

# ANTI-CORRUPTION HELPDESK

PROVIDING ON-DEMAND RESEARCH TO HELP FIGHT CORRUPTION

## CORRUPTION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN BANGLADESH

### QUERY

Please give an overview of corruption in the education sector in Bangladesh.

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### SUMMARY

The education sector is generally considered to be particularly prone to corruption, due to the size of education budgets and the complex administrative layers that exist between central government and the school level. Parents can often be manipulated and tolerate corruption as they strive to provide the best educational opportunities for their children.

In Bangladesh, the main forms of corruption identified in the education sector include more obvious forms such as bribery in admissions and in the disbursement of stipends; nepotism in the recruitment of teachers; and corruption in procurement. Less obvious forms include teacher absenteeism; misuse of private tuition by teachers; and sexual exploitation in schools and universities.

Bangladesh has been recognised internationally for progress made in achieving almost universal access to primary education and attaining gender equity at the primary and secondary education levels. Governmental efforts in the area of governance have led to improvements in the recruitment of teachers and school management. Notable non-governmental anti-corruption initiatives in the sector include TI-Bangladesh's Integrity Pledge which aims to promote people's participation in planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring in schools.

## 1 CORRUPTION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR: CAUSES, FORMS AND IMPACTS

### Causes of corruption

The education sector is considered to be particularly prone to corruption, in large part due to the huge amounts of resources being disbursed through often-complex administrative layers, all the way from central government to local schools. Furthermore, the value placed by the public on education makes it an attractive target for manipulation. Education service providers are in a powerful position vis-à-vis families and young people and are able to extort favours from those striving to succeed in the education system. Teachers and administrators are often influenced by corruption higher up the chain, which leaves them vulnerable and sometimes, even unpaid, prompting a resort to petty bribery and other forms of corruption. At the same time, parents are driven by a desire to provide the best opportunities for their children and may be unaware of what constitutes an illegal or illegitimate charge (Transparency International 2013).

### Main forms of corruption

Corruption in the education sector can take many forms. It can occur at all levels of the education system (primary, secondary and tertiary) and at all stages of the service delivery chain, from school planning and management, to student admissions through to examinations. Corruption may also affect human resources management in schools through teachers' recruitment, promotion and management.

At the policy level, corruption may affect the allocation of resources to the education sector and the general level of funding available for public schools, which has a huge impact on the quality of education services.

Generally, procurement processes are another risk area prone to corruption. A study of 149 members of parliament, conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh, found that as many as 97 per cent were involved in illicit activities of which 69.2 per cent influenced procurement decisions in government (Transparency International Bangladesh 2012b). In education, this can mean diversion of resources,

leakages, and biased decision making in the awarding of construction and service contracts. In the education sector, supplies can be subject to payoffs, under-deliveries and overpricing.

Distinct forms of corruption in higher education include illicit payments in recruitment and admissions, nepotism in tenured postings and political and corporate undue influence in research, amongst others (Transparency International 2013).

### Impact of corruption

Corruption in education damages all members of society, but impacts most heavily those students and families who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. While there is limited recent empirical research on the impact of corruption on education, previous studies have identified some important patterns regarding its impact on school attendance and the allocation of resources. Gupta et al. (2001), for example, suggested that student dropout rates in countries with high corruption are five times as high as in countries with low corruption. More recently Dridi (2014) has corroborated this finding with an empirical study covering 85 countries, finding that high and rising corruption decreases significantly access to schooling. The study finds that a unit increase in corruption reduces enrolment rates by almost 10 percentage points.

Several studies have also shown that corruption is likely to reduce public education expenditures (De la Croix and Delavallade 2009) and/or the effectiveness of public expenditure on education (Baldacci et al. 2008). Most of the above mentioned studies recognise that these impacts are felt disproportionately by the poor and disadvantaged in society.

## 2 FORMS OF CORRUPTION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN BANGLADESH

### The Bangladeshi context

Bangladesh hosts one of the world's highest numbers of young people. There are currently 48

million people aged 10 to 24, and Bangladesh has a total school-age population (5-13 year olds) of 26 million. Therefore education is of critical importance to the country's development potential (UNICEF 2014).

As a result, the education system is large, catering to over 30 million students. There are two ministries charged with managing education, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) which covers primary schooling (children aged 6-10), non-formal education and literacy and the Ministry of Education, which oversees secondary, higher level and madrasah education (World Bank 2013). The splitting of responsibilities across two departments has been criticised as causing a lack of coordination in terms of budget prioritisation and a lack of consistency in allocations to schools funded by different ministries (MHHDC 2012). The ministries have also been criticised for having poor information management systems and low investment in workforce development. At present, the government maintains limited information on schools and pupils, and information tracking is weak. Although there have been investments in workforce development — setting minimum standards for teachers — teacher training and oversight over teacher quality are limited (Wescott and Breeding 2011).

Despite the critical importance of the sector for societal development, levels of expenditure on education are low in Bangladesh when compared regionally and internationally. The share allocated to education in government spending has been fluctuating at around 15 per cent in recent years. But with a low revenue base, this means that it remains below 2.5 per cent of GDP. Overall, the countries in South Asia devote a comparatively low share of national income to education, ranging from 2 per cent in Sri Lanka (in 2011), to 2.2 per cent in Bangladesh (in 2009) and Pakistan (in 2011), to 3.2 per cent in India in 2011 (UIS Database). These figures fall well below the world median of 5 per cent in 2008 (UNESCO, 2011). International recommendations suggest total public expenditure in education should account for at least 6 per cent of GDP (UNICEF, 2014).

At the same time, Bangladesh has been recognised internationally for progress made in achieving almost universal access to primary education, attaining

gender equity at the primary and secondary levels, a marked reduction in repetition and dropout rates and attaining reasonably high levels of completion in primary education (World Bank 2013).

Notwithstanding this progress, 16.2 per cent of primary school age children do not attend school and this figure rises to 30.7 per cent for lower secondary school age children (UNICEF 2014). Furthermore the increased levels of access to schooling have not necessarily led to improved quality of education and learning outcomes, which is a major cause for concern (Asadullah and Chaudury 2013).

### Forms of corruption in education in Bangladesh

A relatively low 12 per cent of Bangladeshi people see the education system as corrupt or highly corrupt (Transparency International 2013). This percentage has been declining over the years, from 23 per cent in 2010 (Transparency International 2010), indicating citizens feel that the situation is improving.

Studies point to specific forms of corruption in the education sector, however: the collection of unauthorised payments for admission to schools and skewed distribution of free text books, coercing students to pay private tuition as well as the demand for bribes to disburse school stipends and grants. Less obvious forms of corruption also occur, including teacher misconduct, absenteeism and neglect of duties, inactive school management committees and lack of accountability mechanisms (TI-Bangladesh 2011/2012). Corruption in procurement in education has also recently received attention as a problem area (The New Age 2014). Sexual forms of corruption, involving practices such as sexual harassment or paying for grades with sexual favours, are also an area of concern in the country's education sector (Nurul et al. 2010).

The causes of these various forms of corruption are many. One recurring theme that emerges is the under-remuneration of teachers and staff, who in some cases even go unpaid for months (Dhaka Tribune 2013). While there is little recent empirical evidence on how widespread such corrupt practices are, several forms have received some attention in the literature.

*Discretionary costs: unauthorised payments*

Primary education in Bangladesh is ostensibly free. All children between the ages of five and 13 should be able to attend school without paying fees. In spite of this, according to household survey data, 66 per cent of households reportedly had to make unauthorised payments to secure admission of their child into Class One (ages 5-7); 20 per cent reported that they made unauthorised payments for textbooks; 19 per cent of students experienced bribery for government sponsored stipends; and 77 per cent of students reported nepotism among teachers (Transparency International Bangladesh 2009).

A 2005 TI Bangladesh survey found that 22 per cent of female secondary school students entitled to receive a stipend in the framework of the Female Stipend Program had to pay a fee to enrol in the scheme. In addition, five per cent of primary school students and 38 per cent of secondary school student stated that at the time of payment, a portion of their stipend was deducted by the grant-making authority (UNIFEM 2008/2009).

The situation regarding the prevalence of bribery in education appears to be improving, with the percentage of people paying bribes decreasing from 39 per cent in 2007 to 14.8 per cent in 2012 (Transparency International Bangladesh 2012). However, a recent study on bribery in schools found that the burden of bribe-paying in education still falls disproportionately on poor households and skews the playing field against them (Emran et al. 2013).

*Nepotism*

Nepotism and political affiliations are common factors influencing the recruitment and training of teachers in Bangladesh. Seventy seven per cent of respondents to a household survey indicated that nepotism in the education sector was a problem (Transparency International Bangladesh 2009). Candidates are reportedly asked to pay bribes to the Upazila Education Office (Transparency International Bangladesh 2008) which is the county-level administration.

*Private tuition*

In many developing countries, it is common for teachers to provide supplementary private tutoring for their own mainstream students (Shafiq 2002; Bray and Silova 2006) and this phenomenon also exists in Bangladesh. While there is no recent data on the cost to parents, a 2007 report found that parents spend between a quarter and just under one half of total schooling costs on private tuition, depending on the type of school and level of education (CAMPE 2007). Children in madrasahs<sup>1</sup> are less likely to take private tuition, partly because poorer parents find it difficult to afford. Sometimes private tuition is not in fact supplementary: teachers offer private tuition to their own mainstream students and use this time to deliver part of the core syllabus. For those who miss out, most often those coming from the poorest families, the chances of success in school are likely to be diminished (Transparency International 2013).

*Corruption in the procurement of goods and services in the education sector*

Public procurement in general is a major site of corruption in Bangladesh. Practices such as short bidding periods, poor advertising, non-disclosure of selection criteria, poor specifications, negotiations with bidders and rebidding without adequate justification create opportunities for corruption and bribery (World Bank 2010). Education sector procurement is a particular problem area, as the sector disburses huge amounts of public money through the procurement of goods and services.

There is little recent data on the extent of corruption of public procurement specifically in the education sector in Bangladesh. Previous studies found that at the administrative level, the Upazila Education Office was known to use its influence to make schools buy material from favoured vendors, highlighting the lack of appropriate safeguards in public procurement. A review of the donor programme Education for All by the World Bank reported irregularities in textbook production and distribution in Bangladesh. The report further highlighted that corruption in procurement had

<sup>1</sup> Six million students attend religious-run madrasahs in Bangladesh, 1.5 million in private Quomi madrasahs and the remaining 4.5 million in state-sponsored Alia madrasahs (Anam 2011).

resulted in the poor quality of school construction (World Bank 2008).

### *Abuse of entrusted power: sexual exploitation in the education sector*

While the issue of sexual harassment of women in Bangladesh has received much attention in recent years, there is little recent research on the extent and nature of this form of abuse of power specifically in the education sector. By its nature such abuse often goes unreported due to fears of stigmatisation and because of the power imbalance in the student-teacher relationship.

In the late 2000s a number of high profile cases brought the issue to the forefront of public attention. In May 2006, students of the botany department of Rajshahi University called a strike on campus demanding the removal of a professor for alleged sexual harassment of a female student in the department (The Daily Star 2006). Protestors called for formal complaint structures to be put in place in educational institutions.

In a landmark legal decision in 2009, the High Court issued directives in the form of guidelines to be treated as law and strictly complied with by educational institutions and employers in the public as well as private sectors. One of the guidelines was to set up formal complaints committees in organisations and institutions. While problems of compliance with this ruling across many organisations have been reported, it has been noted that the University Grants Commission notified all colleges and universities urging them to set up complaint committees in accordance with the directives of the court. It has also been noted that 31 private universities and 22 public universities have complied with the guidelines by setting up complaints committees. In the same vein, universities have undertaken awareness programs on sexual harassment including arranging seminars and debates (Salma 2014).

## **3 GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVES TO FIGHT CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION**

### **Government anti-corruption efforts**

The efforts of the government of Bangladesh in the fight against corruption in the education sector have been recognised by the international donor community. Specifically, improvements have been noted in the recruitment of teachers, monitoring and evaluation, school management and auditing (Norad 2011).

Regarding the recruitment of teachers in government primary schools, an improved and more transparent recruitment process has been put in place, which has resulted in more female teachers and more teachers with higher qualifications (Norad 2011).

Donors also note an improvement in management at the school level through the active involvement of Parent Teacher Associations and School Management Committees (SMCs) to support schools, monitor progress and ensure the transparency of fund utilisation (Norad 2011). It is worth noting that other commentators are more critical of the shortcomings of the decentralisation of school management in practice. In particular, it has been noted that the effectiveness of SMCs has been hampered by political influence in their membership, decisions and functioning, resulting in key decisions regarding school management being placed in the hands of the uneducated and/or well connected. Because of these shortcomings, many SMCs are believed to be inactive (MHHDC 2012).

Also of note is the JRCP Project, coordinated by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, with financial assistance from the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) (CRI 2014). It is an anti-corruption programme aimed at promoting honesty and integrity among the younger generation. Under this programme, in order to raise young people's awareness about corruption, 20,886 Honesty Clubs have been formed drawing students from all levels of education. There is little detailed information available publicly about the programme. In essence, the clubs should promote anti-corruption ethics from an early age. While the idea of the project has been welcomed, some concerns have been raised about the level of activity of the Honesty Clubs, as well as low levels of awareness of the programme, even in schools and institutions where such clubs have already been established (The New

Age 2014b).

## Non-governmental anti-corruption efforts

TI Bangladesh introduced a series of anti-corruption tools to promote the voluntary engagement of school authorities with community representatives. These tools are applied as part of a process that culminates in the signing of an Integrity Pledge (IP).

### *Citizen report cards*

The citizen report card (CRC) is an advocacy tool for improving service quality. Its purpose is to improve the working relationship between service providers and recipients and to create a feedback loop to improve service quality. The CRC measures the satisfaction of service recipients with the content and quality of the service provided by an institution, such as a primary school.

The service recipients' responses are collected through a survey and supplemented with interviews and consultations with the authorities, focus group discussions and/or key informant interviews. The findings of the CRC are usually released with the participation of the relevant authority, which serves the twin purposes of raising public awareness and promoting engagement with the authority.

### *Advice, information and the Citizens' Charter*

People often fall victim to corruption because of a lack of information about their rights and entitlements. In order to provide advice and information to service users in the education sector, TI Bangladesh has introduced a mobile advice and information service called AI-Desk which serves recipients on site in schools. It is also applied in the health sector in hospitals and local government offices.

Access to information on rights and entitlements has also been strengthened by the introduction of the Citizens' Charter. The charter lists the services provided by the institution concerned; the nature, quantity and quality of the services; the prescribed costs, if applicable; the waiting time necessary for obtaining the service; and from whom to obtain which service. It also clearly explains the process for

redressing grievances, including the appeal authority.

### *Participatory school budgets*

Participation in the tracking and monitoring of school budgets is crucial, both in ensuring that financing in education respond to the needs of students and to mitigate corruption in the sector. The participation of parents ensures the appropriateness, transparency and effectiveness of budgets. Achieving this requires awareness and motivation from both the school or institution and the parents. Participatory budget initiatives are preceded by instruction for parents as to how the budget works and its importance and the implications of mismanagement of budgets. At the practical level, participatory budgeting requires schools to share information about income and expenditure, the distribution of scholarships and supplies as well as information related to procurement and the development of infrastructure. This increased transparency is an important anti-corruption tool.

### *Face the Public meetings*

Face the Public meetings (known locally as mothers gatherings, as they bring together mostly the mothers of students) provide a forum for the school authorities to respond to questions and opinions raised directly by the parents of students and other members of the public. These are usually attended by between 150 and 250 people.

### *The Integrity Pledge (IP)*

The Integrity Pledge was first introduced by TI Bangladesh in 2009. It is built on the premise that ensuring people's participation in planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring the process of service delivery can significantly reduce corruption at all stages. It involves the empowerment of people which leads to greater accountability.

The IP is signed by the school management committee, the school watch group and the CCC (Committee of Concerned Citizens).

Integrity pledges are currently in operation in 27 different institutions in education, health and local government in 25 districts and sub-districts around

the country.

Schools that have instituted an IP have seen successes across a range of criteria including the elimination of unauthorised payments for admissions, the distribution of books and scholarships, lower absenteeism among teachers, elimination of misuse of private tuition, reduction of physical punishment, gender-sensitisation of school staff and students and increased activity of the school management committees (Transparency International 2013).

The social accountability initiatives appear to have a positive impact on the prevention of corruption in schools. Of course their voluntary nature means that successful implementation depends largely on the commitment and good will of the stakeholders involved.

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