

Ethics and Integrity in Public Service in Bangladesh: Institutional and Comprehensive Approach

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This paper is an attempt to examine the challenges to prevent erosion of ethics and integrity in public service in Bangladesh. It first presents an overview of corruption as a development and governance challenge. We then identify the entry points of erosion of integrity which account for the depth and breadth of corruption in public service. In the next section the paper goes on to examine the prospect of preventing erosion of integrity and ethics, and propose a few tools and processes. Finally the paper proposes an institutional and comprehensive approach without which ethics and integrity in public service will be hard to promote and institutionalize.

The main theme of the paper is that corruption exists everywhere in the world; it also involves every sector and level where there is scope of abuse of power. The public sector tends to be exposed to erosion of ethics because of institutional and individual factors. When depth and breadth of corruption are associated by a growing culture of impunity and erosion of values and ethics, corruption threatens to become a way of life. Policies, decisions and actions of public interest at national level are taken in private interest, while at the local level citizens' access to basic rights and entitlement become contingent upon the capacity to make unauthorized payments.

The issue of ethics and integrity in public service is crucial to addressing corruption. Whatever well-meaning may be reforms in other sectors, these cannot bear fruits nor can any of those be sustained without establishing that appointments, promotions, postings and transfers in public service are based on performance and merit and not on

political influence, bribery and other means of subjective influence. So long as discretion is wide and the scope remains for abuse of power with impunity, and as long as effective legal and ethical standards are not in place with enforcement mechanisms for zero tolerance to corruption, no true results can be expected or sustained in enhancing ethical and moral standards.

No less important is the issue of salaries and benefits, which must be viewed as investments for future. Much would definitely depend on the extent to which anti-corruption values and ethics can be mainstreamed in the public service. A key role would be played by preventive measures against erosion of public service integrity and honesty by enforcing public service code of ethics including positive and negative incentives.

Ethics and integrity in public service are more than a project of value or moral education, however well-designed it may be. It cannot be viewed in isolation from systemic challenges, and must be part of a holistic institutional structure and process that would promote and sustain integrity in the public service as well as other aspects of life in a holistic infrastructure of integrity. A comprehensive and institutional approach strongly backed by highest level political commitment is indispensable.