Spotlight

Future of the Afghan State: An anti-corruption perspective

Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director | @SIAfzali

The French political philosopher Montesquieu, in The Spirit of the Laws, argued long ago that separation of powers between the Legislative, the Executive, and the Judiciary is a fundamental safeguard against tyranny and misuse of power. After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Afghan state was supposedly built based on the same model of separation of powers. However, in reality, the emphasis has been on the distribution of power among the corrupt elite rather than the separation of powers. This has led to state capture by corruption networks and tyranny in the form of corruption. After more than one and a half decades of such unsustainable and counterproductive efforts at state-building, history may well be on the verge of repeating itself.

Fundamental mistakes were made both in the design and practice of establishing a viable State since 2001. While entrusting too much power in the executive branch of an overly centralized state is a design problem, the executive has negatively influenced and has even corrupted both the legislative and the judiciary in practice. As a result, checks and balances have been undermined and corruption has prevailed in all state institutions. Our National Corruption Survey findings indicate that people face corruption in almost all state institutions which has destroyed public perception about the government and has ripped off the necessary public support for state-building. In fact, our successive surveys show that the spread of corruption helps the spread of insurgency. Continue reading...

Nangarhar Integrity Network established
On February 25, more than thirty men and women activists from Nangarhar Province started an initiative with the main goals of improving governance, fighting corruption and preventing misuse of public funds. Known as Provincial Integrity Network (PIN), the volunteer body has member activists drawn from civil society, education institutions and public servants.

Opening the network, Sayed Ikram Afzali, executive director of Integrity Watch Afghanistan, highlighted strengthening social accountability as the main purpose behind the initiative. “Through this initiative,” he told the newly established network, “you have the power to hold public officials into account and ask how aid and your hard-earned tax money is being spent.”

Gulsom Malala, a women’s rights activist in the Province and a member of the network welcomed the formation of the network and said, “it is a great platform to address issues such as health, education, and delivery of services to people.”

Mining Watch discusses next step following Afghanistan's suspension from EITI
Mining Watch Afghanistan (MWA) members expressed their concerns over the Government’s lack of meaningful progress in, and management of, the extractive sector, resulting in the suspension of the country from Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in its 20th February session.

Mujib Azizi, a researcher at Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) and a member of the MWA network said that lack of Government’s willingness to implement the needed reforms suggested by the key anti-corruption body and mismanagement of the sector resulted in Afghanistan’s suspension from the initiative. “With the current trajectory of the extractive sector, the chances are that Afghanistan may never get full membership status”, he warned. Others suggested that the Ministry’s leadership is another issue which hinders the sector’s development. Naser Timory, Head of Advocacy and Communications at Integrity Watch Afghanistan which is currently the secretariat of the network said that the continued running of the ministry by the Acting Minister raises a question about the political will to carry out reforms in the sector and this, in turn, discourages the long-term planning needed to transform the sector.

In late January this year, the EITI secretariat based in Norway announced the suspension of Afghanistan from the initiative citing lack of overall progress in the extractive sector. The body, however, encouraged the country to continue implementing the recommendations suggested by the EITI reports. For its part, the Government has promised to take whatever steps are necessary so that Afghanistan can rejoin EITI by June 2019. This is a welcoming step.
Community monitoring stops construction of low-quality canal in Herat

Zohra Aminpoor, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

The Shogofan canal project is a two-section irrigation construction in Herat Province. The project is part of efforts by the government to bring flood relief to the communities that lie in the delta of the canals in the region. The construction was marred with irregularities and misconduct. However, as a result of the efforts of community activists, construction has stopped until the quality of the work improves.

From the beginning of construction, issues such as using low-quality materials, lack of information disclosure about the project documents and beneficial ownership were evident.
Mr. Muhsin Hashimi, a community volunteer, the representative of his community which will benefit from the construction of the project, shared his findings with head of the local council but to no avail. However, later it was found that he holds a share in the company.

Determined to stop further construction Mr. Hashimi outlined the misconduct in the construction of the project with the relevant government entities in Herat province responsible for overseeing such public construction projects. With assistance provided by Integrity Watch Afghanistan, the findings from the monitoring which, included the use of low-quality types of cement and other construction materials in the canals shared with Herat Municipality and Economy Department. Both government agencies are trying to find out a solution. Currently, the project is stopped.

Last year alone 22 projects were monitored in Herat province which included among others, a research center for Education Department, ICU section of Herat zone hospital, a road, boundary wall, and four canal constructions.

---

Major civil society group discusses National Corruption Survey findings

---

Wahidullah Azizi, Integrity Watch Afghanistan | WahidSays
On the 4th of February 2019, Integrity Watch presented its National Corruption Survey to the Civil Society Joint Working Group in Kabul during its monthly meeting. The main findings of the National Corruption Survey, which was launched on the eve of International Anti-Corruption Day, include among other issues, the amount of money paid in bribes, corruption within government institutions, and corruption as one of the main issues faced by the Afghan people.

Naser Timory who leads Advocacy and Communications at Integrity Watch summarized the results of the survey as “mixed”. The survey found that insecurity, unemployment, and corruption were the top issues faced by Afghans in their country. Presenting the findings to the group, Mr. Timory explained the relationship between the three and how it perpetuates the continuing circle of corruption.

The other important finding of the survey was the amount of money paid in bribes by citizens to access basic public services. “In total, an estimated USD 1.65B was paid as bribes to public servants,” said Mr. Timory. According to the findings, the amount has dropped compared to two years ago when the same survey was carried out. The reason behind the drop, Mr. Timory clarified, was the overall purchasing power of the people has dropped because of the economic situation in the country. Continue reading...