment

8 research reports published:
  - National Corruption Survey 2018
  - Gap Analysis of Afghanistan Conflict of Interest Regulations
  - Budget Credibility: Multi-Country Study of Budget Credibility
  - Procurement Cost Estimation
  - Policy Note: Lessons from Community-Based Monitoring of Courts in Five Provinces of Afghanistan.
  - Education Compromised? A Survey of schools in 10 provinces of Afghanistan
  - Anti-Corruption Project Implementation Plan- UNDP First phase
  - Schools Facilities report
  - Open Budget Survey
  - Kunduz Justice Assessment

377 press conferences held.
4 Amnat magazines (Pshto and Dari) printed.
10855 research reports copies printed.
5 advocacy events conducted.
8 research reports published.

305 integrity volunteers were trained for community based monitoring programs.
10 Health care facilities were monitored in Kabul province.
13 Community outreach events were organized.
98 theatres of the oppressed were conducted in 10 provinces.
56 Community outreach events were conducted.
150 communities were mobilized.

1,135 feedback to community meetings were organized.
115 new communities were mobilized in 7 provinces.
110 community feedback meetings organized.
34 education sector group (ESG) meetings organized.
625 integrity club meetings were organized.
864 school management Shura (SMS) meetings were organized.
