

Spotlight

Making the Budget Work for the People



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In January, the Afghan Parliament approved the National Budget 2020 with a total amount of AFN 428.3 billion (USD 5.55 billion) including an operating and development budget of USD 3.75 billion and USD 1.8 billion respectively. The majority of the Budget goes to the security sector while health, and education get only a small share (14.7% in total).

Apart from being heavily unbalanced, the budget process is deeply flawed and this has allowed inefficiency, corruption, and misuse to thrive over the last nearly two decades. There are vulnerabilities at various stages of the budgeting process that systematically lead to corruption and abuse. Using incremental budgeting, the Ministry of Finance has paved the way for [auction-based budgeting](#) where public officials, especially in the Ministry of Finance, offer projects to Members of Parliament and other actors based on whoever offers the highest price. Auction-based budgeting is detrimental for an aid dependent country like Afghanistan because it reduces efficient and effective use of public resources, erodes accountability to the public and decreases donors' and citizens' trust in the government leading to a continuous cycle of aid-dependence and instability.

The current practice has created a disconnect between resource allocation and policy objectives.

Afghanistan has to shift towards [policy-based and performance-based budgeting](#) which in turn would help to prevent auction-based budgeting. In a policy-based budgeting process, among other things, allocations are made based on policies that are viable, relevant, and working based on the mandate a government gets. Investment in current policies should be based on assessments and program evaluations to understand what works and what does not work and if programs are cost-efficient. In addition, the Government should put in place gatekeepers to prevent bad policies from making it through to the Budget.

In addition, performance-based budgeting is key to building public trust by creating budget accountability and credibility. In a performance-based budgeting process, the Government should make commitments, deliver them, and then report the progress to the public. The Government should also carry out performance audits to assess if the stated commitments have been achieved. However, recently Ministry of Finance officials have been strongly opposing the role of the Supreme Audit Office to carry out performance audits. If there wasn't a performance review of current programs then this would lead to there being further spending on a bad investment. In addition, not assessing/reporting the status of promises made by the National Unity Government has led to a lack of accountability to the public. Efficiency, including allocative efficiency, distributive efficiency, and operational efficiency, should be taken into account in the Budget process. Both the Operating and Development Budgets should be scrutinized to ensure we make best use of the scarce resources. International standards on budget transparency should be met and annual reports to show the performance of the Government based on the promises that it has made would be critical steps to making the Budget work for the people.

Integrity Watch helps Macroryan Residents Against Winter Harsh Cold Spell



Anayatullah Alami, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

The Makroryan Central Heating System which keeps thousands of residential apartments warm in winter in Kabul, restarted functioning as a result of the advocacy efforts of Integrity Watch. The heating system was supposed to be active from December 6, 2019 for three months. However, a month's delay was caused due to procurement issues and negligence by officials.

At the beginning of winter when the heating system was not activated, Macrorayan people met with Executive Director of Integrity Watch, Sayed Ikram Afzali, and registered their complaint. Even after a meeting with the Mayor of Kabul on December 12, 2019, a decision to purchase fuel by the Macroryan People Council, was not executed in time because the price of fuel, that was initially agreed, had increased.

On December 31st, 2019 Integrity Watch took these citizens' concerns to the National Procurement Commission (NPC) which is chaired by the President of Afghanistan. President Ghani ordered the provision of a subsidy to the heating system so that the Macroryan People's Council can purchase cooking gas at the same price as fuel from the Afghanistan Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority. Following this decision, the heating system was activated on January 5th, 2020. However, the Operations and Maintenance Directorate (OMD) -a state owned enterprise – which runs the heating system faces several issues including allegations of corruption and misuse in the past.

On the 23rd January 2020, to discover root causes of the issue, Integrity Watch began a social audit of the OMD. A social audit is a social accountability tool where citizens evaluate and assess the performance of a government agency against the applicable laws and financial resources.

Integrity Watch first talked to the People's Council and held a meeting with OMD. The department would not allow the local council to conduct a social audit, claiming that it would create problems. In order to convince the OMD, Integrity Watch referenced the Access to Information Law based whereby people can access information and can conduct a social audit. These efforts, finally, convinced the Directorate to allow the local council to carry out a social audit. Integrity Watch provided the technical information and trainings necessary for both the local council members and the in-charge directorate to conduct a smooth and successful social audit. The social audit will look into the reasons behind the delays as well as the required changes in the OMD following amendment in its legal status from a State-Owned Enterprise to a government company. The social audit will take around two months to complete.

Mr. Abdul Wakil, a member of the local council, expressed his appreciation for Integrity Watch's work in helping them to restore the heating system, He said, "I am thankful to Integrity Watch for helping us with restoration of the heating system and drawing the official's attention to the importance of a social audit."

The Whistle Blower Protection Law Protects an Afghan Mullah



Anayatullah Alami, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

Sayed Mohammad Arif Wazeen, a Mullah and officer in the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MHRA), who raised concerns about the existence of administrative corruption and the existence of ghost imams received protection against punitive actions of higher officials under Whistle Blower Protection Law for the first time in Afghanistan. The Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (ARCSC), issued an order on 20th January 2020 to reinstate him to his position. Earlier, he was punished by transfer and demotion from 3rd grade to 4th.

The Mullah learned about ghost Mullahs in some villages of Samangan province where he was appointed. He shared the issue with some higher officers of the Ministry but this did not pay off. When the issue was shared with the police department and the accused were arrested, the MHRA punished him with demotion and transfer from Samangan to Uruzgan province. Struggling to find protection, he registered his complaint at the Office of Prosecutor, but, after taking months, it proved worthless. Finally, he requested help from Integrity Watch on December 29, 2019.

Integrity Watch firstly shared the recently enacted Whistle Blowers Protection Law and explained the relevant provisions to him. He was surprised to know that such a law existed. Integrity Watch then issued a letter to ARCSC stating that Article 14 of the Whistle Blower Law's protects him when he discloses information about corruption. Mr. Erfan Erzaz, advocacy officer at Integrity Watch, said, "We also called hotline 5000 number of the Department of Citizens' Complaints of Administrative Office of the President and issued a separate letter to Attorney General Office to investigate the case."

The ARCSC issued a letter on 20th January 2020 to reinstate him to his position. The Whistle Blower Protection Law of Afghanistan coupled with active advocacy by Integrity Watch succeeded in

protecting the Mulla whistle blower. Based on our knowledge this is the first ever implementation of the law which is essential for curbing corruption in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the Mullah still needs security protection if he ever went back to the Samangan because he may be threatened by local officials.

Integrity Volunteers Defend Health Center Against Usurpation Attempt



Anayatullah Alami, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

On the 19th January 2020, some Macryan 3 residents and a number of government officials together with Integrity Watch inaugurated the newly constructed health center after successful recovery of its land by Integrity Volunteers (IVs) and local residents warding off a serious usurpation attempt.

Mr. Abdul Wakil Ahmadi, Director of Kabul Public Health, Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director of Integrity Watch, Mohebullah Moheb, Deputy Governor of Kabul province, Ms. Bano Zakia, member of parliament, local elders, beneficiaries and Integrity activists participated in the inauguration ceremony.

Although public property, the land of the health center had been claimed by powerful individuals. The usurpers used their connections to influence the court; they obtained a court order to stop the construction work which was in progress. The IVs, after learning about the issue, mobilized the local residents to stand firm against the usurpation attempt. The IVs firstly held a meeting and shared the issue with the local health council. Then, they reached out to the district council of district 9 which then obtained another order from the court to allow the suspended construction work to restart. As a result, residents, local representatives, the directorate of public health, the office of the Governor of Kabul Province and a member of parliament joined forces to protect the land and successfully complete the construction of the health center.

Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director of Integrity Watch Afghanistan, addressed the audience at the inauguration ceremony and thanked the Director of Public Health and all those involved in the completion of the project. Mohebullah Moheb, the Deputy governor of Kabul said, “Based on our development plan, our employees assisted this health center and others in Kabul’s districts. We did all that was necessary, and therefore, we would like to request the people to assist us too”. Ms. Zakia, Representative of people of Kabul in the lower house, said, “we fought very hard to protect the health center. The usurpers offered me several shops as bribe and threatened my family, which I rejected”.

A local council representative speaking on behalf of the residents said, “the Integrity Volunteers played an active role in mobilizing the people.” “We organized about 100 people to stand against the powerful usurpers in time of need.”

The two-story health center was designed and constructed by the Public Health Directorate with a total budget of 19 million Afs (approximately 250,000 USD).



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Afghan CSOs share recommendations to invigorate the fight against corruption



Anayatullah Alami, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

On January 23rd 2020, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) held a press conference in Kabul to highlight the issues around and the obstructions to counter-corruption efforts in Afghanistan and to share its recommendations with the people and Government of Afghanistan to revitalize the campaign against corruption.

Recently, Transparency International (TI) released its Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2019, placing Afghanistan among the top 10 most corrupt countries in the world. Afghanistan scored only 16 points out of 100, the same points as in 2018. The lack of progress shown by CPI caused such deep concern among corruption watch dogs and civil society in Afghanistan, that they felt compelled to come together to discuss this in a conference and afterwards present their recommendations for improvement. to the Government.

Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director of Integrity Watch, addressing the audience at the press conference, said, "Although the National Unity Government (NUG) committed to establishing an independent anti-corruption commission in 2014, it took the NUG five years to finalize the law." "Afghanistan has to institutionalize the fight against corruption through establishing independent agencies, supporting the existing ones and ensuring separation of powers to restore trust in state institutions."



Wahidullah Azizi, Program Manager at Transparency Afghanistan, said, “The lack of progress in the fight against corruption is disappointing. The results adversely affect government legitimacy, trust among Afghans, and donors’ confidence.”

In order to revitalize the fight against corruption, Afghanistan’s civil society presented a set of recommendations on how to improve the fight against corruption to the government. These recommendations included implementation of regulations created for managing election campaign financing, ensuring that budgets and public services are not driven by personal connections, stopping Parliamentarians forcing their projects into the National Budget, managing conflicts of interest and addressing “revolving doors”.

Regulating lobbying activities through creation of a lobbying law, strengthening electoral integrity, empowering citizens and protecting anti-corruption activists, whistleblowers, and journalists, reinforcing checks and balances and promoting the separation of powers were also among the recommendations civil society presented to the Afghan government at the conference which was held in offices of Integrity Watch.



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