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Preventing Corruption in the Education Sector:
International Experiences with Civil Society Involvement

Abstract

Civil society participation in preventing corruption has become crucial and few other development areas are more important in terms of long term development than education for the active and systematic involvement of society. As in any other public service delivery, education is a vulnerable sector for corrupt practices. This policy note highlights why it is important to focus on education, what are some of the consequences of corruption in the education sector for development and what can be done to minimize corruption effects and maximize education gains in human development. In doing so, the note aims to showcase some positive experiences of society's involvement in education, summarize lessons learnt from international experiences and present an anticipatory strategy where society's involvement is placed at the center. Comparative experiences highlight three basic lessons from addressing and implementing preventive corruption measures: transparency and accountability, parents / society involvement, and using education as a tool itself.

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1. Introduction

"People know, people discuss, people do, and people verify" *(dan biet, dan ban, dan lam, dan kiem tra).* This is a well-known Vietnamese phrase that summarizes the importance of society's involvement in the fight against corruption. Few other development areas are more important in terms of long-term development than education for the active and systematic involvement of society.

However, all over the world the education sector faces budgetary asceticism, weak management, low efficiency, waste of resources, poor quality of service delivery, low salaries, and lack of political relevance.

The aim of this brief policy note is to highlight why it is important to focus on education, what are some of the consequences of corruption in the education sector for development and

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what can be done to minimize corruption effects and maximize education gains in human development. In doing so, the note aims to showcase some positive experiences of civil society's involvement in education, summarize lessons learnt from international experiences and present an anticipatory strategy where civil society's involvement is placed at the center.

2. Corruption, Education and Human Development

It is widely recognized that corruption is one of the major obstacles for development, as it diverts scare resources away from those most in need, reduces the quality of service provision, becomes a burden on the poor (as a regressive tax), discourages investment, may make political systems lose legitimacy and potentially undermines trust and social cohesion. Even though Viet Nam has made genuine efforts to deter corruption, including a series of directives, decrees, decisions and laws promulgated by the Party, the Government and the National Assembly, little attention has been devoted to the extent to which corruption affects the quality of public services, and little is known about the extent of corruption in the education sector.[1]

In the past few years, civil society organizations in Viet Nam have made valuable contributions to corruption prevention. In particular, there have been closer linkages between the people and media, and a surge of anonymous denunciations through official government, newspapers and blog websites. An example of the closer linkages between the people and the media is the "bribery for school entry" case in Le Quy Don Upper Secondary School in Ho Chi Minh City. This case can be divided into three main stages: (i) 1998-2006, with no involvement of media, (ii) in 2006 people denounce and Thanh Nien newspaper investigates and disclosed the case prompting the Inspection of Education and Training Department to take action, and (iii) civil society organization and the media monitor and evaluate the settlement of the case where it was found a parent paid US$2000 as school entry-fee resulting in the dismissal of the school's head (Dinh Cu, 2007). However, the results achieved in the education sector "are not yet high and remained formalistic" (Dinh Cu, 2007:9).

It can hardly be contested that development needs education, not corruption. More so, considering human development as capability expansion and a process of enlarging people's choices – including to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated (to acquire knowledge) and to enjoy a decent standard of living (UNDP, 1990) – then if these essential choices are not available, or lack certain minimum levels of quality, many other opportunities will remain inaccessible. Corruption, on the other hand, reflects a social and institutional deficiency that limits the expansion of choices and capabilities and hinders development. Corruption in the education sector can be defined as the systematic use of public office for private benefit, whose impact is significant on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and as a consequence on access, quality or equity in education (Hallak and Poisson, 2007).

International conventions and norms[2] that have been ratified by Viet Nam, refer to the importance of education in

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[1] Data on corruption in Viet Nam remains limited and scattered. The majority of assessments are based on cross-country surveys and internationally managed datasets. A unique snapshot of the types and causes of corruption in the country is provided by the "diagnostic" survey/study on corruption, carried out by the Central Committee of International Affairs in November 2005. Yet, while this has been a pioneering effort in the country, still little is known about the extent to which corruption affects public services and the pervasive effects it has on the education sector in the long run.

[2] For example, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (articles 13, 14), the Convention on the Rights of Children (art. 28(1) a), the Convention on Discrimination against Women (art. 10), and the Millennium Declaration to which Viet Nam has committed.

development. Moreover, Viet Nam constitutionally guarantees education as a right.[3] In addition, the 2005 Anti-Corruption Law specifically requires publicizing of certain information and transparency in the education sectors. For example, article 23 of the Law requires transparency in enrollment, examinations and granting of diplomas, as well as disclosure of educational funds used by management bodies and educational institutions supported by the state budget.

Therefore, as a key responsibility of the State and society, and as the foundation for all further learning, education carries profound individual and social benefits. It also matters for poverty reduction and drives progress towards all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Thus the education sector has a key role to play as it educates younger generations on the values that underpin good governance, promotes a culture of positive engagement and respect, develops skills for constructive debate and enhances development in the long run.

Education matters for development as it increases the capabilities and choices of individuals. It expands choices to lead lives people value and have reasons to value, and is a vehicle for self-esteem and empowerment as it widens choices and gives access to other rights. Moreover, education has political, cultural, economic and social positive effects. In political terms, it increases civic participation in community activities, trade unions and local politics. Culturally, it enhances attitudes and norms and improves individuals' ability to engage with one's culture. Socially, better knowledge

improves opportunity for social mobility, for accessing healthcare and family planning, and enhances HIV/AIDS prevention. And economically, education provides high returns on investments, allowing the harnessing of business opportunities

3. Education: A Vulnerable Sector for Corruption

Despite the benefits and importance of education for human development, it is a vulnerable sector for corruption and requires strong accountability and transparency mechanisms, including society's involvement at all levels. In most countries, education is the largest or second largest state budget item, and therefore opportunities for corruption are greater. In Viet Nam, as shown in Graph 1, education and training constitutes the largest expenditure among all social and economic services (about 12% of the State budget during the period 2000-2004), higher than pension and social relief (approx. 9%), general public administration (approx. 7%) and health care (approx. 3%).

Considering these large amounts, it is not difficult to understand why as a sector with high visibility and representation all the way down to the community level becomes an attractive target for patronage and manipulation. Moreover, a considerable amount of education funds are spent in small amounts, across scattered sites, and at different levels – most of which have weak accounting and monitoring systems. Indeed, given the decentralized nature and structure of education programs, decisions perceived to have significant consequences for people's lives are made by "gatekeepers" who control decisions at each level of the educational sector.

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[3] Article 59 of the Political Constitution of Viet Nam establishes that "Education is a right and obligation of citizens. Primary education is to be compulsory and free of charge. Citizens have the right to general and vocational education in various forms. The State and society encourage gifted pupils and students in their studies with the view to develop their talents. The State is to adopt policies on tuition fees and scholarships. The State and society are to provide conditions for handicapped and other specially disadvantaged children to enjoy appropriate general and vocational education."

Graph 1. Viet Nam: State Budget Expenditure (2000-2004) (Bill. VN Dong)
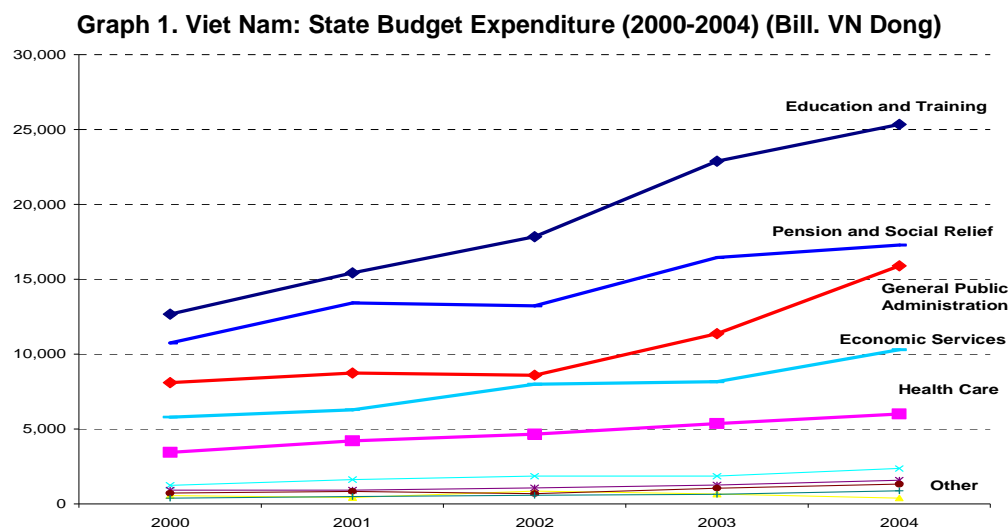
Source: GSO. www.gso.gov.vn

Corruption in education is not a new phenomenon. For decades, a variety of "distortions" in the use of education resources have been detected and noted all over the world (including in developed and developing countries). Given the size of the sector, corruption is prone to occur at different levels, from high-ranking officials to education administrators and school teachers. The actors are many and the nature of exchanges varies considerably across levels, actors and contexts (see Table 1).

Table 1: Corruption in Education: Levels of Occurrence, Actors Involved and Nature of Exchanges

Level of Occurrence	Level of Education	Actors Involved	Nature of exchange
• Ministry • Region–district • School–community • Classroom	• Primary • Secondary • Higher • Distinction public / private education • Distinction formal / informal education	• Private supplier – administrator • School staff – administrator • Student – administrator • Student – faculty • Student – non-teaching staff	• Administrator driven • Faculty driven • Non-teaching staff driven • Student driven • Locating agents with monopolistic powers

Sources: Adapted from Hallak and Poisson (2007)

Examples of these "distortions" include in appointments, deployments and payments to teachers; "ghost teachers"; in production and distribution of textbooks; in private tutoring; in the private use of official property; fraud in the use of aid targeted at education; illegal fees for admission, school maintenance and equipment; and misallocation of talents, among others. Some known forms of corruption in the education sector are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Some Known Forms of Corruption in the Education Sector

	Embezzlement	Bribery	Fraud	Extortion	Favoritism
Definition	Theft of public resources by public officials	Payment (cash or in kind) given or taken in a corrupt relationship	Economic crime that involves some kind of trickery, swindle or deceit	Money and other resources extracted by the use of coercion, violence or threats to use force	Mechanism of power abuse implying 'privatization' and a highly biased distribution of state resources
Family of Terms	Misappropriation, diversion, leakage, capture of funds	Kickbacks, gratuities, pay-offs, speed and grease money	Forgery, smuggling, counterfeit	Blackmail, informal taxation	Nepotism, cronyism, "clientelism," bias
Examples from education sector	Educational funds used for political campaigns School funds diverted for private interest	Bribes paid to be recruited as a teacher Bribes paid to be admitted to university	Ghost teachers Paper mills and diploma mills	Illegal fees collected to be admitted to school Sexual harassment for promotion	Recruitment of administrators based on their membership of organization Good marks obtained due to favoritism

Source: Hallak and Poisson (2007), adapted from Amundsen (2000).

On the other hand, Table 3 summarizes various types and forms of corruption within the education sector based on comparative literature. These typologies highlight the diversity and vulnerability of the sector from blatant illegal acts of bribery or fraud to corruption in procurement, misappropriation of educational property, corruption in accreditation, and corruption that involves students as agents, which has a direct influence on their values and beliefs.

Table 3: Typologies of Forms of Corruption within the Education Sector

Chapman	Tanaka	Heyneman	Rumyantseva
• Blatantly illegal acts of bribery or fraud • Actions to secure a modest income by people paid too little or too late • Actions taken to get work done in difficult circumstances • Differences in cultural perspectives (e.g. gift-giving) • Behavior resulting from incompetence	• Procurement • Educational administration • Teachers' corruption in classroom	• Corruption in procurement • Corruption in educational property and taxes • Corruption in selection • Corruption in accreditation • Professional misconduct • Corruption in services / academic corruption	• Corruption that does not involve students as agents and has a limited effect on them • Corruption that involves the students as agents and has a direct effect on their values, beliefs and life chances

Sources: Hallak and Poisson (2007), adapted from Chapman, 2002; Heyneman, 2002; Tanaka, 2001; Rumyantseva, 2005.

4. Consequences of Corruption in the Education Sector

The consequences of not preventing corruption in the education sector are complex and multiple, and will in the long run negatively affect the quality of development. In sum, it can be said that the lack of accountability and societal involvement in schools leads to high drop out rates, increasingly high levels of poverty, and limits opportunities especially for girls. It also lowers the quality of teaching (i.e., poor school achievement), deepens inequality and widens the gap between rich and poor. Other consequences include limiting generations of individuals from pursuing meaningful futures, reinforcing cycles of poverty (especially for girls, women, and minorities), petty corruption and loss of parental confidence in the legitimacy of service providers.

The effects of not properly dealing with corruption in the education sector undermine all growth and development efforts (including well-being and social trust). Quantifying its costs is a daunting task and may not be relevant for the purpose of this brief policy note. However, it is important to understand these costs (i) are a heavy burden on poor parents; (ii) are a strain on the education budget which deprives students of needed material and an appropriate learning environment; (iii) impact the quality of teaching, allowing less qualified teachers and administrators to reach undeserved positions; and (iv) results in students who are poorly skilled, adding less value to the economy and public sector during their professional life, and (v) violates granted basic rights. As a recent Transparency International report puts it:

> *"Perhaps the highest cost of corruption in education is loss of trust. If people (especially the young) come to believe that school or university admission and marks can be bought, a country's economic and political future is in*

jeopardy. The education sector – rightfully – is expected to be fair and impartial. School should transmit concepts of political representation, human rights, solidarity and the public good. Corrupt practices at schools and universities directly contradict these concepts, destroying the trust that is necessary to the development of communities"[4]

5. What Can Be Done? A Multi-Pronged Approach to Prevention

Accountability, access to information and society's involvement are crucial areas in preventing corruption. To prevent corruption in the education sector, a tripartite approach creating and maintaining transparent regulatory systems, strengthening management capacities for greater accountability and enhancing ownership of the management process is needed (Hallak and Poisson, 2007). There is a need for clear norms and regulations, transparent procedures and an explicit policy framework detailing for each of the steps involved, the distribution of responsibilities between different stakeholders in the allocation, distribution and use of educational resources. Moreover, improving educational skills (i.e management, accounting, monitoring and audit) are basic for reducing corruption in the sector. Better training not just for teachers and administrators, but for other stakeholders like parent-teachers associations. And last but not least, access to information for the public at large is central for building participation, ownership and social monitoring.

There are no magic recipes to combat corruption effectively, and what has worked in other contexts will not apply to all. However, there are five common and basic components that cut across different successful strategies to prevent

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[4]   Meier and Griffin (2005).

corruption. At the core of these five components is public involvement in planning, implementation and monitoring. Preventing corruption requires interventions at different levels, and the combined efforts of policy makers, administrators, teachers, students and parents. In sum, teachers play a crucial role; community participation in school management is unquestionable and valuable as it increases ownership (yet needs to be complemented with capacity building to ensure effective control); public awareness must be raised at all times; and financial accountability which builds trust in school administration.

As with any successful strategy, diagnosis and planning are crucial first steps. Identifying and defining corruption norms (formal and informal) at the local context, locating the parts of the education system prone to corruption and identifying key players are useful starting points; essentially a detailed understanding of local norms and practices. In addition to defining formal information such as legal frameworks and organizational structures, informal information sources need to be available, including from teachers, students, administrators, parents and local people.

Figure 1. Preventing Corruption in Education Sector: A Multi-Pronged Strategy
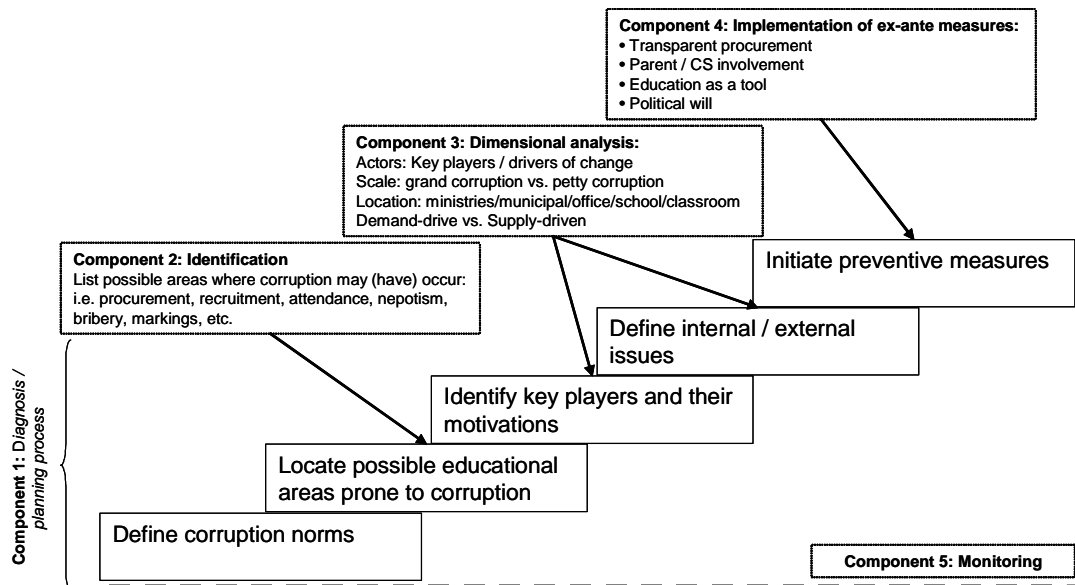
Source: Adapted from Tanaka, 2001.

A second component relates to identification. Once enough information (formal and informal) on norms and behaviors has been collected and processed, a preliminary list of possible areas where corruption is prone to occur or has happened in the past, can be located and clearly identified. In general terms, the diagnosis may hint to weak spots in procurement processes, recruitment, teacher's corruption in classrooms, and so forth. With a clear picture of the above, the third component

of the strategy involves a dimensional analysis. That is, identify key players and drivers of change, the scale and scope of corrupt practices (i.e. petty vs. grand) and the different levels at which it might happen (see Table 1) and its gender aspects. Analysis of scale can reveal endemic and systematic practices, while location analysis includes physical spaces, as well as teachers and administrators with monopolistic powers. At this stage of the preparatory process internal and external issues must be

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identified. This includes for example, the examination of whether corruption involves trade of bribes and favors, or pure exploitation. It identifies whether corrupt practices are behavioral practices or due to a lack of accountability and monitoring systems.

The fourth component refers to the actual implementation of ex-ante (prevention) measures. After addressing the previous steps/components, any implementation should be anchored in the local institutional settings and implemented considering the proposed measures may vary from case to case. Examples of anticipatory measures include transparent procurement, parents/community involvement, using education as a tool itself and strong political will. And last but not least, component 5 refers to the need to constantly and permanently monitor the education sector. The societal role in this component is unquestionable. Figure 1 outlines the different steps and components of such a strategy and highlights key areas for consideration.

6. What Has Been Done Elsewhere: Some Examples[5]

Political commitment is a must have condition to address corruption in education. Governments need to be heavily involved, otherwise schools will continue to transmit a culture of corruption to succeeding generations – undermining all other anti-corruption initiatives. Some countries have been able to approach the issue in a comprehensive and effective manner. Practice shows that Governments can tackle corruption in education through much closer supervision and by allowing communities more control over schools, through parent-teacher associations and other local organizations.

In El Salvador, a local initiative in the early 1990s decentralized decision making at the school level in rural areas. El

Salvador's Community-Managed Schools Program was initiated by the Ministry of Education with the support of parents and teachers associations, and local NGOs. The program, which envisages a self-managed form of education, was intended to address coverage and quality problems in rural areas. In each school, there is autonomous management by an elected Community Education Association, drawn from the students' parents. In these schools, the associations are contracted by the Ministry of Education to deliver given curriculum to an agreed number of students. They are then responsible for equipping and maintaining the schools, as well as for contracting, supervising (and dismissing) teachers. The Ministry expanded the autonomous model to all of its 4,000 elementary and middle schools. The results show that families and communities are much more involved with schooling, therefore quickly detecting and preventing corrupt behaviors that may hinder their children's education.[6]

In many countries, textbook printing, procurement and delivery is plagued by theft, patronage and favoritism. To tackle this, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Argentina in 2003 streamlined the procurement process of more than 3 million textbooks, distributed to all provinces and benefiting almost 2 million students. The effort included open debates about the terms of reference for procurement, conflict of interest guidelines and the signature of an Integrity Pact. These transparency tools contributed to ensuring fair selection of school textbooks. For example, 48 publishing houses participated in the textbook procurement process. An advisory commission recommended more than half, 20% were not recommended and 30% were found not to match the conditions established under the terms of reference. In sum, the process enabled a large number of publishing houses to benefit from the purchase.[7]

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[5] This section borrows from UNDP (forthcoming).

[6] Further information on EDUCO can be seen at www.unesco.org/education/poverty/el_salvador.shtml

[7] See Meier and Griffin (2005), p. 16-23.

Most rural schools in Rajasthan, India have only one teacher so when the teacher is absent children miss an entire day of school. Because the villages are often remote it is difficult to monitor attendance and the absentee rate has been over 40%. The NGO Seva Mandir came up with a novel solution – requiring teachers to take a photo of themselves with the students at the beginning and end of each school day – using cameras with tamper-proof date and time functions. They randomly selected 60 to serve as treatment schools and another 60 as a control group. Teachers received a salary of about US$ 22 if they were present for at least 21 days in a month, and a bonus of US$ 1 for each additional day but were penalized US$ 1 for each day they were absent. In the control schools, teachers simply received a monthly salary of US$ 22, but were reminded that they could be fired for poor attendance and warned that each month there would be unannounced school visits. The results were striking. The schools with cameras made dramatic improvements and increased the number of child-days taught per month by one-third. The experiment was also cost-effective: average salaries in both groups were similar, though this did not include the costs of cameras and program administration – annually around US$ 6 per child.

It has been estimated that the incidence of corruption in Bangladesh is the main factor that has caused public sector primary education to become almost dysfunctional in the country. To tackle these dysfunctional levels, CARE Bangladesh initiated in 2002 a programme aimed at increasing the access and educational achievement of poor children in school. The programme in particular aimed at increasing access to basic education for the poor and marginalized, especially girls, improving Quality and Relevance of basic education, and enhancing the education system through increased Accountability and Capacity building.

The project improved school governance by strengthening the school management committees (SMC) and making them active in proper administration and management of the schools. Additionally, Mothers Groups and PTAs also actively participated and contributed to school improvement activities. SMCs became actively involved in the enrolment process and ensured that the actual number of children enrolled was recorded in the school register (an earlier tendency to inflate the enrolment with false numbers.) Community groups were empowered to articulate their grievances and received significant support from the local government (the actual number of SMC meetings in primary target schools doubled in one year). Some measures to improve the attendance issue for teachers were implemented, including, recruiting more teachers for vacant posts, issuing warning letters to teachers with long absenteeism, and taking action against sub-contracting by other teachers. With these measures in place, the incidence of irregular or unaccountable absences by teachers was halted. In sum, citizens learned the value of collective action, and that their efforts to secure a better education for their children could be successful.[8]

In some schools in Indonesia corruption in the management of funds has been minimized by the involvement of parent associations which decide on the use of these funds and monitor them to ensure that they reach their intended destination. At the beginning of the school year, school officials meet with representatives of the parents association to agree on an annual plan, then during the academic year provide them with a detailed accounting of expenditures. The system works because the use of these funds is highly structured, expenditures are transparent, and the community attaches considerable importance to the system and takes pride in its success.

Following the devastating earthquake in 2005, most primary schools in the

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8   CARE Bangladesh (2004).

Manshera district of Pakistan were totally destroyed. Some of the teachers were displaced, but others also used the earthquake as an excuse for absenteeism. This is a recurrent practice in countries prone to natural disasters like hurricanes and floods. A local NGO managed to get a number of schools functioning again by mobilizing local opinion. The NGO contacted leaders such as imams and elected representatives and encouraged them to put pressure on teachers. The NGO also organized workshops with teachers, local counselors and clerics where they emphasized social and religious responsibilities for education and children's rights. Almost all the teachers participated in the workshops, and within two months of the earthquake most primary schools in the district were functioning again.

7. Conclusions: Lessons Learnt

As in any other public service delivery, education is a vulnerable sector for corrupt practices. However, the long-run consequences of corruption in this sector are of outmost importance to development. Education is a right, and for poor people, it is a tool to escape poverty. While for countries, it is crucial to growth and well-being. Corruption in education can have devastating effects on a country's development.

Table 4. Lessons Learnt from Comparative International Experiences

Transparency and Accountability	Parents / Society involvement	Education as a tool
• Education expenditures & budgeting • Procurement • Recruitment • Teachers attendance	• Monitoring and auditing • Self-control • School accreditation and curricula • Role of civil society in pushing the fight against corruption is unquestionable • Role of media indispensable	• Long run social benefits • Rely less on external controls • Rely more on self-motivation and self-discipline

Strong political commitment is the starting point and base for sustained reform

Comparative experiences highlight three basic lessons from addressing and implementing preventive corruption measures. Transparency and accountability are crucial, including education expenditures and budgeting, procurement, school administration and teachers' attendance. Parents / society involvement is a second pillar. Their involvement increases ownership and responsibility from all actors, promotes self-control, improves school accreditation and curricula, and fosters collaborative monitoring and auditing mechanisms. A third pillar relies on a "win-win" approach using education as a tool itself. Education may transmit values such as integrity, equality and social justice, as well as the sense of shared responsibility that is key to social cohesion and good governance. Yet, strong political commitment is the starting point and base for sustained reform.

These lessons learnt are an indication of what is possible. What works in one country may not work in another. Tackling corruption must be done in a comprehensive manner, taking into account local norms and regulations. Practical experience shows that importing strategies may prevent corruption in the

short-term; yet, in the long run it merely shifts corruption from one level to another. No single intervention will be sufficient itself, rather than more successful approaches, it is crucial to have a more comprehensive knowledge of the problems (root causes) with incentives, supervision, sanctions and participation.

To sum up, while the introduction of this note highlighted the famous Vietnamese phrase that people know, discuss, do and verify, the narrative confirmed its importance when addressing corruption in the education sector. The proposed approach and lessons learnt from comparative experience showcase the importance of comprehensive and positive approaches to curb corruption. Therefore, the proposed multi-pronged strategy centers around the principles that students should focus on their studies, teachers on quality teaching, families to care about their teachers and society to monitor school performance and management.

Jairo Acuña-Alfaro[*]
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