

Afghans See Corruption as Enduring Legacy

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Graft endemic in both local and national government institutions.

Participants in recent IWPR-organised debates in Afghanistan identified corruption as the most enduring legacy of ex-president Hamed Karzai and the post-Taleban era.

Residents of Badghis, Baghlan and Kapisa provinces accused the government of being unable to fight massive corruption in these three provinces because it was itself mired in graft.

Speaking in Baghlan, debate participant Basira Safdari asked Mahmud Akmal, spokesman for the provincial governor, why the local roads were in such bad shape.

Agreeing that infrastructure was below par, Akmal said, "The poor state of the tarmac on the roads is not the Baghlan governor's fault. The fraud originated in Kabul."

But a civil society representative said provincial administrations needed to take responsibility for their own failings.

"We cannot deny corruption exists in local government in Baghlan," activist Abdul Baqer Hussein said, adding that the continuing counter-insurgency war made tackling this problem difficult.

In Kapisa, debate participant Pir Mohammad, from the village in Lukakhel in the Nejrab district, argued that transparency in government projects was the best way to prevent corruption.

One of the speakers accepted that bribery and extortion was endemic in local government departments, particularly in education. Mohammad Naser, representing Kapisa's education department in the debate, said he had little faith that President Ashraf Ghani's newly-appointed finance minister Omar Zakhilwal would bring about fundamental reforms.

In Badghis's Moqor district, Mohammad Aref Baher of the local Youth Association, said education there had been badly undermined by corruption as well as by conflict.

Baher said that most teachers in Moqor's schools were unaware of their rights and were thus employed as contractors rather than full-time staff, which gave them less protection under the law.

"The truth is that education officials not only pay the contract teachers less than they are supposed to, but also bribe them on a monthly basis," he said.

According to Baher, corruption and poor teaching standards have discouraged pupils from going to school.

Mohammad Munir Mehraban is an IWPR editor in Afghanistan.

*This report is based on an ongoing series of debates conducted as part of **IWPR's Afghan Youth and Elections** programme.*

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