EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2016, His Excellency Dr. Asadullah Hanif Balkhi, the Minister of Education, requested MEC to conduct a 'Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment' of the Ministry of Education. This Ministry-wide Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment (MVCA) is the first comprehensive evaluation of corruption vulnerabilities across the entire Ministry.

MEC has examined, in detail, the vulnerabilities to corruption across the Ministry of Education (MoE). MEC has spoken with teachers, head teachers, school principals, school shura members, teacher educators, MoE officials on central, provincial and district levels, donors and other stakeholders, and with many parents and students. In total, MEC carried out 542 interviews and conducted 160 Focus Group Discussions: in Kabul, in the nine provinces of Badakhshan, Balkh, Faryab, Ghazni, Herat, Khost, Bamyan, Pansjhir and Nangarhar, and in 138 schools.

What Afghan school community members have described to MEC in their interviews about experience with corruption in education is devastating. It is vitally important to understand these perspectives and acknowledge the corrosive impact of corruption on the country. Using this analysis of the lived experience of service users will enable policymakers to take meaningful steps towards positive, effective and sustainable change.

Principal finding

MEC analyzed all the interviews according to the specific education corruption vulnerabilities identified. These vulnerabilities ranged from school-level issues, such as bribes to modify school certificates, through to Ministry-level issues such as corruption in school construction and in textbook distribution. **One corruption vulnerability emerged as being the most serious – the widespread, country-wide appointment of teachers on the basis of influence, or nepotism and bribery, not on the basis of merit. In short, teacher appointment is largely corrupted. This is the most damaging issue for the education of students in the country.**

Thus, the heart of the corruption problems at MoE is not primarily issues like procurement corruption or ghost teachers. Rather, it is the children, families, teachers and other school community members who have lost the most from a dysfunctional education system that directly fails the citizens they are mandated to educate at the point of delivery. As a consequence, communities have comprehensively lost faith in the system.

"A suicide attack isn't the most dangerous thing for us, because a few people will die - Afghan mothers will have other children. It is the unprofessional and

unknowledgeable teachers that are most dangerous for us because they kill the future of Afghanistan."
Parent participant in Focus Group Discussion

Other major findings

- Such a large, complex Ministry will always be vulnerable to high levels of corruption. The Ministry is the largest public employer in the country, employing some 262,000 people, or 68 percent of government employment. As such, it inevitably becomes a prime target for those wishing to find positions for friends, relatives, colleagues and the children of colleagues. And it has long been unable to resist this pressure.

- There are extreme levels of nepotistic influence. Unless this influence is shut down, or dramatically constrained, it is difficult to see how there will be any improvement in the corruption vulnerability of teachers' appointments.

- The school curriculum is too large, leading to corruption vulnerabilities as teachers try to get ill-prepared students through the Kankor exam.

- There appear to be very few reform-minded officials who are either willing or able to bring reforms within MoE.

- The extreme disconnect between new graduates and teaching places is likely due, in large part, to corruption. Some 75 percent of the graduates of the Teacher Training Colleges are unable to get work as teachers.

- Inspection, audit and oversight systems are ineffective or lacking.

- Regarding the problems with EMIS, MEC compared school enrollment data and attendance data using the schools that it visited. EMIS data very closely matched enrollment data for the years 1392 to 1395, to within two percent. However, when actual attendance data was compared with EMIS data, EMIS data over-estimated actual attendance by 23 percent on average. While this figure may not be generalizable due to the modest sample size, it indicates large remaining corruption vulnerability.

Next step

MEC proposes that there be a discussion in the country – at Cabinet level, at Education leadership level, and in provinces, districts and school communities – to give broad backing to the MEC findings and to add detail to the major changes that MEC has proposed.

Recommendations

MEC makes 66 recommendations, broken down into the following ten categories:

1. **Local responsibility.** The principal recommendation is that school communities, not

PEDs, should bear the primarily responsibility for selecting their teachers.

2. **Institutional reforms.** The principal recommendations concern the need to reduce the size and scope of the MoE, to make it more manageable and less vulnerable to corruption; to make TVET an autonomous entity outside MoE, to reform the mechanism for selecting teachers, and to reduce the size of the curriculum.

3. **Successfully changing MoE organization**. MEC recommends a two-fold approach: At local level, by moving swiftly to community-led appointment of teachers, and by sponsoring networks of reformers. And, centrally, by setting up a formal change structure, with full-time task force with strong Cabinet backing, and a clear metric by which to measure success in cleaning up teacher appointments. MEC also recommends expansion of CBR appointments, and expansion of positive support for teachers as outlined in the NESP III strategy.

4. **Legal changes**. MEC recommends that MoE leadership make and implement a new policy of actively challenging and reacting to corruption.

5. **Signals of immediate change.** MEC believes that two measures: immediately making visible local accountability for teacher appointment; and setting up an independent complaints body regarding MoE corruption, can be strong signals of positive change. MEC also recommends that MoE show publicly – through a new anti-corruption strategy, through rejecting influence, and through pushing for prosecutions of corrupt MoE officials – that it is now giving priority towards tackling corruption.

6. **International community actions.** MEC recommends that donors quickly signal their support for a new focus on anti-corruption and on independent oversight as the basis for raising educational quality, as well as expanding successful programs such as CBA.

7. **Improvements to systems and independent oversight**. MEC recommends strengthening of EMIS and the HR administration system module within it. MEC recommends comprehensive improvement of the oversight mechanisms: i) major strengthening of the MoE internal audit function, ii) the establishment of an independent oversight bodies for educational quality and performance, and iii) an independent body to oversee the integrity of teacher appointments.

8. **Increased transparency.** MEC recommends that MoE start a major initiative to make its operations highly transparent; so that it could perhaps become the most open government ministry within three years.

9. **Greater enforcement**. MEC recommends that AGO actively take up the backlog of MoE corruption cases.

10. **Market-based alternatives.** MEC recommends a market solution (vouchers) to the

purchase of textbooks by students and parents.

Appreciation

Everyone who MEC interviewed – officials, parents, teachers and students – gave freely of their time and were eager to contribute to this study. They all made clear that education is of central importance for the future for their families and the country, and therefore a top priority for the nation.