



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



# **CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN**

**Bribery as reported  
by the victims**

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## COMMENTARY BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Poverty and violence are usually portrayed as the biggest challenges confronting Afghanistan. But ask the Afghans themselves, and you get a different answer: corruption is their biggest worry. As revealed in this new UNODC report, for an overwhelming 59% of the population the daily experience of public dishonesty is a bigger concern than insecurity (54%) and unemployment (52%).

President Karzai has recognized that corruption is destroying the country. At the inauguration of his second term in November 2009, he rightly identified “*ending the culture of impunity and strengthening integrity as key priorities*” for his new administration. The political will and the analytical tools to make a statistically robust survey of grand-scale profiteering in Afghanistan are not yet available. Therefore, this report looks at the problem of corruption in Afghanistan from a different perspective. It takes a bottom-up look at a problem that affects Afghans on a daily basis: bribery. Yet, this survey, by including some large bribes -- payments of \$1000 and above, i.e. more than twice the country’s per-capita income -- to an extent does capture some serious corruption cases.

Unlike other corruption reports, this one is not based only on perceptions: in other words, it does not only measure shadows

filtered through individual discernment and discontent. It quantifies the actual crime, as reported by the victims. This is the real thing, based on interviews with 7,600 people (a reliable sample) in 12 provincial capitals and more than 1,600 villages around Afghanistan.

### A helping hand, not pointing fingers

This report was not conceived to embarrass or bash Afghanistan, or to point fingers at particular situations. There are three good reasons for this.

- First, no country is free of corruption. Indeed, in so many countries around the world (rich and poor) similar surveys indicate that corruption is peoples’ greatest concern.
- Second, the UNODC ethos is based on constructive engagement: we provide ground-level diagnoses in order to help find national remedies. When it comes to strengthening integrity in governance, our aim is to help Member States implement the world’s only universal legally-binding instrument: the United Nations Convention against Corruption.
- Third, in order to make progress, countries need an honest assessment of where they stand -- no *ifs* and *buts*. By identifying gaps, countries gain a better

idea of what new legislation and measures are needed, and what technical assistance is required.

This survey was conducted, and the report written, with precisely these goals in mind.

### ***A costly part of everyday life***

According to this report, it is almost impossible to obtain a public service in Afghanistan without greasing a palm: bribing authorities is part of everyday life. During the past 12 months, one Afghan out of two, in both rural and urban communities, had to pay at least one kickback to a public official. This was not just done through a wink and a nudge: more than half of the time (56%), the request for illicit payment was explicit by the service providers. In most instances (3/4 of the cases), *baksheesh* (bribes) are paid in cash. The average amount was \$160 – in a country where GDP per capita is a mere \$425 per year. This is a crippling tax on people who are already among the world's poorest.

The problem is enormous by any standards. In the aggregate, Afghans paid out \$2.5 billion in bribes over the past 12 months – that's equivalent to almost one quarter (23%) of Afghanistan's GDP. By coincidence, this is similar to the revenue accrued by the opium trade in 2009 (which we have estimated separately at \$2.8 billion). In other words, and this is shocking, drugs and bribes are the two largest income generators in Afghanistan: together they amount to about half the country's (licit) GDP.

To make things worse, in Afghanistan those entrusted with upholding integrity and the law are seen as being most guilty of violating them. Around 25% of Afghan citizens had to pay at least one bribe to police and local officials over the past year. Between 10-20% had to pay bribes to judges, prosecutors, doctors and members of the government. A kickback is so commonly sought (and paid) to speed up administrative procedures, that more than a third of the population (38%) thinks that this is the norm.

Bribery not only robs the poor and causes misallocation of resources. It destroys trust in government. When people, who earn less than \$2 a day, have to bribe their way into basic services, they lose confidence in the system and look for alternative providers of security and welfare. As demonstrated in other parts of the world, under such circumstances the social contract is torn apart: loyalty is lost and discontent can erupt into violence.

Not surprisingly, most Afghans have no confidence that the state is able or willing to tackle their problems. Despite the fact that, when queried by UNODC surveyors, they were all firm as to the severity and the frequency of the crime, only 9% of the urban population has ever reported an act of corruption to authorities. This suggests that people are either (i.) unaware of what recourse to take, (ii.) distrust those who are supposed to help, or (iii.) feel that there is no point in reporting unlawful behaviour to people who are seen as part of the problem (63% of responses).

### ***Pricing out traditional social stabilizers***

Afghan society has been traditionally held together by patron-client relations -- perhaps more so than in other countries. For centuries, the social contract of favours and loyalty *offered and acquired* in exchange for financial (and other) rewards, have strengthened tribal cohesion and imparted respect for the leaders. In recent time, these relations have been transformed precipitously by the rapid influx of vast drug (and aid) monies. Unprecedented resource flows have created *a new cast* of rich and powerful individuals who operate outside the traditional power/tribal structures and bid the cost of favours and loyalty to levels not compatible with the under-developed nature of the country.

The old patron-client relations, including the services provided by public administrators, have been affected in scope, breadth and depth -- transformed into a monumental, perverse and growing machinery for criminal graft:



- its size (a quarter of GDP) has acquired macroeconomic dimension and has become complementary to, and often profiting from other illicit activities;
  - its growth is confirmed by about two thirds of the respondents to this survey, according to whom the corruption problem at present is worse than in earlier times;
  - its perversity risks shattering social relations. In southern Afghanistan, for example, a number of those surveyed complained that even the village elders, having heard complaints about corruption, no longer turn in the villains, or open a public debate aimed at finding solutions.
- (ii) Members of the government (much more than those sitting in Parliament) are also perceived as villains. Corruption in their ranks was rampant last year: Afghans were asked to pay a bribe 40 percent of the times that they had contacts with senior politicians. A political system operating under such corrupt conditions cannot survive.
- (iii) This survey did not address the question of possible foreign involvement in fomenting corruption in Afghanistan. Yet it makes a stunning observation: over half of the Afghans (54%) believe that international organizations and NGOs, the transmission belts of foreign assistance, “are corrupt and are in the country just to get rich”.

With the very foundation of traditional Afghan justice (administered by the village *shura*) weakened, the recourse to more violent forms of retribution (the Taliban *sharia*) becomes treacherously appealing.

### **Bad examples**

What can be done? First and foremost, the broad political establishment has to lead by example. At the moment this is not happening. In fact, there are perverse multiplier effects throughout all levels of government.

- (i) To begin with, bribery and abuse of power are particularly significant among the police (much more than among the army) and the judiciary. Those appointed to uphold the law get the most severe moral indictment by the survey respondents: as mentioned, 25% of Afghans had to pay a bribe to police officers over the past year, 18% had to bribe a judge, and 13% a prosecutor. In some cases this may be the result of need: the Afghan police are notoriously underpaid. But greed also plays a major role: over half all large bribes (\$1,000 or more) were pocketed by enforcement officers (especially judges and prosecutors) as well as police, customs officials and local authorities. To put it vividly, the average Afghan has to work more than two years to afford such a sum.

- (iv) *In many countries, particularly where the rule of law is weak, national media acts as a watchdog on good governance.* This does not seem to be happening in Afghanistan. Country-wide, 43% of city dwellers say that the media rarely addresses corruption issues. In the South, two thirds indicated that corruption is seldom, or never, in the news. Considering that corruption is the greatest public concern, there is surprisingly little public debate about it: a circumstance that the vast majority of those surveyed consider as a serious impediment to remedial action. The international media, though not directly covered in this survey, has been greatly appreciated for keeping the spotlight on this issue.

### **Cancer treatment**

The x-ray imaging provided by this report shows that the cancer of corruption is metastatic in Afghanistan. It will lead to a terminal condition, unless chemotherapy to reduce the chances of further infection (preventive measures) is combined with surgery to remove the biggest infected nodules (the key villains). The therapy most widely recognized around the world is based on the UN Convention against Corruption. Since President Karzai has indicated his willingness to administer this

tough medicine (Afghanistan is now a party to the Convention), let us see what this would mean in concrete terms.

(I) To begin with, the preventive measures outlined in the Convention must be urgently implemented.

- As a priority, Afghanistan needs an independent, fearless and well funded anti-corruption authority. The government's integrity drive should give the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption (which enjoys relatively high public trust) the tools to do the job. UNODC, that has provided large-scale assistance to even bigger countries affected by equally widespread corruption, can help build capacity for such a suitable authority.
- The appointment of governors and district leaders must include a negative corruption pledge (i.e. the commitment to be guided by unassailable integrity standards). The vetting of officials must be pursued to the greatest extent, including the use of polygraphic technology if necessary. The removal of governors with proven records of collusion with shady characters must be one of the administration's key priorities.
- People holding public service positions should disclose their incomes and assets, as required by the UN Convention. Let's see how senior officials can afford flashy cars and fancy villas with salaries of less than \$500 a month! There is plenty of evidence that the seizure of assets whose licit origin cannot be established is a powerful deterrent to crime. While the executive power must face its responsibilities, Parliamentarians must also practice what they preach – including ridding itself of its members with poor integrity records.
- Since many Afghans (40%) pay bribes to cut through the red tape of administrative procedures that they do not understand, or to cope with poor quality service, as a priority administrative procedures should be made more user-

friendly, and public services made more accessible and service-oriented.

- Again in compliance with the UN Convention, there must be full transparency in public procurement, tendering processes and political campaigns. Regulation of financial institutions (including the *hawala* system) should be tightened in order to prevent money laundering.
  - The media, civil society and educators must become more engaged in anti-corruption campaigns to help change a culture of corruption into an environment of integrity. Religious and tribal leaders – who are the most respected members of society – need to spread the word.
  - The Afghan government and the donor community need to take a hard look at salary levels and structures for public officials. If civil servants were paid a living wage, they could be held to higher standards, and they would have less excuse for providing shoddy service.
- (II) In legal terms, anti-corruption surgery translates into the application of the broad array of criminal justice measures included in the Convention.
- “*Cleaning up the new administration*” (the media jargon so frequently used to spur the government into action) means, first, for the Parliament to adopt the necessary legislation to criminalize bribery, embezzlement, money-laundering, abuse of power, illicit enrichment, and obstruction of justice. For the Attorney General this means resolve to prosecute suspected cases. Senior officials should not stand in the way, and should protect the victims of corruption rather than the perpetrators.
  - The proceeds of crime must be confiscated. Since much of the money stolen through corruption (and other crimes) is smuggled abroad, Afghanistan should take advantage of measures in the UN Convention to strengthen international

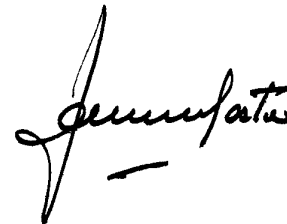
cooperation, via extradition, mutual legal assistance and joint investigations. The World Bank/UNODC Stolen Asset Initiative (StAR) has demonstrated vitality to chase corrupt monies hidden abroad.

- At the moment, the Afghan people are under the impression that it is cheaper to buy a judge than to hire a lawyer. I urge the Chief Justice to undertake disciplinary measures among the judiciary to ensure that Afghanistan is ruled by the law rather than the bribe.
- International aid providers need to improve resource effectiveness, to prevent squandering their tax-payers money, as well as to impart a good example for Afghanistan's budgetary processes.

### **Not quick or easy, but necessary and possible**

Strengthening integrity in Afghanistan -- like in other countries plagued by corruption -- will not be quick or easy. Yet it is both necessary and possible. President Karzai has called for strong measures: it's time for his administration to implement the UN anti-corruption Convention in deeds, not just in the formality of the ratification process.

Fighting corruption is an un-avoidable journey. Afghanistan's path is rockier than most, but its Government cannot and must not do it alone. Fighting corruption in a country already ravaged by poverty and violence must be a high priority for the Afghan government and for the international community. With political will, the right laws, and effective vetting of public officials, corruption will be curbed. Simply, there is no alternative.



Antonio Maria Costa  
Executive Director  
UNODC





## SURVEY KEY FACTS

- *Citizens of Afghanistan have to pay bribes on a routine basis when dealing with public officials: 52% of adult Afghans had to pay at least one bribe to a public official during the last 12 months. On average, victims of bribery reported they had to pay almost 5 kickbacks per year.*
- *In three quarters of cases bribes are paid in cash and the average amount paid was US\$158. The average amount was significantly higher in rural areas than in cities: US\$166 and US\$139, respectively.*
- *In 2009 Afghan citizens had to pay approximately US\$ 2,490 million in bribes, which is equivalent to 23% of country GDP.*
- *Bribery is not evenly distributed across the country. The most affected areas are located in the north and south (respectively 62% and 61%). East-central regions are less affected (53%), while western areas have recorded the lowest prevalence of bribery (21%).*
- *Paying bribes is a frequent experience both in urban and rural areas of the country: overall, the prevalence of bribery is somewhat higher in rural areas than in towns (respectively 56% and 46%).*
- *In urban areas, prevalence of bribery is inversely proportional to city size. A higher incidence of bribery is recorded in small towns, while the lowest figures were recorded in the large cities, such as Kabul and Hirat.*
- *Prevalence of bribe paying is significantly higher for men than for women: 53% and 39% respectively in urban areas. Even if less frequently than men, a significant share of women had to pay bribes to civil servants. In some sectors, notably health and education, women had to pay bribes more frequently than men.*
- *The sectors most affected by bribery are the police, courts and customs: when such officers are contacted by citizens they request a bribe in around 50% of cases. Requests of bribes were slightly less frequent for citizens contacting municipal and provincial officers, members of the Government and cadastre officers (around 40% of cases).*
- *The amounts paid in bribes differ between categories of public officials: on the lower end (less than US\$100 per bribe) are teachers, doctors and nurses. On average, officials belonging to the police, local authorities, tax/revenue agency and land cadastre requested bribes between US\$100-200. Judges,*

- prosecutors, members of the Government and customs officers are at the higher end of the scale (average bribes higher than US\$200).
- Public officials use their position by requesting bribes to speed up administrative procedures (74% of cases) or to make their finalization possible (51%). Data show that the bribe system is often beneficial to both public officials and citizens: for example citizens pay bribes to avoid payment of fines (30%) or to receive better treatment (28%).
  - As a result of the pervasiveness of such practices, many citizens are deeply worried: when asked to select the most prominent problem for the country, 59% of the population indicated corruption, followed by insecurity (54%) and unemployment (52%).
  - Corruption is perceived to be on the rise by many citizens, especially in rural areas: 80% of rural dwellers reported that in their eyes corruption had significantly increased over the last 5 years (40% in urban areas).
  - Corruption erodes trust in public officers and the state: most citizens believe that a bribe is always needed to obtain a public service (72% of respondents) and they have lost trust in public services (65%). International organizations and NGOs are not exempt from this negative picture: 54% of the population believed that such organizations were corrupt and were in the country just to get rich.
  - There is widespread perception regarding the gravity of corruption but, at the same time, there can be a different understanding about what corruption is. For example, many citizens consider it acceptable that civil servants ask for gifts or money to speed up administrative procedures (38%) or that a civil servant is recruited on the basis of family ties (42%). Social acceptance of certain practices represents fertile ground for corruption.
  - Another factor contributing to corruption growth is the perceived weakness of institutions that should fight corruption. Only 9% of population ever reported an act of corruption to a public authority. In most cases (63%) the reason for not reporting is that it would be useless as nobody would do anything about it.
  - Non-transparent administrative procedures and services of low quality also represent possible sources of dishonest conduct: two thirds of citizens stated that they do not have the necessary information to understand the administrative procedures and almost half of respondents were not satisfied with the treatment received by civil servants.
  - Corruption flourishes in the silence. An open and frank debate is a formidable way to nurture antibodies to fight corruption. Traditional opinion leaders, such as tribal elders and mullahs, regularly address corruption-related issues but not everywhere: in the South, for example, 52% of respondents reported that community leaders rarely or never address corruption publicly. Moreover, 43% of the population reported that the media deal with corruption rarely or never.

# **CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN**

**Bribery as reported  
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## CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN

### Background

Corruption is one of the most significant factors undermining peace building in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Compact and the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) both cite corruption as a major impediment to the country's development. A recent United Nations Security Council Resolution mandated the UN to work "to improve governance and the rule of law, and to combat corruption." Moreover, the resolution "*Notes with strong concern* the effects of widespread corruption on security, good governance, counter-narcotics efforts and economic development, and *urges* the Afghan Government, with the assistance of the international community, to vigorously lead the fight against corruption, and to enhance its efforts to establish

a more effective, accountable and transparent administration." (S/2009/9624).

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoA) has committed itself to fight corruption and several key steps have already been taken, including ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) on 25 August 2008, finalization of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS), and establishment in 2008 of the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption (High Office). In his inaugural speech in November 2009, President Karzai addressed the issue of corruption as follows:

*The Government of Afghanistan is committed to end the culture of impunity and violation of law and bring to justice those involved in spreading corruption and abuse of public property. Doing so will require effective and strong measures. Therefore, alongside an intensified judicial reform, all government anti-corruption efforts and agencies have to be strengthened and supported. Particular attention will be given to building the capacity and upgrading the High Office of Oversight for the Implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy. Measures for supporting the anti-corruption agencies include: increasing the scope of their authority, improving their capacity and resources for detection and investigation, expanding their organizational structure, as well as reforming the relevant anti-corruption laws and regulations*

The increased focus on corruption recently has created a window of opportunity to achieve significant anti-corruption progress through policy change, law and institutional reform and capacity-building. In this context, an evidence-based assessment of bribery and corruption should serve the dual purpose of assisting the GoA in identifying priority areas and providing a benchmark to measure future progress in the fight against corruption.

This survey, which was conducted in consultation with the Government of Afghanistan, supports an evidence-based approach to anti-corruption reform in Afghanistan. Existing information on corruption is largely confined to perception surveys, a useful but incomplete tool. This survey

goes beyond perception by also gathering information on respondents' individual experiences of corruption. It asks how often respondents have encountered – and acquiesced to – demands for bribes in the course of their daily lives.

As the guardian of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, UNODC has a special responsibility to help State Parties - - of which Afghanistan is one -- to meet their obligations under the Convention. One of the ways to do so is by helping countries undertake analytical research on corruption, a crucial element to formulating country-specific remedies.



## Introduction

Like every other country in the world, Afghanistan struggles daily to effectively prevent, control, and punish corruption. In Afghanistan, however, the challenges in this battle against corruption are particularly daunting, and the stakes are extraordinarily high. Afghanistan is at a critical moment in its history, and the battle against corruption is a battlefield upon which key aspects of the country's future may be determined.

In order to understand how devastating the impact of corruption can be on the lives of ordinary Afghan people, it is important to understand how challenging daily life is in this beautiful but troubled country.

Stability in Afghanistan – where it exists – is terribly fragile. Security is a daily concern for Afghan people, and even those living in more secure areas of the country face a fluid and volatile security situation that sees rapid changes, often for the worse. Central government control is tenuous, especially in rural areas and parts of the country that are the scene of conflict with insurgents. Access to even the most basic of government services – health, education, electricity – is tenuous at best and often unavailable. Complicating matter exponentially is the extreme poverty of

Afghanistan – a country struggling with some of the most daunting statistics in the world for literacy, maternal mortality, food security, and life expectancy. In this context, simply to survive from one day to the next is a terrible challenge for many people.

So why is corruption an issue of such importance in a context where millions of people struggle simply to feed, clothe, educate and protect their children? Corruption is of critical importance in Afghanistan because it is an obstacle to people being able to feed, clothe, educate and protect their children. As this survey describes, encounters with corruption are so pervasive in the lives of Afghan people – at both rural and urban levels – that corruption may literally determine whether parents can afford food and clothing, whether a child is admitted to school, and whether a family can enjoy the protection of law enforcement actors.

On an individual and family level, the prevalence of corruption described in this survey creates the daily challenges, as people struggle to afford bribes and to form the right connections that can help them to successfully navigate corrupt bureaucracies. On a community level,

corruption undermines faith in local government actors and strengthens local non-governmental structures that are not accountable to the people, to democratic structures or to the rule of law. On a national level, pervasive corruption undermines the entire sense of Afghanistan as a nation.

The lack of confidence in Government actors that results from both experiences and perceptions of corruption threatens the very stability of Afghanistan. If ordinary Afghans are, because of corruption, unable to obtain services and protection from the Government – or able to do so only through bribery – the Government of Afghanistan will not have the support it desperately needs from every community across the country if it is to win its battle against the Taliban insurgency. For this reason, corruption is not an issue that can be deferred for after pressing matters of security, health, nutrition and education have been addressed. Corruption is at the heart of all of the difficulties that Afghan people are encountering today, it is at the heart of Afghanistan's current challenges and instability, and it must be at the heart of all peace building efforts in Afghanistan.

### **The scope of this study**

Corruption is often defined as ‘the use of public positions for private gain’. In practice, corruption manifests itself in multiple ways and several types of behaviour can be considered forms of corruption, including bribery, embezzlement, abuse of power and nepotism.

One useful distinction can be made between political and administrative corruption. The former refers to acts of corruption perpetrated by high-ranking politicians and decision-makers, while the latter concerns offences committed by lower-end public officials, that is, those responsible for administrative procedures and services that are provided to the public. Political or grand corruption often receive greatest attention because of its visibility

and impact on decision-making processes and (mis)allocation of resources. The negative impact that administrative corruption (or petty corruption) can have on the socio-economic development of a country is sometimes underestimated. Administrative corruption can represent a major threat to the rule of law and create a heavy economic burden for households and businesses when it is perpetrated on a large and pervasive scale.

This report presents the major findings of a large-scale survey on individuals and households about their experience of bribery as victims, and their perception of corruption. This research has investigated the form of corruption with the heaviest impact on population – bribery – and it provides an overall assessment of its prevalence and modalities. It includes an assessment of bribery incidence in the various sectors of public administration and an analysis of possible factors underpinning corrupt practices. The study also aimed at exploring Afghans’ awareness and understanding of the issue.

Various actors, both at the national and international level, are committed to increase the understanding of the scope and types of corruption in Afghanistan and some research has been undertaken in this area. However, few studies so far examine the problem comprehensively, using sound methodologies. Surveys with limited geographic focus and larger development studies entailing corruption as one of their elements are available<sup>i</sup> as are a limited number of individual surveys focusing on corruption in a comprehensive manner<sup>ii</sup>

This survey was conducted in Afghanistan from August to October 2009. Respondents from 12 towns and more than 1,600 villages were randomly selected and interviewed. Overall, more than 7,600 persons were interviewed (see *Methodological annex, Chapter 7*). For operational reasons, two parallel surveys were conducted, in rural and urban areas of the country. A few themes were included only in the survey conducted in urban areas, which explains

why for some topics statistical data are available for cities only. The difficult operational conditions of Afghanistan posed some limitations to the design and the implementation of the survey, yet care was taken to ensure the highest possible standards during all phases of data collection, processing and analysis.

## 1. Prevalence of bribery

A major finding of this survey is that citizens of Afghanistan, in their contacts with public officials, are often obliged to pay extra money or give a gift to finalize or accelerate an administrative procedure to obtain a service or a document. 52% of the adult population had to give at least one bribe to a public official in the past year. Evidence from the survey also suggests that this share may be higher since respondents were sometimes reluctant to discuss bribes: more than 10% of respondents preferred not to answer the direct question on the payment of bribes (figure 1).

Citizens of Afghanistan have to pay bribes on a very frequent basis. According to survey results, victims of bribery had, during the previous 12 months, been required to give money to an average of 2.4 public officials on an average of two occasions. This means that each adult Afghan who reported the payment of at least one bribe in practice had been forced to pay almost 5 bribes in a year, more than one bribe per quarter. Pay-

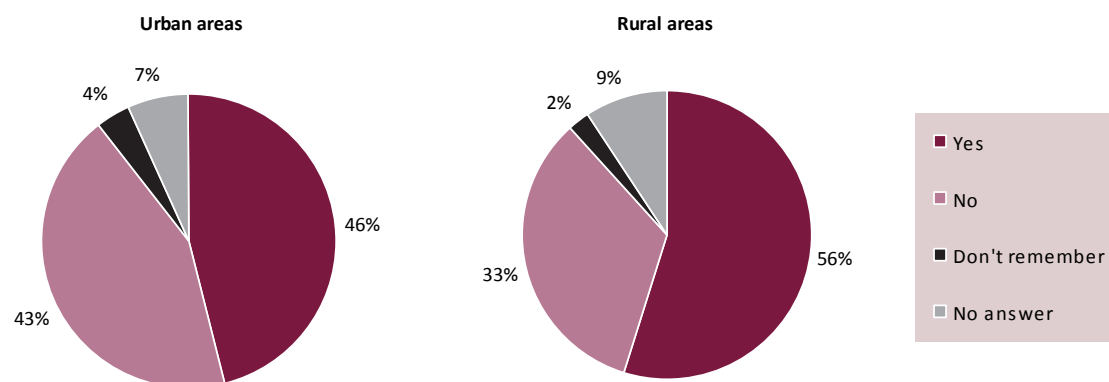
ing kickbacks is indeed part of daily life for most citizens of this country.

Contrary to what has been observed in many other countries, where corruption appears to be primarily an urban phenomenon, paying bribes is a frequent experience both in urban and rural areas of Afghanistan. Overall, the incidence of bribery appears to actually be higher in rural areas than in towns (56% and 46%, respectively).

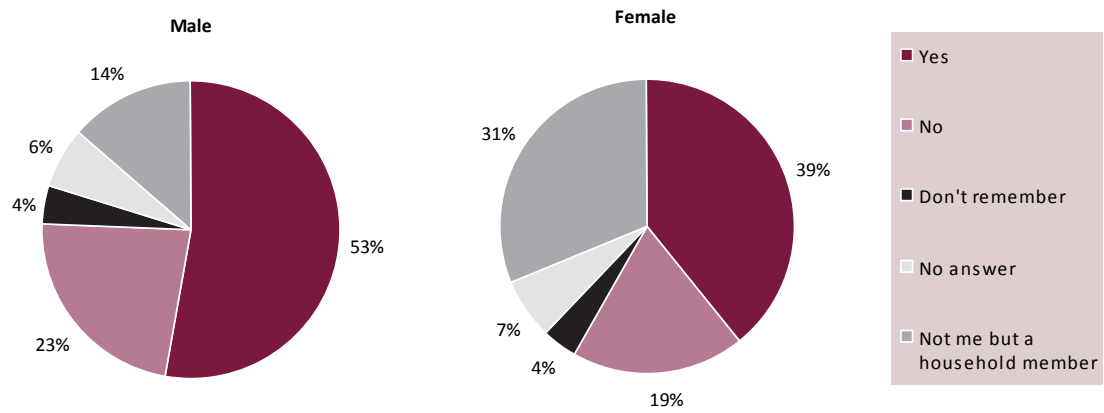
It should be noted that the rural survey included only men, while both women and men were interviewed in urban areas. If the comparison is restricted to men only in both contexts, the proportion of those who paid a bribe in rural and urban areas is very similar (56% in rural areas and 53% in urban areas).

A high prevalence of bribery in rural areas is remarkable when considering that citizens interact less frequently with public officials and the public administration at large in rural areas. Survey data indicate that about 22% of farmers surveyed had no contact with public officials in the year preceding the survey. The corresponding percentage in urban areas was 9%, suggesting that people living in towns may have been more frequently exposed to requests for bribes.

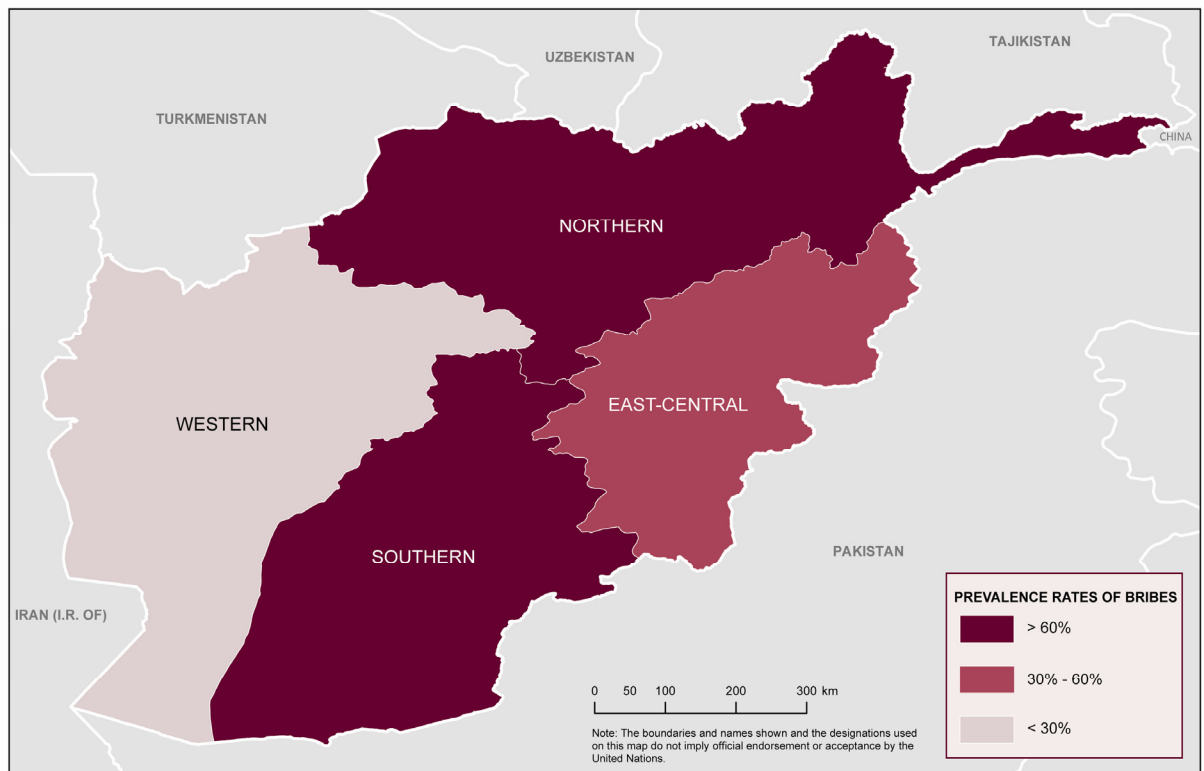
**Figure 1: Percentage of the adult population who paid at least one bribe to a public official during the last 12 months, by urban/rural areas**



**Figure 2: Percentage of adult population who paid at least one bribe to a public official during the last 12 months, by gender (urban areas)**



**Percentage of adult population who paid at least one bribe to a public official during the last 12 months, by region**



In addition to persons who directly paid a bribe to a civil servant in urban areas (46% of the population), some 23% of respondents indicated that although they did not pay a bribe themselves, another member of their household did so in the year preceding the survey. It can be concluded that in urban Afghanistan more than two thirds of households had to pay at least one bribe in the last 12 months (figure 2).

### Geographic patterns

Prevalence rates for payment of bribes are not uniform across the country. Remarkable differences exist, with the most affected areas located in the north and south of the country (respectively 62% and 61%). East-central regions appear to be slightly less affected (53%), while western areas have the lowest share of population who had to pay at least one bribe in the last year (21%). While the prevalence of bribery in the western region is relatively low, it should be noted that this region also contained by far the highest proportion of respondents - almost one quarter - who did not remember or preferred not to respond to the question about payments of bribes (table 1).

Looking at local-level data, it is clear that the local context plays an important role in

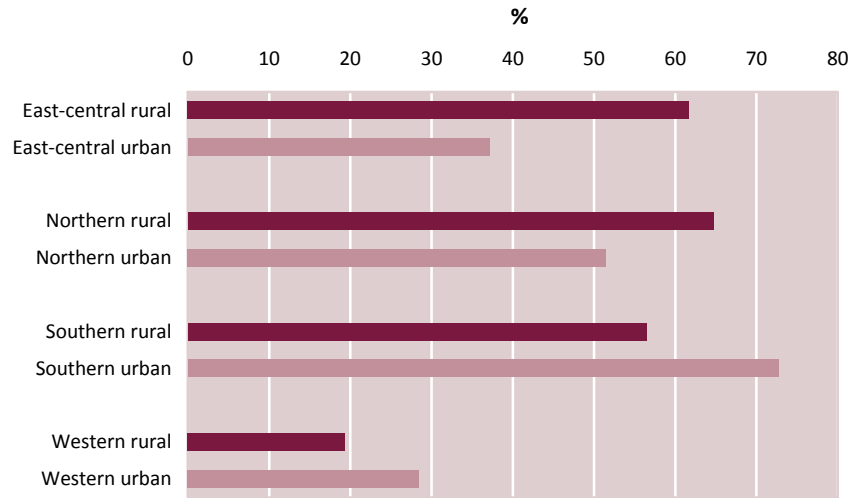
shaping levels and patterns of bribery. For example, in the four regions of Afghanistan, there are important discrepancies in bribe levels between urban and rural areas (figure 3). Moreover, there is no clear pattern to be discerned: in two regions (western and southern) cities show a higher prevalence of bribery than rural districts while the opposite is true in the other two regions. It appears that local factors - from the political power balance to the economic, social and administrative infrastructure – have a significant impact on the prevailing corruption modalities and levels.

A clearer trend can be outlined when limiting the focus to urban areas: survey results show that the prevalence of bribery is inversely proportional to city size (figure 4). A higher incidence of bribery is recorded in small towns (for example, Tirin Kot and Mihtar Lam recorded bribe prevalence rates of more than 70%), while the lowest figures were recorded in the large cities (less than 40% in Kabul and Hirat). It appears that bribery “mechanisms” are more firmly established in smaller cities, with deeper integration into existing practices and social relations.

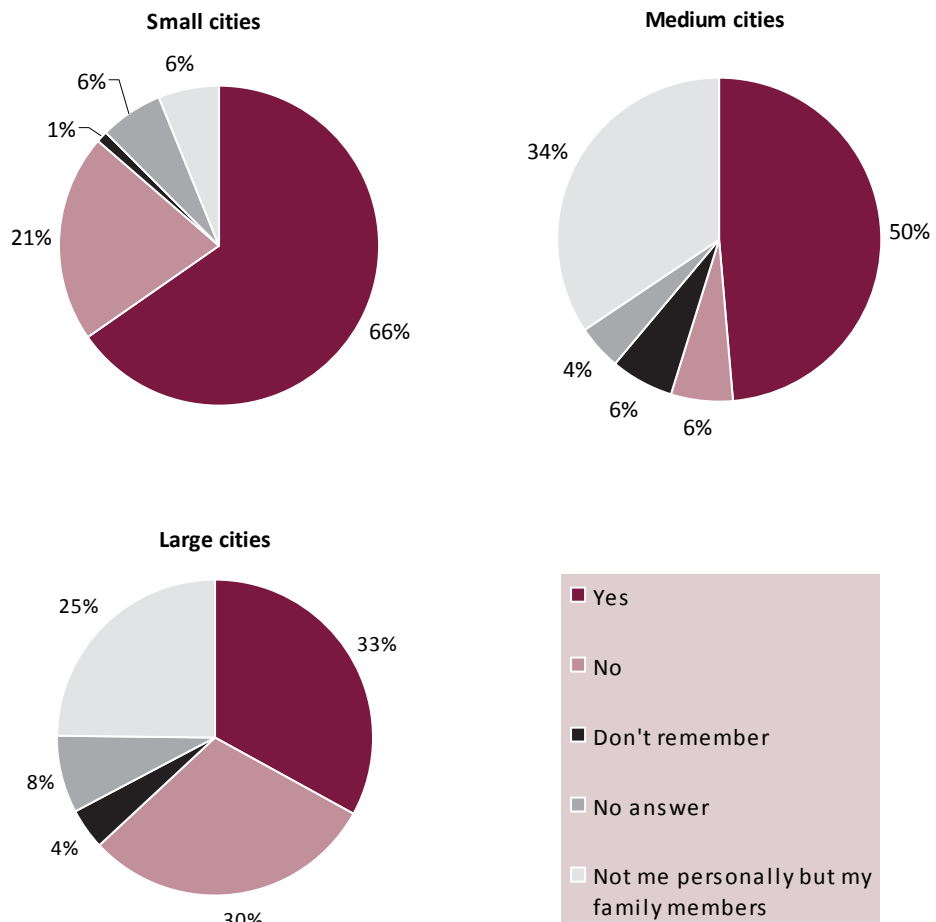
**Table 1: Percentage of adult population who paid at least one bribe to a public official during last 12 months, by region**

	Yes	No	Don't remember	No answer	Total
East-central	53.1	36.6	1.9	8.4	100.0
Northern	60.9	30.5	3.8	4.7	100.0
Southern	61.5	28.5	2.0	8.1	100.0
Western	20.7	55.8	4.9	18.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>52.2</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Figure 3: Percentage of adult population who paid at least one bribe to a public official during the last 12 months, by region and urban/rural areas**



**Figure 4: Percentage of adult population who paid at least one bribe to a public official during the last 12 months, by city size (urban areas)**





## Profile of victims

Although bribery in Afghanistan occurs in all geographical areas and affects all socio-demographic classes, some differences exist in terms of the probability of having to pay a bribe among population groups. The prevalence of bribe paying is significantly higher for men than for women: 53% and 39% respectively in urban areas. This may be due to gender roles that assign to men greater responsibility for dealing with public administration. Nevertheless, the percentage of women who had to pay bribes is significant and shows that female household members often take care of administrative procedures as well. In

particular, women have to pay bribes more frequently than men to officials in the health and education sectors (for example, doctors, nurses and teachers).

Different social strata of the population have different levels of exposure to solicitations of bribes. Looking at levels of income and education, the groups at the lowest and highest ends of the spectrum report the highest prevalence of bribery (figure 5). In fact, the two population groups that are most different in terms of personal and economic resources register similar levels of experience with bribery.

## Experiences of bribery: quotes from survey respondents

**During the survey fieldwork, many respondents referred to actual cases of bribery they had directly or indirectly experienced. This selection of quotes from interviewed citizens provides a vivid portrait of the many forms of corruption common in Afghanistan.**

*'We sell different goods on the streets here. The head of the police for this area has appointed a person who is responsible for collecting money from us and give it to him.'*

*'[The] permit office for the municipality is another corrupt department. Officials want about 18,000 dollars from traders when they want to start a new business.'*

*'Police heads are taking a percentage from each payroll of their subordinates.'*

*'The mayor has distributed plots to his family members and he has taken a number of shops in the commercial markets for approving the construction of the building.'*

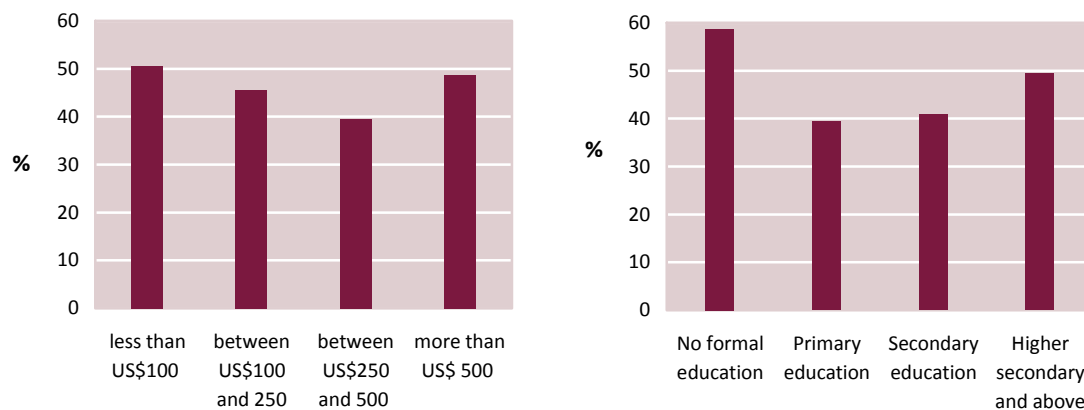
*'There are people known as Employed on Commission in front of each government building...They approach people saying that they can solve any kind of issue in a short time and then they quote the price. For example, if you need a passport or the driving licence or paying taxes and customs duties they can give you the final receipt which has been processed through all official channels in matter of days which takes usually weeks. Then he takes money and of course he will distribute it with those who are sitting inside offices.'*

*'Officials from the Education Department are looting money for books and stationary that are supposed to be given to schools on provincial and districts levels.'*

*'My cousin runs a medical practice. Some expired and low quality drugs were found in his medical and a procedure was started by the Health Department. Later he bribed the head doctor and his file was clean within a day. My cousin is still selling the expired and poor quality drugs made in Pakistan, under the label of Germany and US Made.'*

*'People are a bit scared with the recent announcement of Karzai that his new government will fight all kinds of corruption. This news should turn into reality soon otherwise people will start again with large scale corruption.'*

**Figure 5: Percentage of adult population who paid at least one bribe to a public official during the last 12 months, by monthly income and education attainment (urban areas)**



## 2. Nature of bribes

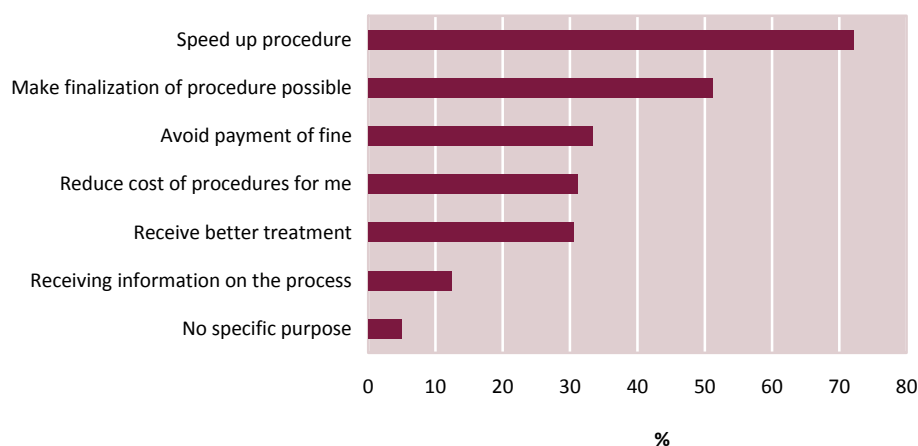
According to data from the urban survey, bribes are usually not paid for a single purpose but for a number of reasons (figure 6). In the majority of cases, Afghans need to pay bribes in order to speed up lengthy and unclear administrative procedures (74%) or to finalize procedures (51%)<sup>iii</sup>.

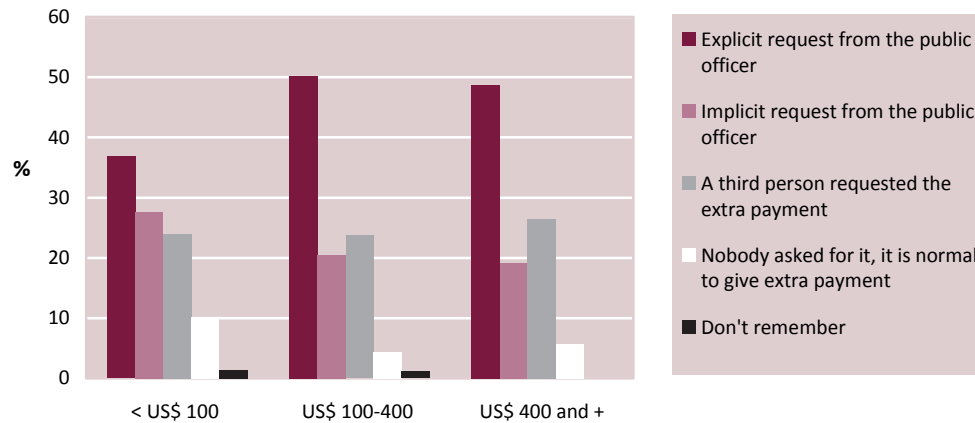
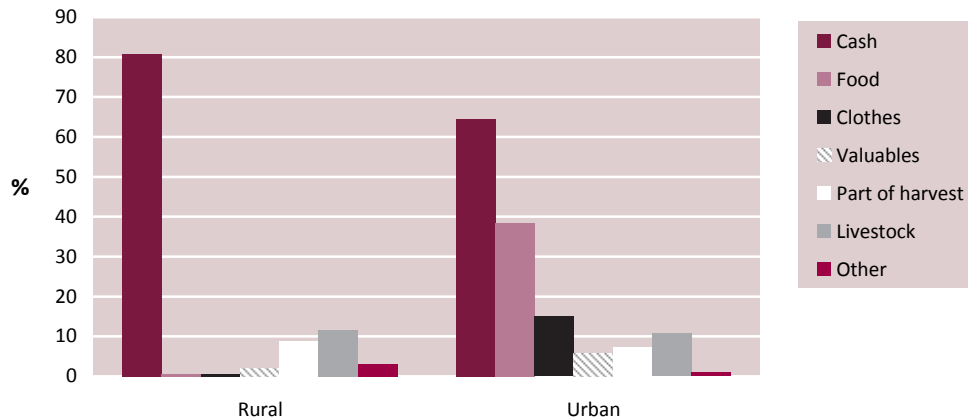
In many cases, the bribe system seems to be of mutual benefit for public officials and citizens: for example, citizens indicate that they pay bribes to avoid paying fines (30%) or to receive better treatment (28%).

Even if paying bribes could be considered ‘normal’ the bribe mechanism still requires

a request from public officials to citizens in need of their assistance. The request for a bribe can be either explicit (56%) or implicit (33%). When looking at bribes paid in cash, the percentage of explicit requests increases with the value of the bribe (figure 7). Also, in a significant number of cases (one quarter) the extra fee is solicited by a third person. This suggests that corrupt officials often set up a system to have another actor request the bribe in order to minimize the risk of being accused of corruption.

**Figure 6: Bribes paid by purpose, as percentage of bribes paid (urban areas)**



**Figure 7: Percentage of bribes paid by request method and amount paid (urban areas)****Figure 8: Percentage distribution of bribes paid in the last 12 months by typology and urban/rural areas**

The existence of an established and well-known mechanism regulating bribery is confirmed by the timing of the payment: in most cases (51%) the payment occurs before the ‘service’ is provided by the public official. In one third of cases, the payment takes place at the time when the service is provided, or partly before and partly after. In less than 14% of cases, the bribe is paid after the assistance has been provided. Thus, the payment may rarely be considered as an ex-post reward or gift from some satisfied customers.

### Economic dimension of bribery

In most cases bribes are paid in cash (around 76%), but ‘baksheesh’ are also given in other forms, with difference in

patterns between rural and urban areas (figure 8). In urban areas, the bribe often consists of more than one item, be it cash, food or other goods. When more than one item is offered, the main component of the bribe is typically cash. In urban areas, food is often added to bribes paid in cash, likely in an effort to make bribes appear to be part of ordinary social relationships. In many cases, rural dwellers use parts of their harvest or livestock to pay bribes to public officials.

The average amount paid per bribe was US\$158, if considering only bribes paid in cash during the 12 months prior to the survey. The average amount was significantly higher in rural areas than in cities: US\$166 and US\$139, respectively.

Taking into account that each victim of bribery on average paid 4.8 bribes in the last year, it can be estimated that US\$2,490 million were paid in bribes by adult Afghans last year<sup>iv</sup>. This is equivalent to some 23% of national GDP. In other terms, it is as if each citizen of Afghanistan, including children and the elderly, had to pay a bribe of US\$100 each year. These data underline the fact that bribery not only constitutes a major threat to the rule of law but also has an extremely heavy impact on households budgets.

### 3. Bribery in the public administration

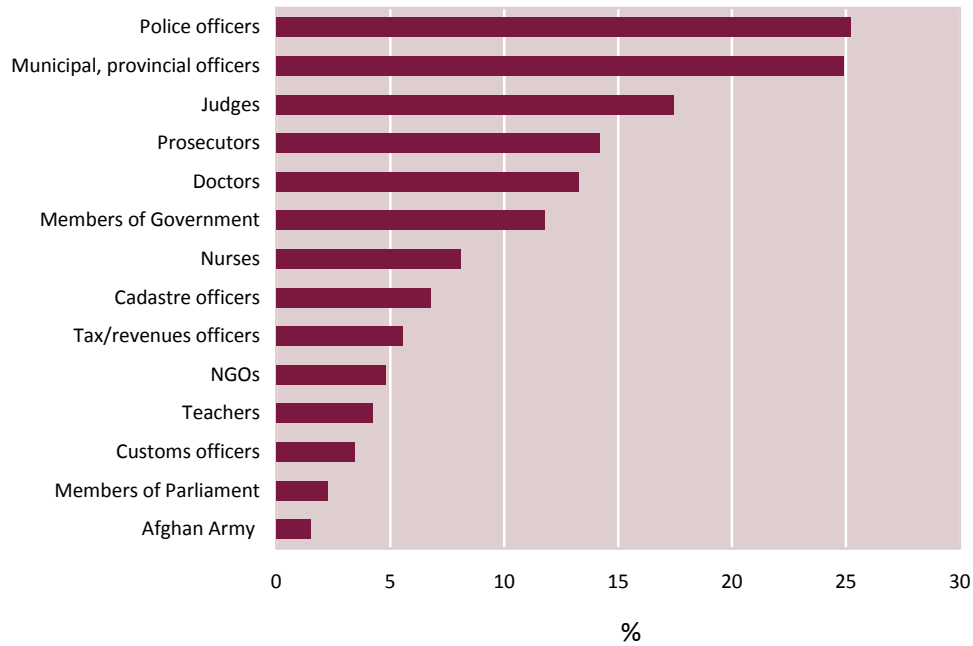
The various sectors of the public administration are differently affected by bribery (figure 9). According to respondents, the sectors most affected by bribery are the police and local administrations (municipal and provincial officials). Around 25% of citizens across the country had to pay at least one bribe in the course of the last year to officials in one of these sectors. A lower proportion of the population, between 10% and 20%, had to pay bribes to judges, prosecutors, doctors and/or members of the Government. According to the data collected, law enforcement officials ranked first in the receipt of bribes, a trend that needs to be reversed for effective anti-corruption measures to be put in place. Bribery is also frequent in the delivery of welfare services, primarily in the health sector (doctors and nurses), while bribes in the education sector are less frequent. The difference between members of the Government and Members of Parliament is significant, with the former

mentioned by 12% of the respondents as bribe-takers against a mere 2% for parliamentarians. Finally, the Afghan army appears to be only marginally touched by bribery.

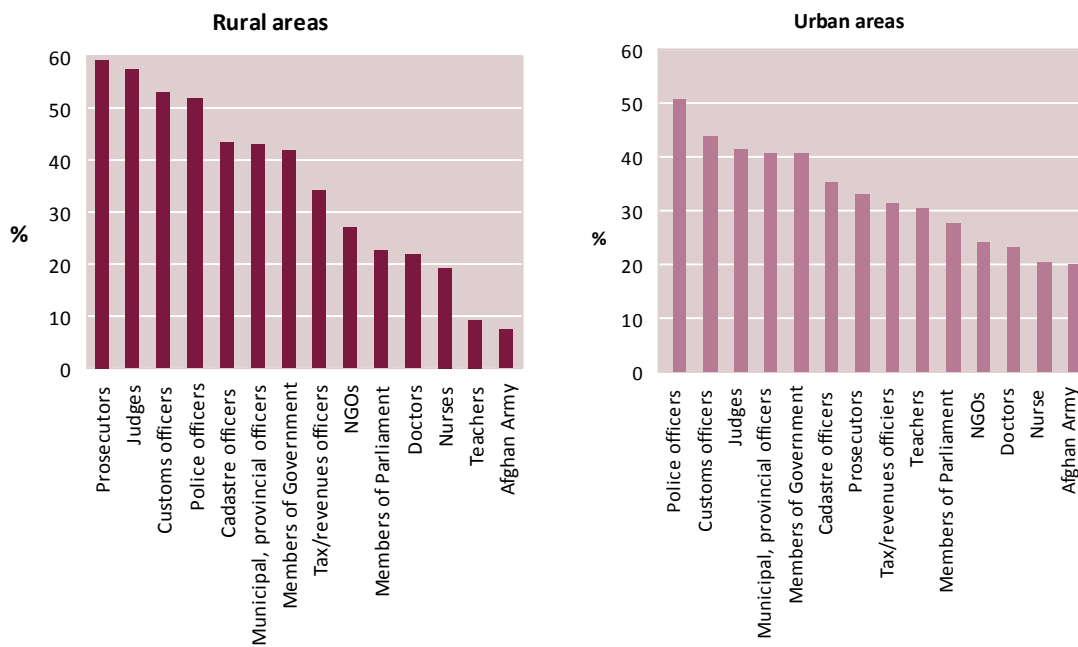
The overall picture is consistent between urban and rural areas, although the data also revealed some specificities. Around 15% of survey respondents had to pay bribes to officials of public utilities in cities, with a similar proportion in villages having to bribe Ministry of Agriculture officials.

The probability of an individual having to pay bribes to different public officials is to some extent influenced by the exposure that people have to civil servants. Those having more numerous interactions with public officials are likely to receive requests for bribes more frequently. Furthermore, respondents to this survey reported a higher number of requests for bribes from officials that have the greatest level of interaction with the public, for example the police. However, there are other forms of contact with the public sector, such as with customs officers, which while occurring less frequently may still imply the payment of a bribe. It is useful to analyze not only which types of officials account for the largest gross numbers of bribe demands but also the likelihood, in a single encounter, that a particular type of official will demand a bribe -- independent from frequency of interactions. To measure this risk, the number of victims of bribery demands from a selected type of public official is divided by the number of persons who had contacts with that type of official (figure 10).

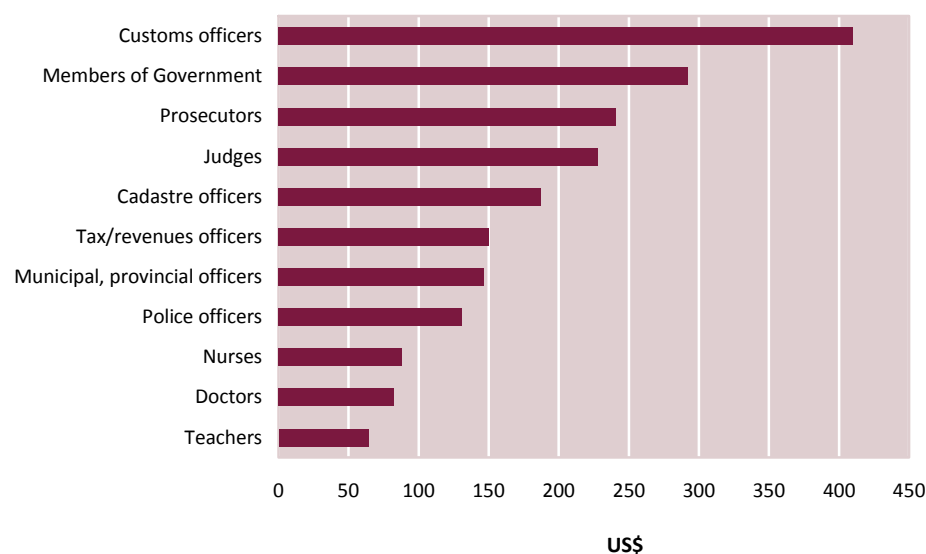
**Figure 9: Percentage of adult population who paid at least one bribe during the last 12 months by type of public official requesting the bribe**



**Figure 10: Percentage of adult population who paid bribes after contact with selected types of public officials, by type of official and urban/rural areas**



**Figure 11: Average value of bribes paid by respondents to different categories of public officials (in US\$), by sector**



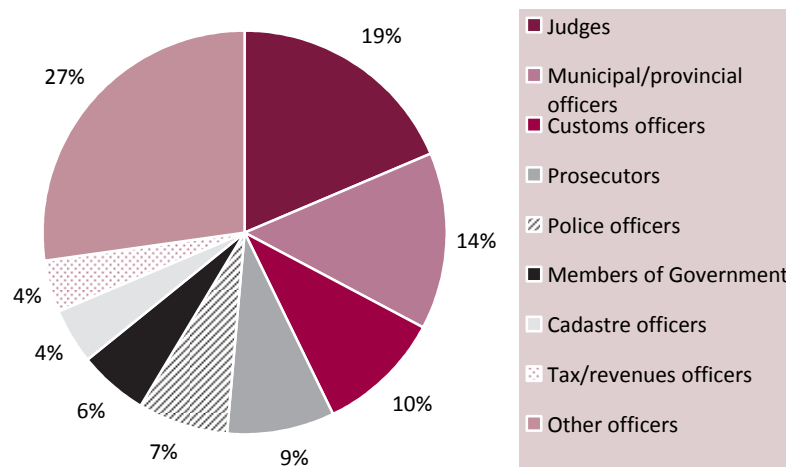
Some categories of public officials, such as police officers, judges and municipal officers, still have high rates. In absolute terms, the highest values for this indicator were recorded for prosecutors and judges in rural areas. Other civil servants also have a relatively high risk of bribery, such as customs and cadastre officers. This means that although it is not very common for an ordinary Afghan to be in contact with the customs or the land cadastre, when this contact happens, s/he is frequently asked to pay a bribe.

Bribery in different sectors of the public administration varies, not only in terms of number of payments requested, but also in the monetary value of the bribes given. Figure 11 shows the average value (in US\$) of bribes paid to selected types of civil servants. On the lower end of the scale (less than US\$100 per bribe) are teachers,

doctors and nurses. On average, officials belonging to the police, local authorities, tax/revenue agency and land cadastre requested bribes between US\$100-200. Judges, prosecutors, members of the Government and customs officers are at the higher end of the scale: on average, they asked for bribes of more than US\$200.

Some bribes reach significantly higher values. Around 2% of the bribes are worth US\$1,000 and more: on average, each such bribe is worth more than four times the GDP per capita<sup>v</sup>. Figure 12 shows the categories of civil servants that are most frequently involved in this high-value bribery. Judges, municipal/provincial officers, customs officials and prosecutors account for more than half of the transactions involving bribes of US\$1,000 and more.

**Figure 12: Percentage distribution of bribes of US\$1,000 and more, by requesting public official**



### Pilot survey in judicial sector

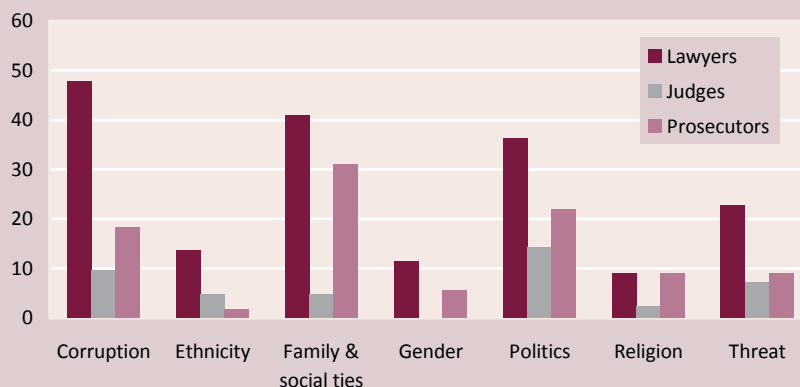
Corruption takes different forms in the various sectors of the public administration. In addition to broad-spectrum assessments that provide a picture of overall levels and patterns, sector assessments can highlight specific features of corrupt conduct. These assessments are particularly useful to identify targeted policy measures and follow their implementation. In 2008 a pilot survey on the Justice sector was jointly carried out by UNODC and UNDP, in partnership with the Attorney General's Office and the Supreme Court of Afghanistan. Almost 150 officials of the judiciary (judges, prosecutors, lawyers) were interviewed in five provincial capitals of Afghanistan. Due to the small size of the sample, results of this survey are not representative of all justice sector professionals; though they can provide interesting indications.

For example, the analysis of working conditions provides valuable suggestions on the possible reasons for misconduct. In the 2008 pilot survey, judges and prosecutors expressed general satisfaction with office arrangements, working hours and staff relationships and coordination. Between 80 and 95 percent of judges and prosecutors, for example, answered that they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with these areas. In contrast, more than 90% of judges and prosecutors stated that they were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with their salary. Frustration about low salaries is confirmed by the priorities that judges indicated in order to improve the performance of the Justice system: higher salaries, larger budgets and better trained staff.

Another factor influencing possible corrupt practices is the accessibility to information, a key aspect of access to justice. Nearly half of lawyers interviewed (45 percent) reported that it was "difficult" or "very difficult" to get information from the court regarding their cases, while less than 30% said that access was "easy" or "very easy". Excessive delay of court proceedings has been reported by 50% of lawyers and 35% of judges and prosecutors. Access to information and length of trials may be a significant barrier to fair treatment, thus representing a possible source of dishonest practices.

Justice professionals were also asked sensitive questions on integrity of justice and their answers provide inside views on the difficult conditions in which justice is administered in Afghanistan. Amongst practitioners, there is wide awareness that in certain cases external factors influence judicial decisions. According to lawyers and prosecutors, family and social ties, corruption and politics too often have an impact on trials' outcomes. Judges, for obvious reasons, declared less external influence on courts' decisions, though a small share of them report undue pressure from politics or judgements conditioned by corruption or threats.

**Percentage of survey respondents who were aware of any judicial decisions in the last 12 months which have been influenced by selected factor.**



Source: UNODC-UNDP Pilot survey on Justice sector, 2008

When interviewed on issues related to corruption, the attitude of public officials is necessarily different from the one of the general population. Hence, results from surveys on public officials cannot be directly compared with those derived from surveys on population. However, civil servants' surveys can provide important insights on several factors often associated with corruption, such as working conditions, salaries, transparency and accessibility of procedures, staff motivation, etc. Moreover, they can provide a self-assessment of integrity among civil servants.

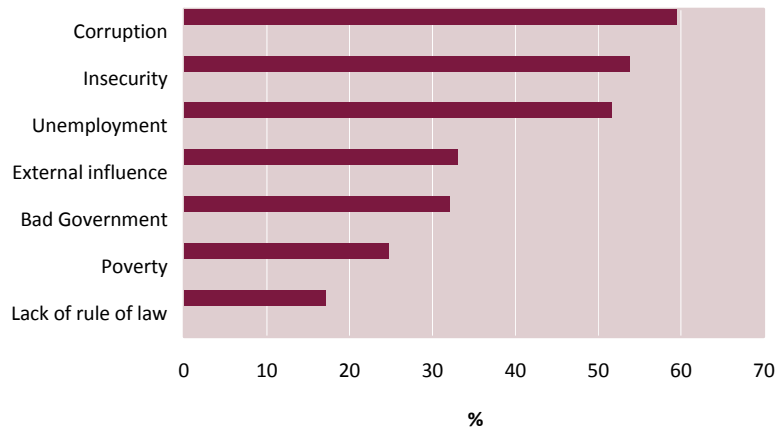
#### 4. Perception and awareness of corruption

According to the respondents in the urban survey, corruption is seen as the most important problem facing Afghanistan today. When asked to select the most prominent problem for the country, 59% of the population indicated corruption,

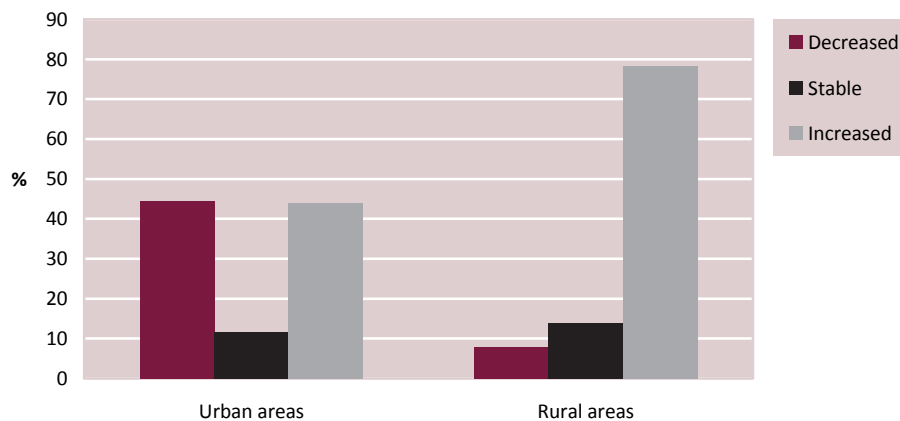
followed by insecurity (54%) and unemployment (52%). The priority attributed to the fight against corruption by Afghans surveyed is a clear sign of the gravity of this issue (figure 13).



**Figure 13: Percentage of adult population considering different issues as most important problems in Afghanistan (urban areas)**



**Figure 14: Distribution of adult population according to perceived trends of corruption over the last 5 years, by urban/rural areas**



Perception of the seriousness of corruption varies significantly according to city size, as persons living in the capital (65%) and major regional cities (63%) appear more alarmed than those living in medium-sized urban areas (54%). Interestingly, this pattern differs from the one based on the actual experience of bribery: as shown in figure 4, higher bribery levels are recorded in towns of smaller size. Hence, the view that corruption is an urgent problem is based not only on personal experiences but also relates to other factors, such as awareness, tolerance and social acceptability.

This survey also indicates that corruption – or at least perception of it - has increased in

Afghanistan. This increase is more marked in rural areas where almost 80% of people were of the opinion that corruption had increased over the last five years, while 40% of respondents in urban areas perceived a recent increase of corruption (figure 14).

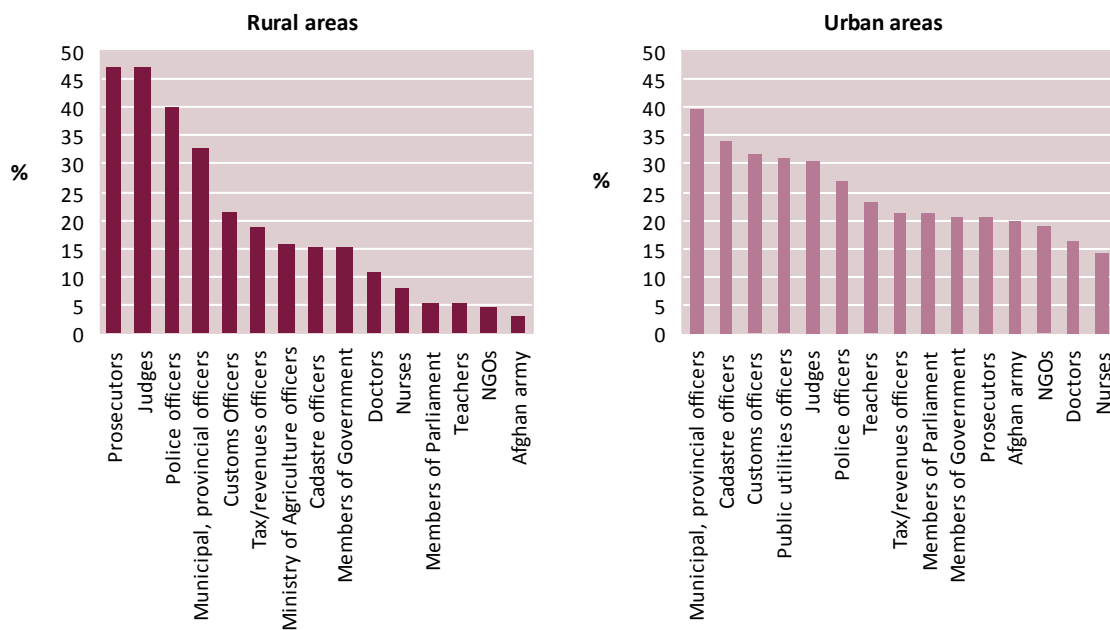
Given the lack of data about experiences of corruption in the past, it is not possible to assess whether this high level of perceived increase of corruption is due to increased misconduct by public officials or an improved general awareness. In any case, this data creates a case for urgent and focused action, in particular in the rural areas. It is noteworthy that the urban population is split between those who see

corruption increasing and others who see it decreasing. In Kabul and other major cities, a high proportion of citizens reported a decrease in corruption. This would indicate that, in some urban areas, the fight against corruption has already produced encouraging results, at least in the eyes of the public.

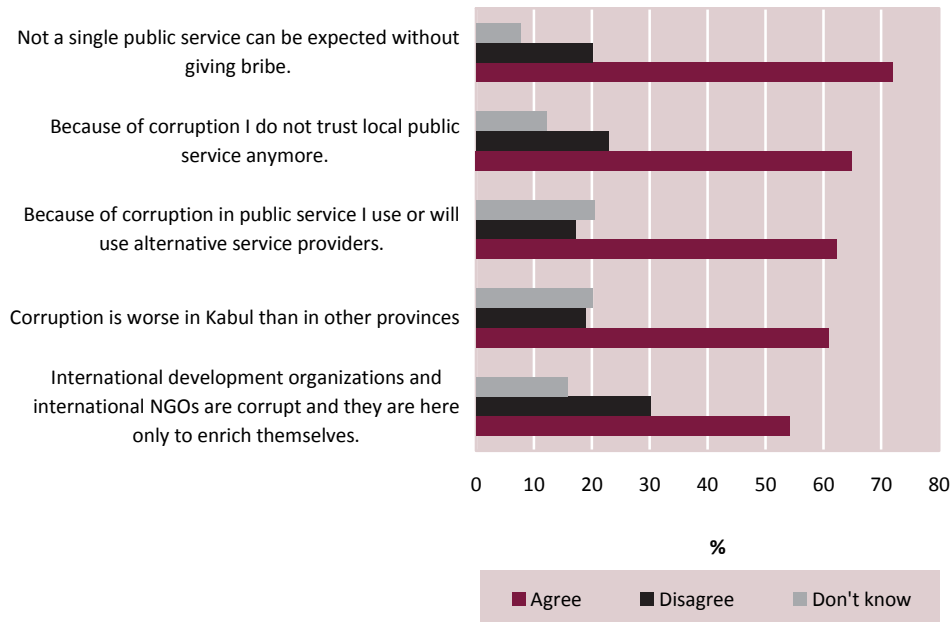
When respondents were asked whether they thought public officials would request bribes, the overall response was similar to that based on actual experiences of bribery both in rural and urban areas (figure 15). The integrity of various categories of public officials was assessed on the basis of daily experience. Law enforcement officers were perceived as being the most corrupt officials in rural areas, while civil servants from ‘service agencies’ (local authorities, cadastre, customs) are the ones more frequently asking for bribes in urban areas. “Members of the government” were perceived as being on the mid to lower end of the range in terms of perceived corruption.

The direct or indirect experience of corruption has a considerable impact on the overall image of public officials among the population. Hence, a number of questions were asked about the trust placed in public services and public officials; the results show that corruption contributes significantly to the erosion of state institutions and to undermining the authority of the central government (figure 16). A significant portion of the urban population actually believes that a bribe is always needed to obtain a public service (72% of respondents) -- and for this reason they have lost trust in public services (65%) and/or try to use alternative service providers (62%). Many think that corruption is worse in Kabul, the capital, than in the provinces, which probably reflects scarce confidence in central authorities. Furthermore, international organizations and NGOs are not exempt from this overall negative perception as 54% of the population believed that such organizations are corrupt and are in the country just to get rich.

**Figure 15: Percentage of adult population perceiving different categories of public officials as frequently requesting bribes, by type of officials and urban/rural areas**



**Figure 16: Percentage of adult population who agreed with selected statements (urban areas)**



## 5. Institutional and social factors affecting bribery

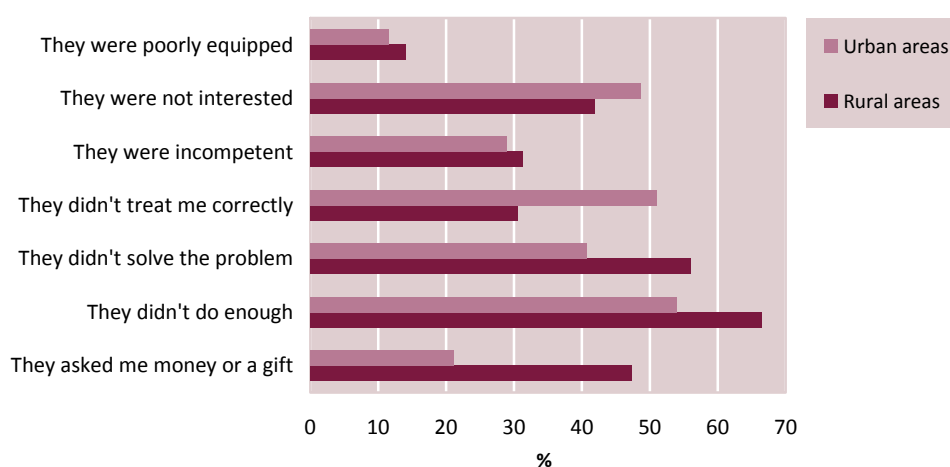
Corruption in Afghanistan has several and interrelated causes. These includes, for example, the huge illicit gains from opium production and trade, dirty money that often buys the complicity of competent authorities. It is believed that even foreign aid in many instances fuelled corruption because of mismanagement of assistance projects. Amongst the factors feeding corruption, one cannot forget the significant role of traditional social structures where individuals needs and entitlements are often negotiated in a patron-client relationship.

This survey, in a bottom-up approach, explored some of the factors that, in daily life, can often bring citizens into the situation of being requested to pay bribes. Also, some social factors that can create a favourable environment for corruption to flourish were considered. Such issues, if promptly addressed with targeted policies, can significantly contribute to the reduction of bribery in Afghanistan.

## Accessibility of information from government agencies

Lack of accessible information about administrative procedures often represents a key factor in facilitating systems of bribery, since less informed citizens are more vulnerable. According to the survey results, only one third of citizens in urban areas (34%) stated that they have the information necessary to adequately understand administrative procedures. Another 26% stated they did not have any information or only some information, while the remaining 40% indicated that the information was not clear enough to understand the procedures. While the difficulty in understanding administrative processes may be somewhat related to low education and literacy levels amongst the population, survey results show similar responses on information accessibility for respondents from all levels of education. This suggests that needed information on administrative procedures fails to reach the population at large due to a lack of communication between the administration and the citizens.

**Figure 17: Percentage of adult population by selected reasons for dissatisfaction with treatment received by public officials, by urban/rural areas**



Access to information on administrative procedures is often restricted to the point where citizens are obliged to make use of middlemen (“agents”) to obtain information and advice on procedures (34% of cases for urban population). In other cases, they turn to leading figures in the community (25% of cases). Informal channels are most frequently used, including through friends and relatives, to obtain the information needed to manage administrative processes.

### Quality of services

A perceived poor quality of public services also contributes to corruption in Afghanistan. According to the survey respondents, services provided by public administrations are often of low quality and almost half of the population (48%) were not satisfied at all by the way they were treated by public officials. This figure was even more pronounced in rural areas (54%). Less than one fifth of the population (18%) were satisfied with the treatment received by public officials and the remaining were sometimes satisfied and sometimes not.

Figure 17 shows the reasons behind the respondents’ dissatisfaction, where public officials were described as not interested, determined or capable to address the needs of community members. The connection between quality of services and bribery is

apparent when comparing complaints about services to reasons for paying a bribe. For instance, 63% of the Afghan population thinks that public officials do not do enough on their behalf, followed by 52% claiming they did not solve the problem at hand. Also, 44% of the respondents claimed the officials do not show any interest or do not treat them well (37%). In comparison, the reasons for paying a bribe were to speed up procedures (74%), make finalization of procedure possible (51%) and receive better treatment (31%). Hence, it can be concluded that bribery is often resorted to by community members seeking to cope with unresponsive and slow administrative procedures.

### Perception of anti-corruption authorities

Victims reporting of corrupt behaviour represents an important indicator of the perceived efficiency of the anti-corruption institutions on the one hand and the social acceptance of corruption on the other. In contrast to the high levels of bribery indicated in the survey, only 9% of the urban population has ever reported an act of corruption to any public authorities. In most cases (63%) the reason for not reporting was its perceived uselessness (‘nobody would do anything about it’). In some cases, victims did not know to whom they could report the abuse (19%) or they

did not feel that it was appropriate to report a behaviour that is so widespread (15%).

Respondents indicated some willingness to report incidents of corruption. 40% of respondents declared they would report any future case of corruption to a public authority. The data show, however, that a high proportion of the population prefers to deal with informal social institutions rather than with official authorities.

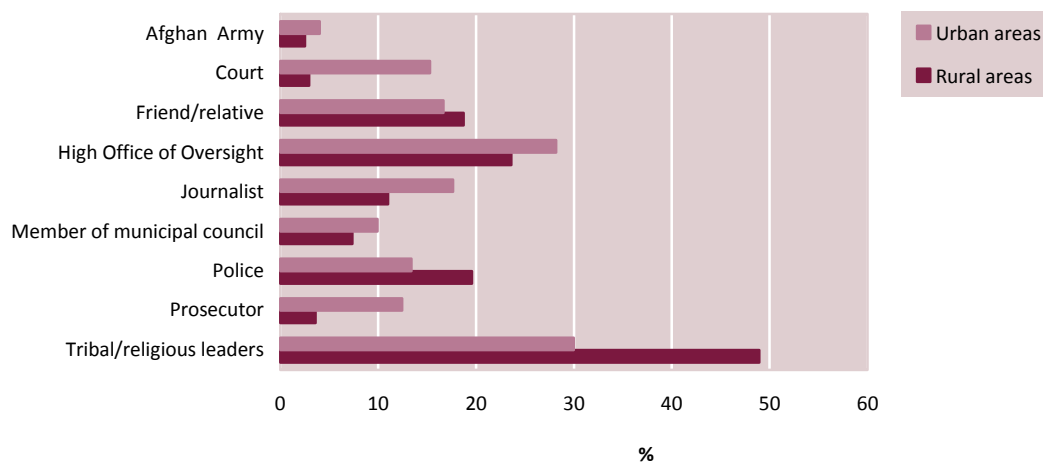
Figure 18 shows the preferred persons/institutions to which population would report their experience as victims of a corruption episode. Tribal leaders and mullahs represent the natural recipients of such reporting for a high share of respondents, especially in rural areas. In this ranking, the High Office of Oversight, the anti-corruption agency of Afghanistan, ranks second, demonstrating that this recently created institution enjoys good trust among the population. A significant share of respondents indicated police, friends/relatives and journalists as preferred recipients of the reporting.

### Debate regarding corruption

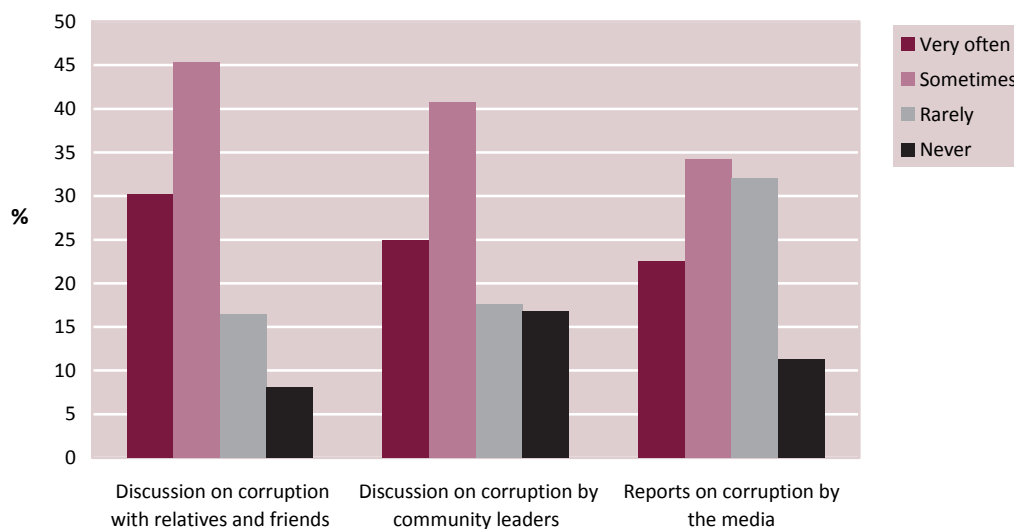
An open debate about corruption, at all levels of society, is an important component of efforts to raise awareness about corruption, reduce tolerance of corrupt practices and increase the social stigma attached to such behaviours. The

survey investigated to what extent population and opinion leaders speak openly regarding corruption. Understanding the on-going debate is crucial for both pointing out gaps which could be addressed in anti-corruption measures as well as understanding the dynamics shaping current corruption levels. In general, it can be said that a lack of public debate can be an indicator of tolerance towards corrupt behaviours. As figure 19 shows, in urban areas Afghan people frequently discuss corruption while talking with relatives and friends: three quarters of them indicated they had such discussions very often or sometimes. Traditional leaders, such as tribal elders and mullahs, often discuss corruption, thus fostering public debate on the issue: according to two thirds of urban population, local opinion leaders address the issue very often or sometimes. Such figures can play an important role in the fight against corruption, as evidenced by the willingness of population to report corruption cases to them (see figure 18). In respondents' opinion, traditional leaders in Southern and Western areas talk less frequently about corruption: respectively 52% and 43% of respondents reported that they never or rarely address corruption publicly. In these regions local opinion leaders appear more hesitant to discuss corruption.

**Figure 18: Percentage of adult population indicating institutions and persons as preferred recipients of reports on corruption cases, by urban/rural areas**



**Figure 19: Frequency of discussion and reporting on corruption by selected contexts and actors (urban areas)**



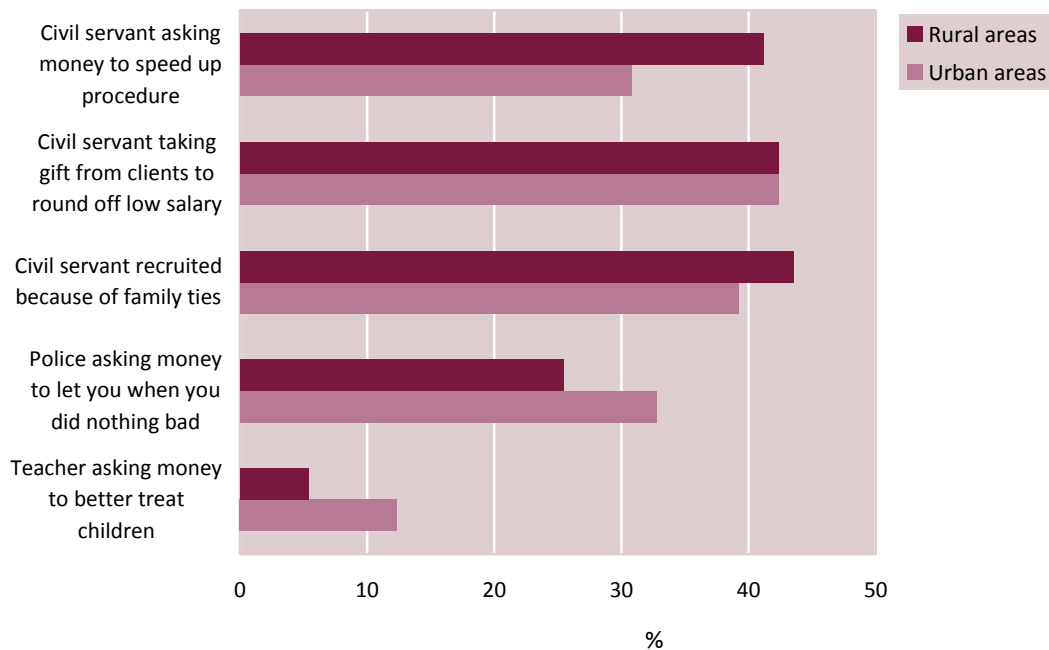
According to the perception of survey respondents, the media are not engaging with corruption issues as often as the other actors. Corruption is widespread in Afghan society, the population is increasingly aware of the need to fight it and anti-corruption efforts are one of the top priorities in the political agenda of the current Government. Given these circumstances, it is surprising that 43% of urban survey respondents believe that the media rarely or never addresses corruption-related issues. Media coverage of corruption appears to be especially low in the South, where two thirds of respondents indicated that reporting on corruption appears on the media rarely or never. Some private TV channels appear among the media most often quoted by citizens as dealing with corruption-related topics.

### Social acceptance of corruption

Despite widespread perception about the gravity of corruption, data show that there is still a high level of tolerance for certain behaviours (figure 20). For example, many

citizens consider it acceptable that civil servants ask for gifts or money to speed up administrative procedures (38% of survey respondents), that a civil servant is recruited on the basis of family ties (42%) or that a public official request extra payments because of his/her low salary (42%). A significant percentage of the population (28%) find it acceptable that a person be stopped by the police and requested to pay some money even if the person did nothing contrary to law. However, not all forms of bribery demands are tolerated: for example a very small percentage of the population (8%) would find it acceptable for a teacher to request money from parents in order to have their children better treated. These responses indicate a mixed and somewhat confused perception of what should be the role and duties of public officials. Other factors, such as respect/fear of public authorities or intensity of family/tribal ties may have an important impact on the way certain behaviours are perceived and, at times, accepted.

**Figure 20: Percentage of adult population who consider selected behaviours acceptable, by urban/rural areas**



There is an inherent contradiction between the acceptance many respondents expressed of certain forms of corruption, and the responses indicating that the people surveyed consider corruption to be the greatest challenge facing Afghanistan. This apparent contradiction may be explained by reference to some of the factors discussed in the introduction. Afghan people may find it understandable that public officials demand bribes in a context where central government is weak to the point of near absence in some regions, public officials' salaries are very low and not infrequently unpaid, a long history of conflict and a volatile security situation encourage everyone to think only for today, and demanding bribes is a low risk and high reward activity. At the same time, Afghan people yearn for peace and can see that their best hope for peace lies in a government that they can trust and respect – one in which corruption is an exception, not a rule.

## 6. Concluding remarks

The range of experiences with bribery found in this survey is both wide and deep, stretching across the whole public sector. These include key government institutions, such as law enforcement bodies, as well as local authorities and service providers. Citizens are confronted with requests for bribes whenever they need a document or a license, to have their rights protected in courts or to receive medical treatment, just to mention a few cases.

Corruption is not only a source of private and social frustration, it also erodes confidence in the state, and generates considerable financial strain on the population. The Afghan public is sick of corruption, views it as public enemy number one.

That being said, it takes two to tango. Bribery requires two parties: someone to offer or ask for a bribe, and someone to accept it.

Afghan citizens are therefore partly complicit in the problem, even if the greater culpability attaches to the recipient and demander of the bribe. When paying a bribe, most people know they are committing an offence against the law. However, in most cases, they act against their own values because they believe they have no alternative. Yet this perpetuates the vicious circle since every bribe paid rewards bad behavior, and makes corruption more commonplace. It becomes ever harder to push back.

As one survey respondent rightly pointed out, there is now a unique window of opportunity to break the spiral of corruption. The issue is in the spotlight, there is an unprecedented expression of political will to fight corruption, there are increased expectations among the population, and international partners expect – and are pushing for – demonstrable change. Now is the time to act.

In this report a number of priorities have been identified and several recommendations for action made, on the basis of the evidence gathered. One crucial element of the fight against corruption is indeed information – the information provided through credible and detailed research.

The present survey represents the first attempt to conduct an assessment of the actual experience of bribery among victims in Afghan society. Results of this exercise can be used to benchmark future progress in the fight against corruption.

Nevertheless, additional research is needed to provide a full picture of corruption in the country and to assist policy-making. Research can help the Government of Afghanistan and its partners understand patterns, identify priorities, and evaluate

the success of anti-corruption measures. Equipped with accurate information, the Government of Afghanistan can make an informed diagnosis of the corruption eating away at Afghan society, formulate evidence-based solutions, and be held accountable for doing so.

A comprehensive system for monitoring corruption should include the following three elements:

- General assessments of the experience of bribery and other forms of corruption (both for the general population and the business sector), for the purpose of providing benchmarks and measuring progress;
- Sectoral assessments of the working conditions and integrity of civil servants by sector (judiciary, police, customs, government, etc.) for the purpose of providing more in-depth and specific information and assist in identifying targeted policy measures.
- A system for monitoring the state response to corruption, both repressive and preventive measures, in order to identify successful and unsuccessful practices.

UNODC stands ready, subject to availability of resource, to support the Government of Afghanistan in developing a comprehensive monitoring system on corruption, in collaboration with international and national partners. This would put Afghanistan in the vanguard of efforts to strengthen implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and tackle what Afghans consider to be the biggest scourge facing them today.



## 7. Methodological annex

### Survey design

This survey consists of a rural survey and an urban survey which were independently administered. The same core questionnaire was used in both surveys. The urban survey included some additional questions on perception and opinions about corruption.

#### *Survey methodology for rural areas*

The corruption survey in rural areas was conducted jointly with a survey on cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan. As such, the sampling methodology employed for the corruption survey was determined by the requirement to produce an accurate area estimation of cannabis cultivation. Provinces known to have negligible cannabis cultivation were excluded from the sampling frame and consequently no interviews regarding corruption were conducted in these provinces. While the sampling methodology was not ideal with regard to the selection of interviewees for the corruption survey, it proved necessary to strike a balance between optimal sampling design, and the resources and practicalities of conducting surveys in difficult operational conditions. In particular, accessibility to many rural areas was possible only because of the well established network of interviewers that UNODC regularly utilizes for the conduct of drug related surveys.

The sampling approach follows the guidelines for an area frame sampling design that is a widely used methodology in agricultural statistics. The village sampling frame is a list of villages compiled by the Central Statistical Office containing 43,556 villages in total. This frame was overlaid with the most recent map of agricultural land in Afghanistan and divided into a series of 10 km by 10 km grids. The resulting frame is a collection of 4,231 grids (each of them with an area of 100 squared km); each grid in the frame contains one or more villages and a determined amount of agricultural land. Taking into account land characteristics,

only 105 districts in 20 provinces in Afghanistan were targeted as potential areas with cannabis cultivation. Considering only potential areas for cannabis cultivation this translates into a sampling frame of 13,713 villages enclosed within 1,569 grids. In order to collect as much variability as possible in terms of area under cannabis cultivation among villages a sample of clusters was selected as the primary sampling units (PSU). Each cluster corresponds to a grid which geographically groups a set of villages. Theoretical and practical considerations identified a sample size of 400 clusters and up to 1,700 villages.

Due to the fact that the agricultural land in each segment varies considerably, it was apt to use probability proportionate to size (PPS) sampling. Grids were selected by using probability proportional to size (where size is defined by the amount of agricultural land). Four villages (when there were only three villages in the segment, three villages were selected) within each grid were randomly selected using GIS tools.

In each selected village, face-to-face interviews were conducted with village headman and a variable number of farmers, randomly selected under an area frame sampling approach. In total more than 4,200 interviews were conducted in 1,634 villages.

#### *Survey methodology for urban areas*

The urban survey was conducted by Eureka Research/Evaluation, a research company based in Kabul. In aiming for a representative sample of Afghanistan's urban population a distinction was made between the capital Kabul, major regional cities and medium-sized urban areas. In addition, regional differences in terms of political context, economic development and security had to be accounted for. Based on these considerations it was decided to include the

following twelve cities: Kabul (Kabul), Pol-e-Khumri (Baghlan), Kunduz (Kunduz), Mazar (Balkh), Maimana (Faryab), Herat (Herat), Lashkar Gar (Helmand), Kandahar (Kandahar), Tiring Kowt (Uruzgan), Gardez (Paktia), Jalalabad (Nangarhar) and Mihtar Lam (Laghman).

The sample was selected following a two-stage sampling design. In the first stage, cities were divided into homogeneous geographical areas (12 in Kabul, 6 in the other towns) and every second area was randomly selected (e.g. 6 areas in Kabul, 3 in the other towns). In the second stage, households were randomly selected using a random walk procedure: starting from a predefined geographical location, surveyors had to select households according a predetermined interval.

#### *Post sample adjustments*

Weights were applied to responses from the rural survey at the regional level according to the proportion of the total rural population in the four regions. This is to adjust for differences in the sample sizes across the four regions. Similarly, weights were applied to the urban surveys according to the number of responses by urban population in the three categories of city size. Urban and rural estimates were combined by the estimated distribution of Afghan population respectively in urban and rural areas.

#### **Estimation of total annual amount paid in bribes**

An estimate for the total amount of money paid in bribes during 2009 is calculated and expressed as a percentage of GDP. The estimate is calculated by multiplying the number of people likely to have paid a bribe in cash (part 1 below) by the typical number of cash bribes paid per person over the year (part 2) and the typical amount of money paid in each bribe (part 3). Estimates are determined separately for urban and rural regions and then combined to provide a national estimate.

#### *1. Total number of people estimated to have paid a bribe with cash*

The number of people who could potentially be involved in the payment of bribes corresponds to the adult (aged 20+) population, which is estimated to be 40% of the total population<sup>vi</sup>. This gives the number of people potentially involved in the payment of bribes in urban and rural areas as 2,862,741 and 6,734,659.

The urban survey indicates that 46% of people paid a bribe in one form or another. Of these, 64.5% paid a bribe with money. The rural survey only concerned male respondents: taking into account that very similar prevalence were recorded for men in the urban and the rural survey, the overall value of 46% from the urban survey is used for the percentage of people who paid a bribe in one form or another in rural areas. However, the rural survey does indicate that 80.7% of the respondents who paid a bribe did so with money. This suggests that the total number of people from urban and rural areas who paid bribes in cash is respectively 849,428 and 2,498,746.

#### *2. Typical number of bribes paid each year*

The average number of cash bribes paid over the year was 5.2 for urban areas and 4.5 in rural areas. This implies that the total number of cash bribes paid by the population from urban and rural areas was 4,444,757 and 11,280,849 during 2009.

#### *3. Typical amount of money paid each bribe*

The average amount paid per cash bribe was 6,926 Afghani (US\$139) in urban areas and 8,291 Afghani (US\$166) in rural areas.

#### *4. Annual amount paid nationally in cash bribes as percent of GDP*

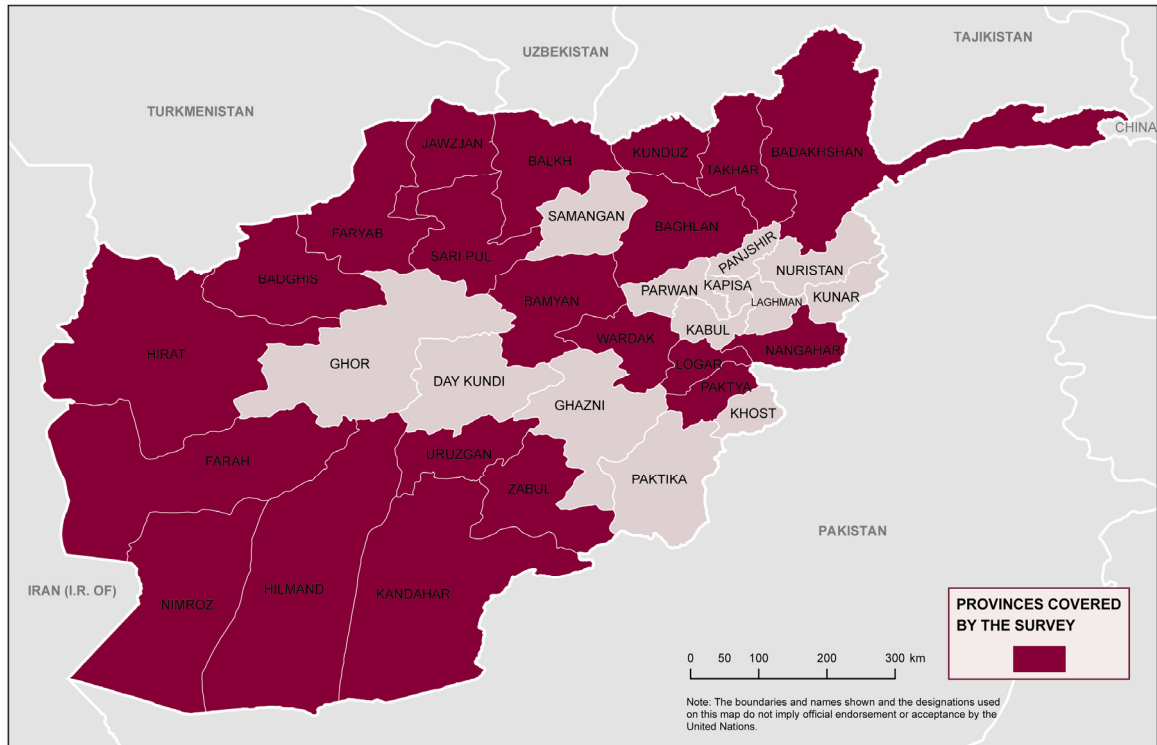
Multiplying parts 1, 2 and 3 (summarized in table 2) gives the total amount of money estimated to have been paid in bribes during

the year as US\$615.7 million (or 30,784 million Afghani) in urban areas and US\$1,870.6 million (or 93,528.5 million Afghani) in rural areas. At the national level this corresponds to US\$2,486 million (124,313 million afghani), which is the equivalent of 23.3% of GDP.

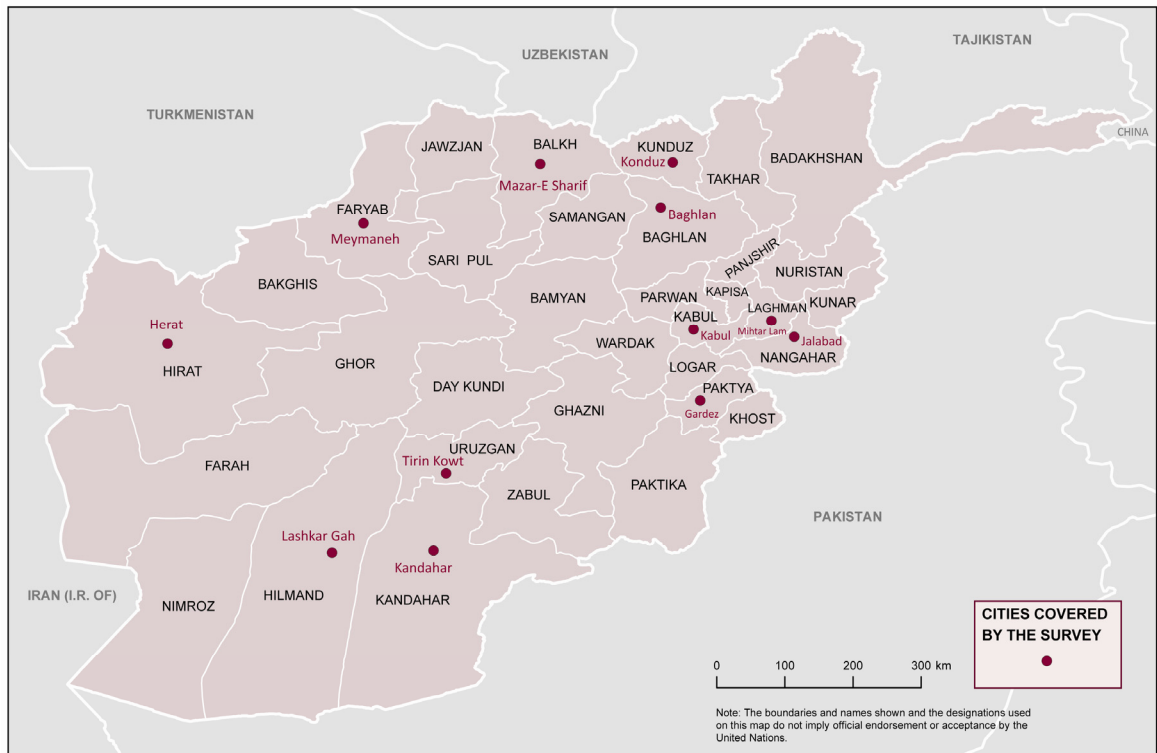
**Table 2: Summary computation procedure of annual amount of bribes paid**

	Urban	Rural	National
1. Number of people paying money as a bribe	850,000	2,500,000	3,350,000
2. Mean number of bribes paid per year	5.2	4.5	
3. Mean bribe amount (US\$)	139	166	
<b>Total money paid as bribes (1. x 2. x 3.) (US\$ million)</b>	615.7	1,870.6	2,486.3

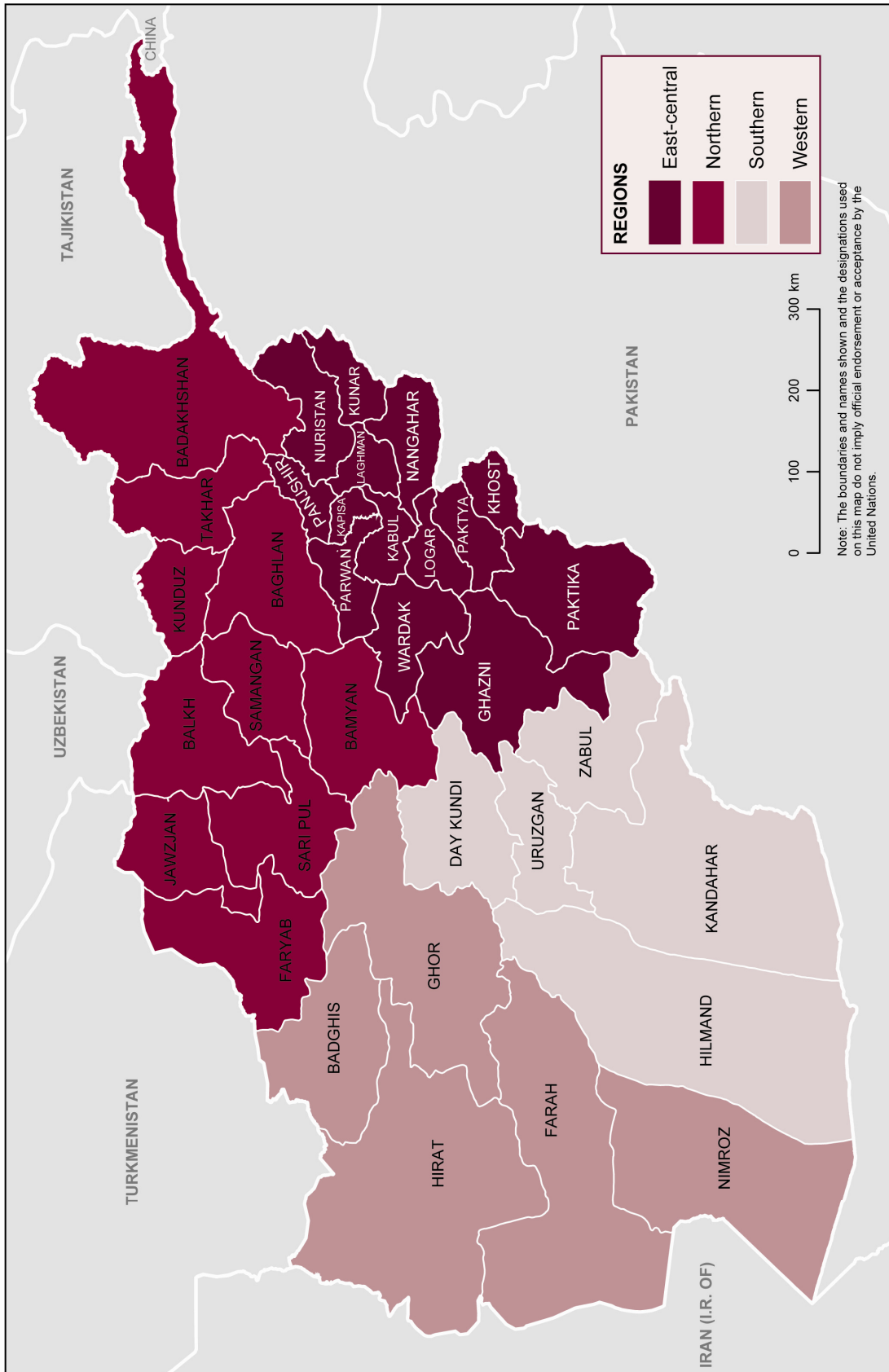
### Provinces covered by survey



### Cities covered by the survey



Afghanistan regions



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> For example, the Asia Foundation conducts an annual survey on public opinion on country development. Corruption is one factor included in the analysis ( see <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/627>

<sup>ii</sup> As one of the few examples, see: *Afghans' Experience of Corruption*, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2007, <http://www.iwaweb.org/>

<sup>iii</sup> The total is bigger than 100% since respondents could indicate up to three purposes for the bribe paid

<sup>iv</sup> See *Methodological annex* for more details on methodology used to estimate total amount of bribes paid in a year.

<sup>v</sup> According to most recent estimates from Central Statistical Office the GDP per capita was US\$ 426 in 2008/09.

<sup>vi</sup> See *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/08*, Central Statistical Office, 2009 (<http://nrva.cso.gov.af/>)