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Issue Brief

Afghanistan's Corruption Dilemma: Progress and Challenges

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Corruption remains a very serious impediment to development anywhere in the world. But in the case of Afghanistan, rampant corruption has been a hindrance in the way of



implementing reforms. War torn Afghanistan has been a victim of poor governance, corrupt government practices, and above all, lawlessness. This has often been observed and studied by international organisations. According to Transparency International, corruption risks in Afghanistan hamper humanitarian aid from getting where it needs to go, and has called on the government of Afghanistan, donor agencies and humanitarian agencies to strengthen transparency and accountability in the humanitarian response to ensure fair, rapid and corruption-free humanitarian aid. Transparency International's new report titled *"Collective Resolution to Enhance Accountability and Transparencies in Emergencies: Afghanistan Report"*¹ published in April 2017 has exposed a number of aspects like reinforcing the role of local governance structures to promote transparency, and investing in communication with affected communities which would strengthen the response of humanitarian aid providers and the honesty of the aid they deliver.

Through in-depth interviews with affected communities and stakeholders, the TI report shows that corruption risks exist at a number of stages within the programme cycle of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. The most notable included during the negotiation of conditions for access and area selection for programming; inappropriate interference in the selection of beneficiaries; risks of favouritism and ethnic bias in staff hiring; a lack of means to reliably hold corrupt staff and organisations accountable; and a lack of transparent and effective communication and feedback mechanisms with aid recipients. Many people interviewed were unaware of the amounts and timing of aid entitlements and some had tried to complain about aid quality or corruption issues to no effect.

¹ "Collective Resolution to Enhance Accountability and Transparencies in Emergencies: Afghanistan Report"
https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/create_afghanistan

Corrupt practices were reported both within local government agencies at the provincial and sub-provincial levels, as well as within the contracting chain with national and international aid organisations. Corruption is widely understood to be a major problem in Afghanistan, threatening people's ability to trust in government, undermining security and pulling apart the fabric of society. An anti-corruption agenda has become a major focus of the Government of Afghanistan and of a number of partner donor governments.²

However, when it comes to the donor community, it does not make an effort to draw attention to the corruption prevalent in the country. They never tie their aid to any kind of genuinely effective inspection, and as result they have ultimately failed to hold the Afghan government to account for how they spend the donors' money.³

The corruption dilemma remains a core problem, but in recent months, the Afghan government has made some effort to fight corruption as highlighted by the United Nations report released in April 2017. In its report entitled *"Afghanistan's Fight against Corruption: The Other Battlefield"*, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), highlights the country's advancement in addressing corruption. Drawing on internationally recognized best practices, it provides recommendations for how the Government, with the continued support of the public and the international community, can build on those achievements. A key component of Afghanistan's fight against corruption is the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre (ACJC). Its dedicated police and prosecution units, and a new national primary and appeals court, was established by Presidential Decree to operate with jurisdiction over the broad range of corruption offences specified in the current penal code. The Justice Centre's scope also includes money laundering, destruction or selling of cultural and historical relics, crimes against internal and external security, illegal extraction of mines and land usurpation.⁴

² "Corruption Risks in Afghanistan's Humanitarian Sector Prevent Aid from Reaching those in Need" April 27, 2017

https://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/corruption_risks_in_afghanistans_humanitarian_sector_prevent_aid_from_reach

³ Jamil Danish, "Afghanistan's Corruption Endemic is Wasting Billions in Aid", November 3, 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/nov/03/afghanistans-corruption-epidemic-is-wasting-billions-in-aid>

⁴ Afghanistan makes progress in fighting corruption, yet enormous challenges remain – new UN report, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56623#.WSK0RdzTWM8>

Although challenges continue to haunt Afghanistan, the government can only be successful in implementing transparency if the humanitarian donor agencies, as well as international watchdogs and organisations develop and enhance mechanisms aimed at addressing corruption threats, and the establishment of joint mechanisms to effectively overlook how assistance is received. Apart from this, shared responsibility should be a key goal, which can help in impartial delivery of services along with meticulous practices in the acquisition of tenders can help create more transparency and encourage development.