

# ***Corruption Practices in the World Food Programme's Food-distribution Initiatives in the Ministry of Education***

***(November 2015)***

## ***1. Executive Summary***

Since the fall of the Taliban, the international community has provided substantial financial support to the education sector in Afghanistan. One problem these donor-funded initiatives seek to address is the alarming number of school-age children, especially girls, who lack the incentive to attend school. The World Food Programme (WFP) attempted to increase enrollment by distributing food items to students, such as oil, biscuits, wheat, and dates. While a rise in enrollment did coincide with WFP efforts, weak oversight, inadequate monitoring, and instances of mismanagement allowed corrupt actors to embezzle funds and abscond with items intended for the students, and profit from the sale of those items.

## ***2. Methodology***

The VCA team interviewed Ministry of Education (MOE) and WFP officials in Kabul and conducted inspection trips to Nangarhar, Laghman, Herat, Balkh, and Badakhshan provinces. During these visits, the team met provincial educational directors and interviewed teachers and students, while also conducting trips to numerous shops, markets, and open-air bazaars.

## ***3. Findings***

WFP officials informed MEC that they had an agreement with the MOE and its Provincial Education Directorates until the end of 2013. Under this agreement, MOE officials were responsible for:

- (1) Distributing the food in coordination with WFP;
- (2) Abiding by WFP's standards; and
- (3) Providing regular reports to WFP on their progress, so as to ensure transparency and allow for adequate oversight.

However, the MOE was inadequate in transparency efforts and often failed to submit to WFP any reports on their activities in remote provinces.

Additionally, WFP was lax in its oversight and did not aggressively monitor MOE's compliance with the terms of the agreement. Furthermore, according to some interviewees, WFP contracted for the transportation of food with local NGOs, compensating those involved in the transportation process with food items. WFP has rejected these claims, stating that they allocated funds for transportation and provided these funds to MOE officials for disbursement. WFP officials admitted to MEC that there was at least 20% "wastage" caused by corruption in the food-distribution process, which was administered by the MOE. Much of this appears to be attributable to mismanagement and monitoring weaknesses in the initial planning stages, specifically for the distribution of WFP biscuits, a process that was done jointly by the MOE and WFP. The program authorities acknowledged that, although transportation costs were included, some school's principals and MOE provincial officials still improperly collected money from students for such costs. Moreover, WFP reported that its own personnel found hundreds of bags of food stored in several private residences, indicating the involvement of organized criminal elements in some of these schemes.

Local MOE officials also found ways to profit from this initiative. For example, in the Shendand district of Herat province, the responsible team delivered biscuits to the center of the district, and secured the items under lock and key in a storage facility. The head of Education

Directorate, along with several school principals, then distributed some of the biscuits to those students who happened to be present, while selling what remained in the nearby bazaar, pocketing the proceeds. MEC found that similar schemes were perpetrated in Laghman and Badakhshan provinces. Moreover, Nuristani education officials appear to have sold WFP biscuits and other WFP-funded items in Laghman province at below market prices, thus managing to harm both their own constituents and Laghman food suppliers attempting to obtain a fair price for their goods.

Another scheme employed by corrupt MOE officials involved allocating food for school holidays and other days when the students had off and, by implication, did not consume the WFP-supplied food. Principals and other senior officials would then enrich themselves by selling the biscuits in the bazaar.

#### **4. WFP's Attempts to Mitigate Corruption**

WFP officials stated to MEC that, when they became aware of corruption in the distribution process, they informed the MOE and, in some cases, referred the matter to the Attorney General's Office (AGO), but that neither agency followed up on these reports. WFP also reported that it requested that the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) send a formal letter to all provincial police offices to take action whenever they found WFP food items for sale in the local market. But while the former minister sent the letter, the local police rarely acted to prevent the sale of such items.

WFP's internal evaluation of this program found that approximately 20% of the food was diverted prior to reaching the intended beneficiaries. Thus, WFP abrogated its agreement with the MOE and the provincial education directorates, except in Helmand and other provinces where they contracted with local NGOs to distribute the food. WFP also created some additional reporting mechanisms to prevent fraud in the aid-distribution process and obtain more information from their NGO partners. In addition, WFP established a new office specifically charged with processing complaints, as well as a hotline number that could be used to report any suspected corruption.

During MEC's provincial inspection trips, our team did not find any instances of WFP biscuits being sold inappropriately, but this was because they were not included on the WFP's food-items list for 2014 and 2015. Early indications suggest, though, that biscuits will be once again be distributed to students in 2016. Consequently, it is premature to assess the efficacy of WFP's anti-corruption efforts.

Biscuits are far from the only aid item that ends up being sold in the marketplace. UNICEF-supplied school stationary and free school books published by the MOE and intended for students, often appear for sale in bazaars and small shops. Some Herat provincial council members claimed that, at the beginning of the 2015, more than 20,000 books were found at one school principal's home, ready for sale on the private market (the specific facts surrounding this particular case are unclear, though, and the case is no longer under investigation).

WFP has taken serious measures to prevent corruption in the food distribution process. Enabling complaints through phone or email were useful initiatives conducted to reduce the level of corruption. These phone numbers and email addresses were written on the biscuit and other food packets.



Figure 1: WFP e-mail and hotline printed on its food packets

## 5. Conclusion

Poor coordination between the donor, WFP, and the government, as represented by the MOE, lies at the heart of the problem of food distribution items ending up in the hands of non-students. Inadequate donor oversight combined with the weak performance of the MOE audit team and prosecuting entities - despite obvious corruption taking place in the process of food distribution - indicates the neglect of those responsible for fighting corruption.

Recent WFP actions to mitigate corruption in the food distribution process are apparently effective, however no actions have been taken on the wrongdoing and profiteering which has occurred thusfar. For tracking corruption cases during the period of 2002-2013 regarding the process of food distribution, the MOE should inspect the relevant entities involved in the process, especially the Provincial Education Directorates, and the individuals or groups who were involved in corrupt practices should be identified and prosecuted.

### Recommendation:

Indicator	Recommendation	Baseline
Inspection and clarification of corruption cases in the process of food distribution at MOE during 2002 to 2013.	MOE conducts an inspection of the food distribution process covering the period of 2002 - 2013 in its offices and provincial directorates, identifies the actors involved in embezzlement, and refers all cases to the AGO for prosecution.	(Nov. 4, 2015) The distribution of food funded by WFP, especially biscuits distributed in schools through the MOE, was plagued by embezzlement, which caused a waste of more than 20% of the project funds.

## 6. References:

- Meetings with Ministry of Education, WFP officials, Provincial Councils and provincial education officials of Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Laghman and Badakhshan;
- Field visits to provincial supermarkets and shops;
- Interviews with relevant officials, school principals and teachers, and students and their parents.

## 7. ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

MEC	Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOI	Ministry of Interior Affairs
PED	Provincial Education Directorate
NGO	Non-Government Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCA	Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment
WFP	World Food Programme