

NurJolBer
Kyrgystan
TACKLING CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION
Project Completion Report
March 2008

Background

Until now corruption in the education sector in Kyrgystan has been ignored by the authorities. Reduced State expenditure on education has compelled all institutions to look for their own resources and seek money from wherever they can find it. This often causes them to seek bribes to augment salaries and lack of resources. This situation has no precedent and no regulatory body exists to develop instructions for it. Precisely because there are no rules or regulations governing the provision of education, corruption takes place.

Because of an absence of modern methods and technologies in the selection of students for higher educational institutions, corruption has penetrated the system deeply. Since the structures do not correspond to modern requirements, corruption is a widespread phenomenon in the processes of accreditation, licensing and certification. Textbooks and educational accessories are frequently in the hands of state monopolists; designers and writers of books are selected not on basis of professional competence, but rather on personal relations. Due to corruption, the kind of education young men and women receive is of poor-quality and ineffective.

Inadequate methods of management and imposition of sanctions for professional offences are common. Teachers have gotten used to abusing their position, receiving gifts for performing their duties and receiving bribes in exchange for a good evaluation of certain category of students. These acts would have serious consequences no matter where they happen. But their occurrence in the education sector is especially alarming. Education is a means of strengthening the social unity of the population and if students find widespread corruption in the education system, they will lose faith in their nation's future and come to believe that corruption in public affairs is a normal and acceptable situation.

The objective of this project was to stimulate discussion of the problem described above and to propose solutions. To this end NurJolBer organized roundtables as a forum for discussion, provided training, undertook research and prepared recommendations on ways to reduce corruption which were subsequently discussed with the relevant authorities.

Report on round tables

Six roundtable discussions in Narynskaya oblast were carried out. The purpose of holding the roundtable discussions was to attract the attention of Narynskaya oblast public to the problems of corruption in education and to develop effective mechanisms to counteract corruption based on global practice. The facts about, extent of and the causes of corruption were discussed. The participants included teachers, parents, students, administrators of educational institutions, and representatives of the mass media. A students' debate tournament with the theme "Kinds of corruption in education and ways to prevent them" was held. There was also a speech competition on the following themes: "Corruption in the system of selection to Universities: A Corrupted system of accreditation".

Various ways of eradicating corruption were suggested:

- Toughen the system of monitoring the performance of students and pupils
- On a regular basis, rotate heads of education facilities

- Apply administrative penalties on proven corruption cases
- Raise wages of teachers
- Bring up diligent citizens starting in kindergarten
- Prohibit nepotism

Report on training

Training seminars on ways to prevent corruption in Narynskaya oblast were held for the first time. Thereafter, a good partnership with the department of education was established. The following actively participated in the seminar: teachers, representatives of youth organizations, representatives of law enforcement bodies and education establishments, and the high school student government. The seminars increased the interest of teachers and students in the topic.

The seminar participants stressed that corruption in education has various negative effects. It deprives children of needy parents of the opportunity of attending school, detracts from schools' ability to purchase supplies for their classrooms, and reduces the quality of teaching. As a consequence, the quality of education suffers putting at risk the future for Kyrgyz youth. Public inaction on this issue has catastrophic consequences. There are various reasons for these problems and they are frequently understandable. The most salient reasons are:

- Low wages of teachers
- Falling prestige of the teaching job; low qualification of staff; among others.

To help solve these problems, the seminar participants recommended formulating procedures to make the financing and management of the educational system more transparent, and also to develop public control, through the publication of information on the activities of education establishments in mass-media.

Results of research

As part of its research, NurJolBer undertook monitoring of Oblast schools. This monitoring consisted of round tables with parents, teachers, and students and a survey given to teachers and students at all levels to understand the root causes of corruption. The survey undertaken by NurjolBer revealed that illegal requirements for acceptance to high school, bribery to pass examinations, sale of fake diplomas and other abuses are widespread in Naryn. Another problem identified was the illegal collection of indirect charges, which leads to a decrease in the number of pupils and to the growing number of children who drop out from the schools. The idea of "corruption" is familiar to all. The survey revealed that 49% of the respondents had encountered cases of corruption in their lives. Some 23% of teachers blamed the parents: "Some parents give gifts for holidays in all sincerity, and some parents give gifts for good grades during the quarter. Thus, parents themselves are accustomed to bribery". On the other hand, 69% of the respondents think that both teachers and parents are guilty.

Report of anticorruption action

Anticorruption action under the project "Corruption in the educational system" was carried out on November 9 2007. It started in a public place (near a drama theatre) where a banner photo was shot. The volunteers then visited all schools and hung posters appealing to people to fight corruption. They were also hung posters in all the buildings in the university. In all the educational institution volunteers discussed corruption with various groups of students and teachers. After the publicity, the volunteers set up desks in several public places and distributed leaflets with appeals to fight corruption in the education sector. Pupils and students together with their parents supported the appeals.

Report on the conference

After the registration of participants, and the distribution of materials, the head of NurJolBer, S. Jumalieva, opened the conference. In her speech, she emphasized the urgent need to tackle corruption in the education sector and set out the main issues.

After her speech, the participants were shown slides where they learned about the project, and also on the work being done. Also, participants were briefed about the laws and rules against corruption in Kyrgyz Republic.

Parents and teachers from regions then shared their thoughts. Everyone agreed that corruption should be eradicated from top to bottom. It is necessary for the Government to take a lead, but it is also necessary for the citizens to struggle with this problem within civil society and to speak out. Representatives from the regional department of education promised that from now on schools will not cut money from their budgets intended for the repair of schools. Last year, pupils of elementary classes were also provided with free tea and rolls. The administrator, however, mentioned that the school administration cannot forbid pupil's parents to give gifts to the staff. The parents present at the conference responded that such gifts discriminate against parents who cannot give such gifts.

One of the parents stated that some students never attend classes and appear only during examinations, but they get high grades. They can do that because they give bribes to the teachers or their parents are high-ranking government officials. A representative from Aktalinskiy rayon has noted that, at present, there is a practice of "voluntary" payments in villages, but in practice parents are forced bribes. Both parents and teachers noted that, despite the national test which students are supposed pass to study in the universities, the children of people who have money or authority are favored.

Following these open discussions, the participants divided into four working groups so that they could develop proposed solutions to the problems of corruption in the education sector. The following solutions were offered:

1. Strengthen the work of parental committees to fight corruption by:
 - creating in each region an association of parents against corruption, which would carry out monitoring in each village.
 - explaining the situation to other parents
 - working with law-enforcement and judicial bodies.
2. Carry out monitoring of the quality of study and attendance of pupils and students.
3. Increase teachers' wages
4. Avoid distracting teachers from their main work (teachers are involved in elections and the population census; pupils are involved in the cleaning of streets, which distracts that from their studies)
5. Carry out open examinations for students' entrance to university with the participation of representatives from parents or a committee of parents
6. Carry out a open policy of fighting corruption
7. Amend the anti-corruption law. This law is in the process of being changed and its future is undecided.

After the presentation of proposed solutions, the representatives from the regions expressed their desire to further cooperate with NurJolBer. They also thanked PTF for the funding support. NurJolBer was also asked not to stop the project. It is necessary to work further on this problem. The conference ended by summarizing the results and with the agreement that all parties need to do more in the fight against corruption in Naryn Oblast.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The primary factor in the fight against corruption is the activism of the civil society consistent with the law.
2. It is necessary to hold all educational establishments accountable without exception. Their reports should be published and exposed to an independent expert for appraisal and audit check.
3. The financing and management of the education system should be made fully transparent
4. It is necessary to establish procedures in declaring the financial situation of officials (i.e. a declaration of personal/family assets) - when they are appointed to their post and when they are dismissed from it. This is a useful instrument in the fight against corruption because it will show whether officials have received any undue gain from holding their position.
5. Each school graduate should receive an educational voucher with identical advantage, and should have the right to dispose it at his or her own discretion.
6. Admission to high school should be based on a scientifically applied process for selecting entrants. The applicants should be capable of mastering certain educational programs.
7. Development of a more precise and transparent normative base for the educational system. This means that
8. Schools should have zero-tolerance for all forms of a corruption. They also should provide corruption training, so that they are prepared for the college process, which rife with corruption beginning with application process.

After the Conference of the Naryn City Department of Education, Asan Atabaev, the head of the Naryn Oblast Education Department, promised to stop corruption in the capital's schools. This conference had been sponsored by the Center for Monitoring the Capital's Education in cooperation with the Naryn City Education Department. The Center is necessary for Naryn City. The Center for Monitoring the Capital's Education will revise education system norms and instructions with regard to the apportionment and allocation of resources to fight corruption in the education system.

In Naryn, the Center will update the methods of administration and reporting on school performance. In addition, the Center will also broaden its understanding and use of experience from other countries, which have independently administered tests.

At the Center, there will be a meeting to gather all information on what practically works in the schools. They will collect information through testing and surveying, which will be conducted by the members of NurJolBer. Further, there will be lobbying to fix the laws with regard to the fight against corruption in the education sector. Currently, the volunteers from our organization are gathering cases of corruption in schools throughout Naryn City, and the report will be published

on our NGO's website. In the five regions of Naryn Oblast there will lessons that will be taught in the schools on the theme of anti-corruption.

In the future, there will be a report published in the newspaper Tenir-Too dedicated to the theme of corruption in the educational system. Based on monitoring results, a book will be published, which will feature NurJolBer's work on corruption in the education sector once completed in the Spring or Summer of 2008.