

Despite fewer people paying bribes, the total corruption cost increased to US\$ 3.9 billion

7 February 2013 Kabul (UNODC) – Since 2009, Afghanistan has made some tangible progress in reducing corruption in the public sector. Despite fewer people paying bribes, the total corruption cost increased to US\$ 3.9 billion. This is an increase of 40 per cent in real terms between 2009 and 2012. In 2012, half of Afghan citizens paid a bribe while requesting a public service, says a joint High Office for Oversight and Anticorruption (HOO) and UNODC survey on trends and patterns of corruption in Afghanistan, released today.

“The bribes that Afghan citizens paid in 2012, equals double Afghanistan’s domestic revenue or one fourth of the Tokyo pledge. Nobody doubts the seriousness of the issue, the art is to design the correct strategy to remedy the situation. The findings of the survey will allow us to do so”, said Mr. Jean-Luc Lemahieu, UNODC Regional Representative.

Nearly 30 per cent of Afghan citizens paid a bribe when requesting a service from individuals not employed in the public sector of Afghanistan in 2012, as opposed to the 50 per cent who paid bribes to public officials. The national economic impact of non-governmental bribery is also lower, with an estimated total cost of US\$ 600 million, some 15 per cent of the total cost of bribes paid to the public sector, says the survey.

The public sector is most affected by bribery in the Western (where 71 per cent of the population accessing public services experienced bribery) and North-Eastern Regions (60 per cent), while it is least affected in the Southern (40 per cent) and Central (39 per cent) Regions. On the other hand, local individuals and entities not employed in the public sector of Afghanistan, such as village elders, Mullahs and Taliban groups, are more involved in bribery in the Southern region (nearly 60 per cent of those who had contact with such individuals).

“Afghans know that corruption is eating at the fabric of their society. The solution is not only to be found within the Government but also within the wider community. Having the support of our Goodwill Ambassador, popular and respected Afghan public icon, Mr. Farhad Darya to this end, proves powerful in our public campaigning”, said Mr. Lemahieu.

While corruption is seen by most Afghans as one of the most urgent challenges facing their country, it seems to be increasingly embedded in social practices, with patronage and bribery being an acceptable part of day-to-day life. For example, 68 per cent of citizens interviewed in 2012 considered it acceptable for a civil servant to top up a low salary by accepting small bribes from service users (as opposed to 42 per cent in 2009). Similarly, 67 per cent of citizens considered it sometimes acceptable for a civil servant to be recruited on the basis of family ties and friendship networks (up from 42 per cent in 2009).

The survey was based on a representative sample of 6,700 Afghan citizens aged 18 and over interviewed across Afghanistan. Of the respondents, 42 per cent, were women.

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