

## Kuwait Transparency Forum 2013

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*Integrity in Education*

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I would like to sincerely thank the organisers of this event, the Minister of Education and my dear colleagues and friends at the Kuwaiti Transparency Society for this invitation.

At the TI Secretariat, we are particularly proud of KTS, which is an active Chapter of the TI movement, and of their tireless efforts to promote integrity and transparency in all spheres of life in Kuwait.

I think it is particularly fitting that this conference focuses on this subject at this point in time here in the Arab world. For a long time, learning in the Arab world took the form of rote learning, where children learned and repeated things by heart, and were not encouraged to think creatively and critically. This is now changing; partly as a result of the internet and social media, but also because of the changes in the political landscape, where children are learning that many viewpoints exist around a subject and that in many cases there is not necessarily one single interpretation. It is essential that this development takes place, since it is this new approach, this new way of engaging, which will encourage the younger generation to take more initiative and more responsibility. It is only by taking responsibility for our actions that we can really bring about change. In my experience of more than fifteen years of working on the governance issue, I often encountered the attitude "Ah yes, we have corruption, but not right here." Corruption was always somewhere else; in another ministry, another department, another part of the country or even in the neighbouring country. Very few people were ready to accept responsibility, and without that responsibility, there is no accountability.

Good integrity education at an early age is an investment in the future of a country, just as fundamental as its physical infrastructure. Children who are confronted by corruption and a disregard for human rights in their early childhood and at school, may not develop an appropriate sense of integrity and a respect for human rights. They may become accustomed to corruption and the disregard of human rights, and consider corrupt practices a natural part of social interaction.

We at Transparency International take the issue of the integrity of educational systems so seriously, that we dedicated our Global Corruption Report this year to the issue of corruption in education. Corruption in education is particularly burdensome for the poor, who, according to the 2010/2011 Global Corruption Barometer, are twice as likely to be asked to pay bribes for basic services as wealthier people. Transparency and strong accountability mechanisms make it harder for corrupt school officials and university staff to disguise this corruption.

Identifying and eliminating corruption in the education sector is essential to ensuring that learning opportunities are not undermined. Our national chapters have undertaken numerous initiatives to fight corruption in all levels of education. Activities range from providing legal assistance to witnesses of fraud in higher education in Fiji, to initiating an intensive public expenditure monitoring

project on school education in Rwanda, to helping universities create integrity plans in Bosnia Herzegovina.

Transparency International also believes that a huge potential in combating corruption in education lies in education itself- that is, teaching an anti-corruption viewpoint in the classroom and lecture hall. With nearly a fifth of the world's population between 15 and 24 years old, young people have the potential to stop corruption, both as citizens today but particularly as the leaders of tomorrow.

The education sector is particularly vulnerable to corruption; in many countries of the world, it constitutes the largest element in the public sector, in some cases accounting for over a fifth of total government public sector expenditure. Large sums of money are disbursed through complex administrative layers, inadequately monitored from central government to schools. In Nigeria, for example, this allowed at least 21 million USD to be lost over two years, and double that amount in Kenya over five years. Foreign aid to basic education of approximately 5.8 billion USD per year flows to countries that are often least equipped to manage those funds and ensure that it reaches those who most need it.

Recent developments, such as the increase of higher education students worldwide from 32 million in 1970 to 159 million in 2008, have led to new challenges and risks. Public resources have not been able to keep pace with change, and increasing competition for university places has increased the pressures on institutions and staff, which in turn inevitably affects oversight and control.

There are many different types of corruption in education. Corruption in schools can include procurement in construction, 'shadow schools' and 'ghost teachers', bribery in access to education and nepotism in teacher appointments, private tutoring in place of formal teaching, and sexual exploitation in the classroom, to name just a few examples.

So, what can be done to tackle all these challenges? As with any sector, corruption in education is less likely in societies in which there is broad adherence to the rule of law, where there are strong accountability mechanisms in place and where there is an independent media and an active civil society. One overarching recommendation of the *Global Corruption Report: Education* is the need to reach a better understanding of education as an essential tool in itself in the fight against corruption. The social role and value of the school and the teacher must be placed at the forefront of education policy and anti-corruption efforts. Teachers are often the first targets of corruption allegations, but this is often the cause of corruption at the higher level. Leadership and political will, robust transparency frameworks, access to information laws which cover public education data, accountability systems in public institutions and codes of conduct in schools and universities are just a few elements which can help ensure greater integrity in education.

Enforcement, such as enhanced powers of parliamentary committees in ensuring preventive measures, and whistleblower legislation to protect those who speak out, are also imperative. Citizens also need to demand their right to an education free of corruption. There is no one single remedy for tackling the enormous challenge of corruption in the education sector. Strategies to fight corruption need to be tailored to national contexts, and all concerned stakeholders need to work together in order to bring about genuine and sustainable change over the long term.