

U4 Expert Answer



Fighting corruption in education in fragile states

Query

Please share any lessons (successes and/or challenges) from efforts to combat corruption in the education sector in fragile or conflict affected states, paying particular regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Purpose

To mainstream anti-corruption at the sectoral level in most countries, but especially in fragile or conflict affected states.

Content

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Caveat

Very few studies focus specifically on addressing corruption in fragile states' education sector and there is very little information publicly available on corruption in Pakistan's education sector.

Summary

Fighting corruption in education has the potential to mitigate some of the root causes of fragility and restore citizens' trust in the government's capacity to deliver

public services. Corruption can occur at all stages of the education service delivery chain, from school planning and management, to student admissions and examinations as well as to teacher management and professional conduct. These risks can be exacerbated in fragile settings which are often characterised by weak governance structures, limited infrastructures, inadequate political leadership and reduced human, organisational and institutional capacity of government.

There is still relatively little evidence of what comprises good practice on how to fight corruption in fragile states, including as it relates to the education sector. Recommendations typically include the establishment of transparent regulations and procedures, reforms of the procurement and public finance management (PFM) system, transparent teacher management systems, the introduction of codes of conduct for educational staff, robust information systems in the area of teacher registration and management, examination and access to university. Social accountability initiatives also have potential and may be the most viable option in some challenging environments.

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U4 is a web-based resource centre for development practitioners who wish to effectively address corruption challenges in their work. Expert Answers are produced by the U4 Helpdesk – operated by Transparency International – as quick responses to operational and policy questions from U4 Partner Agency staff.

1 Corruption, fragility and the education sector

Fragile states broadly refer to states that lack the capacity or willingness to perform key functions for their citizens, as per the OECD DAC definition: *"States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of the population"* (OECD 2007). The concept covers different categories of countries and realities, ranging from countries in a state of "arrested development" or "deterioration" to countries in "post-conflict transition" or "early recovery". Each category of countries poses specific challenges, with the presence or absence of conflict, political will and existing capacity levels crucial variables to consider when planning interventions in such settings (Bethke 2008).

Why tackle corruption in the fragile states' education sector?

According to World Bank figures, fragile states represent 14 % of the world's population and account for about a third of the world's poorest people (living on less than 1 USD a day). While there is a very high demand for basic education, poor access to education is typical in fragile states with a lack of qualified teachers, learning materials and school buildings. At the same time, the education sector is one of the largest beneficiaries of public resources and one of the largest employers of public servants in these countries, making the potential impact of corruption very high (Rose and Greeley 2006).

There is a growing interest in exploring the relationship between corruption, education and fragility but still relatively little empirical evidence substantiating the linkages between them. The concepts of corruption and fragility are closely intertwined, with corruption broadly understood as a core driver of conflict and fragility. Some authors consider that violence and insecurity are linked to weak accountability, corruption and lack of transparency and affect the state capacity to effectively prevent conflict. It contributes to exacerbation of inequalities among social groups and political factions, fuelling risks of social unrest. In fragile settings, corruption also often permeates the security forces, resulting in the state failing to provide security services to its citizens. In addition, certain forms of corruption undermine the legitimacy of the state and erode public trust in institutions, with a damaging impact on the

institution building process, especially in post-conflict countries (OECD 2009).

While the link between corruption and education have not been specifically or systematically analysed within fragile settings, there is a broad consensus and a growing body of evidence indicating that corruption undermines education outcomes in terms of literacy rates, drop out rates, quality of education, lower ranking of schools, service users satisfactions, average schooling years, etc (Rothstein and Holberg 2011; Azfar et al. 2005; Gupta et al. 2000).

Corruption and its impact on education outcomes and accessibility are likely to be exacerbated in fragile states that are characterised by weak governance structures, lack of transparency and failing institutions. In addition, corruption, inequitable distribution and misuse of funds in the education sector may worsen inequality between groups in fractionalised societies and fuel favouritism of specific social, ethnic or geographic groups over others, potentially triggering discontent, protest and social unrest (Miller-Grandvaux 2009).

At the same time, education is widely perceived as having the potential to mitigate the root causes of fragility, including corruption, to promote stability and to bridge the gap between short term relief strategies and longer term development priorities. In particular, teachers and curriculum reform can be important drivers of change and positively contribute to state-building processes (Rose and Greeley 2006). Investing in education and improving service delivery in fragile settings has the potential to increase the legitimacy of government and restore citizens' trust in public institutions, positively contributing to improve other dimensions of fragility. Service delivery can be an area with potential for cooperation across ideological, social or ethnic lines (OECD 2008).

Donors are increasingly acknowledging the linkages between corruption, education and fragility in their policy frameworks and strategies for fragile states. For example, the USAID education and fragility framework identifies corruption and rent-seeking as a root cause of fragility, among other factors such as insecurity, exclusion, lack of capacity and public disengagement, while casting education at the forefront of programming priorities to respond to the challenges facing countries affected by potential or actual conflict (Miller-Grandvaux 2009).

Corruption challenges in the fragile states' education sector

Corruption challenges in the education sector

Fragile states are confronted with similar corruption challenges in the education sector as other developing countries. But fragility makes them more vulnerable to risks of corruption. As in other countries, corruption can occur at all stages of the education service delivery chain, from school planning and management, to student admissions and examinations as well as teacher management and professional conduct. Corruption manifests itself in a wide variety of ways, with practices ranging from bribery, embezzlement, favouritism and the exploitation of parents and students to less obvious practices such as ghost teachers, absenteeism and sexual exploitation of children and students (Please see: [U4 thematic Page on Education/ U4 2006](#)).

At the **policy level**, corruption may affect the allocation of resources to the education sector and reduce both the level and effectiveness of public spending for education services, seriously undermining education outcomes (Azfar et al. 2005). At the school management and planning levels, funding decisions can be made for political and personal reasons rather than based on objective criteria. For example, politicians can allocate resources to particular schools for political reasons, to gain support, especially during election times.

At the **administrative level**, funds and supplies can be diverted before reaching the schools. For example, survey data from a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey conducted in Uganda revealed that primary schools received on average only 13 % of the grants during 1991–1995 (Reinikka and Svensson 2004). Student numbers can be manipulated to obtain more funding. Some teachers are registered in more than one area to get double salaries. The payroll can also be inflated with names of fake employees or employees who are no longer (or were never) employed (ghost teachers).

Education related procurement is also highly vulnerable to risks of diversion, leakages, and biased decision making in contracts' award processes. In particular, hiring contractors and the rehabilitation of schools can result in procurement of poor quality materials, equipment and physical infrastructure.

Teacher management and professional conduct can also be corrupt, with licences and authorisations for teaching obtained on false grounds and unqualified staff hired, retained and promoted due to bribery or patronage instead of merit.

At the **service delivery level**, parents and students can be requested to pay illegal fees for education services that are supposed to be free. Exam questions can be sold in advance or examination results only released upon payment. There are also more "quiet" forms of corruption such as teacher absenteeism and abusive practice of private tutoring. In many countries, parents are forced to hire private tutors, with high risks of manipulation and distortion of the mainstream curricula, and contributing to make free primary education prohibitively expensive for poor households (UNESCO 2003).

Specific challenges due to fragility

These risks can be exacerbated in fragile settings which are often characterised by weak governance structures, destroyed infrastructures, inadequate leadership and reduced human, organisational and institutional capacity of government. In addition, in post-conflict or early recovery settings, large inflows of aid combined with pressure to deliver can create many opportunities for corruption amidst weak institutions and the legacies of war (OECD, 2009). Barely functioning ministries often lack financial resources and technical expertise to respond to challenges in the sector.

- Fragile states often have limited national budgets as conflict and fragility affect economic growth and revenue collection. In these countries, the majority of education budgets are allocated to recurrent costs, primarily teachers' salaries in the face of growing demand for resources for procurement of learning materials, teacher training and rehabilitation of school infrastructures (Branelly and Ndaruhustse 2008).
- Education planning, management and resource allocation are hampered by lack of systematic and coherent data collection and record keeping, reliable and credible information, making it challenging to verify and consolidate even basic data on numbers of schools, pupils, and teachers.
- Poorly functioning payroll systems and inadequate salaries provide both incentives and opportunities for corruption, with widespread practices of "ghost teachers" or greater focus on private tutoring to supplement inadequate salaries.
- The education sector in many fragile settings is also characterised by a lack of trained staff, with unqualified

ministry staff – including teachers – holding their position by virtue of longevity, patronage or political ties.

- In fragile settings, the budgetary and public financial management systems are often barely functioning, with increased risks of leakages when funds are transferred across the education sector chain from central ministries to the provincial, district and school levels.
- In the absence of adequate standards and capacity, transparent contracting processes and functioning systems of oversight, procurement of learning materials and rehabilitation of school infrastructures offer lucrative opportunities of rent-seeking through corrupt bidding processes.
- In post-conflict countries, challenges can be exacerbated by the high demand for education services and sudden rush back to schools of pupils, stretching further the capacity of strained education ministries.

2 Fighting corruption in education in fragile settings

Fighting corruption in fragile states

Challenges associated with anti-corruption in fragile states

There is little literature specifically focussing on fighting corruption in the education sector in fragile settings. However, in the education sector, fragile states are confronted with challenges similar to those they face for addressing corruption more generally. Lessons learnt in this regard can also apply to the education sector.

Generally, there is a tension between focusing on short term immediate objectives such as promoting access to education versus longer term governance and institution building objectives. There is no consensus on the prioritisation and sequencing of anti-corruption in fragile states which typically need to arbitrate between (often) competing and resource-intensive priorities: peace-building, security, humanitarian needs, institution building and longer term social and economic development. Experience shows the critical importance of addressing governance issues from the outset. Failure to address corruption in order to attend to more “pressing” issues can contribute to fuel fragility (OECD 2009). In practice however, anti-corruption reforms are often postponed to a later stage of reconstruction efforts, especially in post-conflict countries where corrupt elites and networks created during the war can take advantage of their position after the war to

entrench their power and set up predatory schemes (Mathisen 2007).

An additional challenge in such settings is that citizens’ expectations are not always aligned with those of external actors. As fragile states are heavily reliant on aid resources, they are accountable to both their citizens and donors. In reconstruction settings, this is complicated by the fact that donor engagement in post-war contexts is often driven by priorities of political or geopolitical nature, and such agenda can conflict with anti-corruption efforts (OECD 2009).

Anti-corruption reforms can also have unintended effects that can potentially undermine stability, such as anti-corruption crack-downs used to silence political opponents or over-ambitious anti-corruption plans that generate frustrations and cynicism and undermine trust building efforts.

In fragile contexts, donors are also often confronted with challenges of weak, non-existent or changing government leadership which lacks the political will and capacity to address governance issues and corruption. In such settings, NGOs may be more competent, representative and trusted by local communities. The objective of delivering effective basic services may involve bypassing inefficient government structures and institutions to the detriment of longer term institution building objectives. While relying on non-state actors for service delivery may improve access to education in the short or medium term, it will have little impact on building the government capacity to deliver basic services (UNESCO 2009). This approach can also have the unintended effect of diluting state’s accountability and weaken the accountability framework in the longer term (OECD 2008).

Principles guiding anti-corruption interventions and lessons learnt

While there is still relatively little guidance on best practice on how to fight corruption in fragile states, the OECD has developed principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations that are relevant to both education and anti-corruption interventions in the education sector (OECD 2007). These include the following principles targeted at donors:

- Take the context as the starting point and acknowledge different challenges of capacity and will as well as specific challenges of countries recovering from conflict,

deteriorating governance environment and of stopped development;

- Do no harm: International intervention can create social divisions and worsen corruption if no appropriate safeguards are established. Equally, international response to serious cases of corruption and human rights must not exacerbate poverty and insecurity through sudden withdrawal of aid.
- Prioritise prevention;
- Recognise the link between political, security and development objectives;
- Focus on state building as the central objective. The long term vision of building viable sovereign state involves two main areas: 1) strengthening the capacity of states to fulfil their core functions such as ensuring security, justice service provision and 2) supporting the legitimacy and accountability of the state by addressing issues of good governance, human right and peace building;
- Promote non discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies;
- Align with local priorities in different ways in different contexts; and
- Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors.

Consistent with these principles, a few lessons and operational guidelines emerge for fighting corruption in such settings (Mathisen 2007).

Anti-corruption interventions need to be tailored to the local context and appropriate resources should be allocated to assess the local circumstances and existing institutional environment at the design stage.

In terms of prioritisation/sequencing of interventions, a good starting point is to secure visible early victories to gain citizens support for reform. This can include for example, the conviction of figures thought untouchable. Similarly, reforms should be prioritised at first in areas where they are likely to meet the least resistance and offer quick pay off to groups that are potential constituencies for further reforms, such as restoring trust in the institutions where people interact most such as the health, education and justice sectors.

Early successes should be widely publicised to build trust. Even small successes have the potential restore confidence and send a strong signal of change. Having an effective communication strategy is therefore an important element of anti-corruption interventions.

Even in challenging contexts, islands of integrity can be supported by identifying groups or individuals within the public sector or specific institutions who can champion anti-corruption and accountability reforms. To achieve this, it is critical to discover and empower actors that have a genuine interest in anti-corruption reform (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2006).

There is a need to combine longer term capacity building efforts with short term approaches. In particular, there is a need to find the right balance between state and non-state capacity development. Relying exclusively on non-state actors for anti-corruption or service delivery sends a strong signal that government structures cannot be trusted and can undermine long term sustainability of reforms.

Against this backdrop, the potential of social accountability mechanisms emerges as a key lesson and a promising approach, as more conventional enforcement-based approaches to strengthening anti-corruption through formal channels often fail in fragile states due to lack of independence, functioning judiciary and long term support from donors (Schouten 2011). In fragile contexts, community based approaches may be the only feasible option (OECD 2008) through mechanisms such as participatory monitoring of expenditures, scorecards, and independent media.

Specific areas of intervention for fighting corruption in education in fragile states

Generally, fighting corruption in such settings involves addressing a number of governance issues such as addressing PFM issues, establishing robust information management systems, improving teacher management and professional conduct and promoting social accountability mechanisms at the local level.

Public Finance Management

Most recommendations for addressing corruption in fragile states call for the establishment of transparent regulations and procedures. They also emphasise the need to address public finance management (PFM) issues, as a way to ensure accountable and transparent use of funds and minimise leakages between ministries and school levels (Brannelly and Ndaruhustse 2008; Miller-Grandvaux 2009).

As a first step, external stakeholders need to assess the underlying budgetary system, as well as examine the level of capacity of state and non-state actors, the

reliability of PFM systems and the legitimacy of government before making decision on aid modalities (Brannelly and Ndaruhustse 2008). This can also include strengthening budget transparency and oversight, establishing a policy framework for the allocation and use of education resources, improving the capacity of government and civil society to manage and monitor resources and providing financial information to relevant stakeholders.

Operationally, the use of a third party for disbursement of funds and the systematisation of bank accounts for school can improve management of school grants (UNDP 2011). In Sierra Leone for example, using a global auditing company as a third party for grant disbursement resulted in 98,6 % of the funds transferred reaching schools. In most countries introducing capitation grants¹, schools have been requested to open bank accounts to avoid full disbursement of the grant in cash. In most instances, the head of the school, the chair of the school management committee and a treasurer are the three signatories to the account.

Information systems

Robust IT systems in the area of teacher registration and management, examination and access to university can also reduce opportunities for corruption, especially to address challenges of ghost teachers, patronage/rent seeking, in career progression and plagiarism (UNDP 2011). In particular, Education Management Information System (EMIS) – which allows collecting, analysing and making available data on the education sector in a reliable manner - generate useful data outputs for analysis and to better inform policy making. It makes inequalities or discrepancies in the system more evident, thus making decisions more productive in a given context. In Sierra Leone for example, the introduction of an EMIS is used as a tool to detect malpractice in the areas of (Hamming 2008):

- Management and administration (e.g., record keeping, management of teachers salaries, school fees and school resources);
- research and planning (e.g., setting up new schools, expansion of existing schools);
- monitoring and evaluation (e.g., educational indicators).

¹ Capitation grants refer to grants of money given to every person who qualifies under certain conditions.

In this regard, USAID's framework on education and fragility recommends assuring that management information systems focus on: 1) accountability and transparency of financial management, especially in the areas of teachers compensation, recruitment, deployment and disqualification; 2) transparency on the administration of exams and on student promotion within the system; and 3) discrimination and exclusionary practices that determine access and retention of both students and teachers (Miller-Grandvaux 2009).

Teacher management and professional conduct

Teacher management is an important area of reform in fragile states. The above mentioned USAID framework recommends addressing teachers' compensation issues in the early recovery phases of a conflict.

In terms of professional standards, local and national legal frameworks and codes of conduct can be established to sanction perpetrators and protect victims of fraud and corruption. Codes of conduct for educational staff have been established in several countries such as Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire to improve professional behaviours and performance and address issue of absenteeism, private tuition and sexual harassment. Consultation and involvement of the teachers' union, effective dissemination and enforcement mechanisms are critical to the success of such interventions. Community members also need to be involved in developing the code, and the information and expectations contained in the codes need to be understood by all stakeholders (UNDP 2011).

Decentralisation

There is a lack of consensus on the potential impact of decentralisation on corruption. Some authors argue that decentralisation has the potential to strengthen local accountability and oversight and reduce leakages and corruption. For example, findings of four case studies show that decentralisation of basic education services has been a significant factor in strengthening both local governments and decentralised offices of central government in countries such as Uganda, Guinea and the Philippines (USAID, 2006). In Mozambique for example, the Direct Support School programme has supported the decentralisation of decision making and resource management to the school level and promoted the involvement of communities in running of the schools. At school level, grants are managed by the school council composed of teachers, the principal, the community and the district education officer. The

experience shows that aid can be effective within a poor governance environment, with ownership and strong leadership from the Ministry of Education as a pre-requisite (Rose and Greeley 2006).

However, some authors also argue that decentralisation can increase risks of corruption and mismanagement by granting local offices with little experience and capacity greater responsibility (Hall 2011). Decentralisation also entails the risk of parents and communities groups being captured by local forces or lacking the capacity to monitor (UNDP 2011).

Social accountability mechanisms

Participatory monitoring and social accountability initiatives are an option in challenging environments. This can include initiatives such as enhancement of the role of school management committees, building the capacity of school parents associations, budget tracking as well as monitoring interventions undertaken by community members.

In Afghanistan for example, Integrity Watch Afghanistan worked through local accountability mechanisms such as Shuras (community gatherings) and community development councils to facilitate the election of volunteer community monitors. They are trained to access project information on reconstruction projects selected by the communities, survey beneficiaries and assess the projects on the ground (Schouten 2011).

3 Corruption and education in Afghanistan

Corruption in the education sector

Afghanistan emerged from more than two decades of strife and violence in the early 2000s with a ruined economy, deficient physical and social infrastructures and destroyed health and education services. The country is heavily reliant on foreign aid and the government still does not have full control over its territory.

Against this backdrop, the central government is confronted with major governance challenges, including weak institutions, an inefficient public sector and excessive bureaucracy. As the largest public sector employer, the Ministry of Education is no exception to this situation and lacks the financial resources and technical expertise to deliver basic education services. It is characterised by inefficient bureaucratic structures, inadequate curriculums, lack of teachers, ill-functioning

payroll system, unsupervised schools, lack of book and teaching materials as well as widespread absenteeism of both teachers and students (Hall 2011). An estimated of 80 % of school facilities were destroyed or damaged during the war and most schools lacked adequate physical facilities (USAID 2006). Following the collapse of the teacher training system, there was a dramatic lack of trained teachers and fewer than half of the teachers were high school graduates in 2002 (USAID 2006).

In addition, since the country had not had a census since 1979, the ministry faces major challenges of lack of data and poor record keeping of actual number of staff in schools, provincial and district offices. This lack of data complicates school governance and teacher management as well as prevents efficient use of data for forecasting and planning. Frequently teachers were not paid, not paid in time or had to pay bribes to receive their salaries. It was estimated that there were between 16,000 and 20,000 ghost teachers who do not come to work or are double registered (Sigsgaard 2009). Inadequate salaries also provide the wrong incentives, driving teachers to focus on bribes and private tutoring to supplement their income. Until recently, salaries were paid in cash, leading to funds being siphoned off at all stages of the disbursement process (Hall 2011).

Other challenges include (USAID 2006; Hall 2011):

- A dramatic increase in the number of students enrolled following UNICEF 2002 and 2003 "back-to-school" campaign;
- Inequitable distribution of education resources;
- Shortage of qualified staff and deeply entrenched patronage systems, with ministry positions held by unqualified staff with strong political ties;
- Initial exclusive focus on school construction, with construction contracts offering lucrative opportunities for corrupt officials in the absence of standards and effective oversight mechanisms and lack of resources allocated to contract monitoring; and
- Lack of basic management skills, absence of filing system, poor record keeping.

In spite of these major corruption challenges, a 2010 UNODC survey reported that bribery in the education sector is less common than in many other sectors such as the police or health sectors.

Anti-corruption efforts

The Afghan National Development Strategy deals with corruption as a cross-cutting issue that is addressed

with institutional strengthening programmes in all ministries as well as accounting and procurement procedures². Anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan's education sector are taking place within the broader framework of education reforms, that include rehabilitation/construction of schools, curriculum reform, teacher training, textbook development, etc. The Ministry has recognised the problem and included corruption within the National Education Strategic Plans 2010-2014 which is primarily being tackled as part of the "education management" programme. The monitoring and evaluation chapter of the plan also singles out corruption. More specifically, this includes (Hall 2011):

- Data collection: A first school survey was conducted in 2007 and the Ministry of Education has developed an EMIS which collects data and monitors various indicators and registers employees by position, profession and duty station to address challenges of ghost teachers. The Ministry is also planning to expand the EMIS capabilities to cover student enrolment, exam scores, attendance and teachers' attendance.
- In terms of financial management, an electronic bank transfer system for teachers' salaries has been developed and the Ministry of Education has also integrated an Afghanistan Financial Management Information System to track expenditures on education programmes at national and sub-national levels.
- Discrepancies in staff qualification is being addressed through a lateral entry programme for short-term qualified staff at the central level, modernisation of the university entrance exam system and the issuance of forgery-proof university diplomas. Although not per se an anti-corruption intervention, the Basic Education Support System for Teachers (BESST) designed to reform education through teacher training and evaluation include several anti-corruption relevant components by addressing issues of low teacher pay, standardisation and transparency of non-merit based hiring. This includes creating and administering competency tests for teachers and education officials, developing organisational charts, a human resources manual and data base policies and standardising job descriptions, in addition to developing community involvement via school improvement councils.

² For more information on Afghanistan's anti-corruption efforts more generally, please see an unpublished U4 expert answer produced in 2012, accessible on request.

- Although not solely focussed on the education sector, the UNDP's Accountability and Transparency Project (ACT) was also implemented together with the Ministry of Education. It comprises four components: 1) institutional reforms 2) activities increasing transparency, accountability and integrity; 3) public awareness initiatives and 4) enhanced monitoring capabilities. With the support of the project, an Office for Anti-Corruption Implementation Plan was established at the Ministry, and 6 complaint offices have been created in various education directorates and ministries with most common concerns relating to delays in service, abuse of power and bribery.
- From 2005 on, the Ministry started to put systems in place to improve contracting processes and oversight for school construction and rehabilitation but there is a lack of resources allocated for contract monitoring (USAID 2006).

Despite of significant challenges, there have been impressive results in education since the ousting of the Taliban in 2001, including a 570 % growth in enrolment, a seven fold increased of teachers (although qualifications remain relatively low) and the construction of about 4000 schools (although only 25% of schools have usable buildings).

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