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ENDING CORRUPTION TO ENSURE BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALL

Universal primary education is one of the eight pledges of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are set to be met by 2015. Since the goals have been adopted, corruption and governance deficits have undermined their achievement. In the case of education, progress has been mixed and there are wide disparities among groups. The number of students staying in the education system through primary school has reached 90 per cent. Yet, enrolment rates have seen a declining trend, and poor governance and corruption have been pointed to as among the culprits.

Every child has a right to free primary education.[1] It is enshrined in international covenants as well as national legislation from Algeria to Uganda. Yet corruption has created a formidable obstacle to ensuring that every girl and boy can go to school. When there is corruption in education, it creates costs, implicit and explicit, that prevent this right from being realised. In 2011, 57 million children were still not enrolled in primary school despite the global promise of education for all.[2]

Corruption affects schooling at every level and in multiple ways.

When resources intended for schools are siphoned off for private gain, it reduces the availability of learning and undercuts the quality of educational inputs — from learning facilities and materials to teachers and administrators. Corruption also acts as an added tax on the poor who are plagued by demands for illicit fees and bribes, compromising their access to schools.

Corruption has been shown to erode progress on achieving government commitments on education, including those outlined by the Education for All movement, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other global pledges.[3] Most strikingly, the effects of corruption in education have spill-over effects for other development promises and overall economic growth. For example, corruption serves to deepen the fault lines of inequalities.[4] Children that confront blocked access to schools often are then faced with blocked access to labour markets and livelihoods.

As the world looks at and beyond 2015, addressing corruption and its impacts on the access and quality of schooling will be critical for the sector as well as broader development.

THE ISSUE

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states 'everyone has the right to education'. Additional international covenants require governments to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory for all, and all other levels of education are available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable.[5]

As states must take steps to prioritise access to free education, spending on education tends to be sizable in countries, representing on average 16 per cent of a country's budgetary outlays. Even in low-income countries, funding for education can be significant when compared to other government budget lines.

These sizable resources put the sector at risk of corruption. When abuses arise, they can take many different forms which all have the same affect: limiting students' access to free and quality education.

Bribery and the charging of illicit fees — such as for enrolment, grades and diplomas — create barriers to getting into and staying in schools. Corruption diverts needed school supplies and funds from their intended sources. Corruption-ridden procurements produce low-quality, unsafe and un-built facilities. Sexual extortion by teachers and administrators forces girls and boys from schools and destroys a safe learning environment. Chronic teacher absenteeism, a silent form of corruption, leads to un-staffed schools and increased student drop-out rates.

For people who are already poor and marginalised, many will not be aware of their right to education nor have the space to speak out about these injustices.

Redressing the problem can involve small but impactful changes. These include providing better working conditions, training and salaries for teachers. It also involves ensuring communities have access to information about their schools and can get involved. Finally it means opening government budgets to public scrutiny.

Breaking the corruption cycle can have important social, political and economic dividends. First, lower levels of bribery and greater levels of transparency have been shown to produce better educational results. Meanwhile, increased investment in education correlates to decreased corruption over time, which in turn leads to increased investment in education and higher quality schooling.[6]

It is essential that these governance breakdowns in the sector are addressed now and that any future education commitments put anti-corruption at the centre.

RECOMMENDATIONS
TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS:

Adopt a human-rights based approach for education and development commitments

- Ensure governments uphold their obligations and draw upon these to implement or reform policies.

Create the right incentives for school administrators and teachers to not engage in corruption

- Create better working conditions so that teachers have pride in their vocation and school.

Provide for greater transparency

- Increase information to communities, including simple changes such as clear details about school fees and testing processes (see side bar).

Create better public oversight and accountability

- Ensure funds are reaching their intended destination and disbursement levels are on track for the year.

- Establish oversight bodies, such as parents' committees in the management of schools, to help prevent and detect corruption.

TO CIVIL SOCIETY:

Demand governments provide universal education and support communities to claim this right

- Work with governments to fulfil this right by integrating it within development pledges, such as the successor framework to the MDGs.

- Use existing mechanisms to bring relevant information on corruption to these global bodies' attention (see side bar).

Work with the public and school staff to shift their attitudes about bribery

- Create greater awareness on the part of parents and students about the negative impacts of corruption, particularly bribing one's way into a more prestigious school or paying to pass an exam.

- Target anti-corruption outreach to specific groups who make decisions about schooling in a household, such as mothers.

- Get the media – whether print, television, radio or social channels – to play an important role in shifting public opinion about bribery.

A UNIVERSAL RIGHT

The institutional framework of human rights mechanisms provides potential resources for addressing corruption in education.

Anyone speaking out against corruption in education – from individuals to organisations – can submit documented evidence of how corruption or impunity is preventing the realisation of the right to education.

Although these processes are under-utilised in addressing corruption, they have been used to seek effective remedy. For example in 2012 the Committee on the Rights of the Child called upon a state party to consider raising teacher salaries to improve the quality of education and stamp out corruption among instructors.

ABOUT THE SERIES

This policy brief is one of five that has been produced using information presented in Transparency International's *Global Corruption Report: Education*. The report presents more than 70 articles written by experts in the fields of corruption and education, from universities, think tanks, business, civil society and international organisations. The report presents both qualitative and quantitative research to advance our understanding of the dynamics of corruption in the sector and focuses on providing examples of practical solutions. The report is published by Earthscan from Routledge. For more information, see: **www.transparency.org/research/gcr**

NOTES

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all content, facts and figures are drawn from: Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report: Education* (Oxon: Earthscan from Routledge, 2013): Trócaire, ' Countering corruption to achieve universal primary education'; Muriel Poisson, 'International standards and national regulatory frameworks to realise the right to education'; Richard Lapper, 'Understanding corruption in education as a human rights issue'; Transparency International, 'Introduction to the *Global Corruption Report: Education*'; Peter Hyll Larsen, 'Free or free: corruption in primary school admissions'; Stephanie Chow and Dai Thi Nga, 'Bribery for enrolment in desired schools in Vietnam'; and Stéphane Stassen, 'Making oversight participatory: a golden way to tackle corruption?'.
[2] This data is from the 2013 UN report on the MDGs. See http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/News.aspx?ArticleId=75.
[3] Education for All (EFA) is an international initiative to bring the benefits of education to 'every citizen in every society', through a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups and development agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank, committed to achieving six specific education goals. EFA was launched in 1990, and in 2000 two of the EFA goals were adopted as Millennium Development Goals, see www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all (accessed 4 January 2013).
[4] Philip Stevens and Martin Weale, 'Education and Economic Growth', NIESR discussion paper, issue 221 (London: National Institute of Economic and Social Research, 2003).
[5] These include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. See General Comment 13, available at http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/ae1a0b126d068e868025683c003c8b3b?Opendocument.
[6] Sanjeev Gupta, Hamid Davoodi and Erwin Tiongson, 'Corruption and the Provision of Health Care and Education Services', Working Paper no. 00/116 (Washington, DC: IMF, 2000).