

Niger

Corruption in Higher Education: People's Perceptions

Summary

To gain a better understanding of the role corruption plays in Niger's educational system, the *Association Nigérienne de Lutte contre la Corruption* (ANLC/TI) conducted a survey of 500 students, teachers, parents and officials in secondary and higher education in Niamey, the capital, in November 2004. The aim was to analyse the scale of corruption, the forms it takes and public perceptions of it.

Corruption and the laws that prohibit it are poorly understood and in many cases unknown by the majority of respondents, whatever their level of education, but there is a strong conviction that it affects all spheres of activity, whether public or private. Corruption is considered very widespread in education, but the majority of respondents think it is less serious than in other sectors because it is only visible at the beginning and end of the school year. Corrupt methods are used to achieve transfers to specific institutions; to achieve success in examinations and gain qualifications; to procure scholarships to study abroad; to gain positions and postings; and to win promotions.

Context

Niger's population of almost 12.6 million is mainly rural and has a very low level of education. Only 19.9% of men and 10.6% of women are literate, and only 50% of school-age children were in school in 2004, compared to 37.3% in 2000. Despite significant success in providing children with school places, recent studies show that the situation is worrying with regard to access and fairness. Only 40.4% of girls are attending school and 48.4% of all children in rural areas.

The average salary of a teacher varies between FCFA 90,729 (€137) and FCFA 119,440 (€182) per month, depending on qualifications and experience. Recruitment to the public sector has been frozen for 10 years due to an IMF economic reform programme. The compromise solution has been to recruit contract teachers who receive a monthly salary of FCFA 40,000 (€60) at primary level and FCFA 60,000 (€80) in secondary schools. Such teachers have no teacher-training experience.

The debate on corruption is very recent in Niger, only developing with the ad-

vent of democracy and the emergence of civil society. There have been a number of cases in which important procurement contracts were allocated by mutual agreement, but no real charges of corruption or of inappropriate expenditure were lodged. In October 2003, the government established a national commission responsible for developing strategies to combat corruption. Its remit is to:

- Study the phenomenon of corruption in Niger
- Define anti-corruption strategies
- Devise a programme of action against corruption
- Make recommendations relating to the fight against corruption.

The project and its findings

The survey sample was made up of 500 randomly chosen individuals and included secondary school students, students from the University of Niamey and technical schools, educational administrators (heads of institutions, managerial staff, ministry officials), teachers and parents. Of the sample, 55% were students in secondary or higher education, 25% were students' parents, 15% were teachers and 5% were administrators. The sample was composed of 310 males (62%) and 190 females (38%), and 93.8% had been educated to secondary level or above. Most of the people interviewed were young, with 39% aged 13-24, and 44% between 25 and 44 (see table 1).

Table 1:

Distribution of respondents by age

Age group	Number of respondents	Proportion
13 - 24 years	191	39%
25 - 44	331	44%
45 - 54	63	12%
Over 55	25	5%
Total	500	100%

Student interviews were held in six junior high schools, five senior high schools, one *complexe* (an institution offering junior and senior high school programmes), six professional institutes and the University of Niamey. Others were held at places of work and parents' homes. The sample was not an exhaustive profile of Niamey's population, but the fact that interviewers operated in 52 different districts indicates they were able to canvas a wide range of opinions. The survey was carried out over a period of 10 days by five interviewers who were given a day of training before starting. Interviewers met at the ANLC/TI head office every afternoon to review progress and draw lessons for the rest of the survey.

According to the survey findings, 98% of respondents have heard about corruption, 36% think it is a serious problem, 35% think it is very widespread and 17.2% think it is widespread. However, only 28% of those questioned said they have been victims of corruption themselves and nearly 49% said they had had no personal experience of it. The principal sources of information about corruption are the press (nearly 41%), personal experience (23.5%) and word of mouth (18.6%). These results may be interpreted in two ways: either respondents dared not admit that they have been involved in corruption, or the perception of corruption is much greater than its actual extent.

According to those interviewed, all sectors of the economy are affected by corruption, with education in prime position (35.8%), followed by customs (20.2%)



Discussing the findings in the ANLC office

and the police (see table 2). Almost 96% of the people questioned said they were aware of corruption in the education sector. Their principal sources of information were relatives (32.4%), the press (27%) and personal experience (24.5%).

Table 2: Corrupt sectors

Sectors	Number of respondents	Proportion
Education	179	35.8%
Customs	101	20.2%
Police	40	8.0%
Government departments	33	6.6%
Justice	31	6.2%
Health	19	3.8%
Finance	15	3.0%
Tax	11	2.2%
Others	71	14.2%
Total	500	100%

Corruption in the education sector mainly occurs in connection with examinations (46%), but also when students seek grants (8.6%) and in the management of institutions (7.8%). But 11.4% of respondents did not specify situations in which corruption occurs in education and a significant 19.8% did not reply to the question (see table 3).

Table 3: Situations in which corruption mostly occurs

Situations	Number of respondents	%
In connection with examinations	230	46%
When study grants are awarded	43	8.6%
Management of institutions	39	7.8%
In class	32	6.4%
Others	57	11.4%
No reply	99	19.8%
Total	500	100%

According to the respondents, corruption takes three forms in examinations:

- Corruption brings markers face to face with students' parents whose primary concern is their children's success
- Corruption appears through intermediaries who take money from parents with a view to approaching exam markers
- Teachers, or their accomplices, form groups at exam time to offer fraudulent services and guarantees of exam success. Such teachers may know members of examination boards and ask for sums of money from parents. Sometimes they offer their services to students who then have to persuade their parents.

Acts of corruption generally take place at the home of the parent or teacher, or at other places agreed with the bribe taker. Sums demanded vary according to the objective sought:

- FCFA 1,500-3,000 (€2,25-4,50) to re-register a child who has been excluded
- FCFA 25-30,000 (€37.50-45) for a student to be registered in another institution
- FCFA 50-100,000 (€75-150) for the BEPC (*Brevet des Etudes du Premier Cycle*; Nigerien exam taken at 16)
- FCFA 150-200,000 (€225-300) for the baccalaureate
- FCFA 200-300,000 (€225-450) for a grant to study abroad
- Monthly payments are often made to gain contractual teaching positions.

Corruption occurs at specific times in the educational calendar: at the beginning of the school year; the examination period; pupil recruitment; when grants are allocated; and during the examinations which teachers sit for appointment to contractual positions. Corruption also occurs when teachers or students wish to transfer from one institution to another, when annual reports may also need to be falsified.

Over a third of respondents (35.8%) consider education Niger's most corrupt sector. Since it concerns all parents and employs so many people, corruption in education affects more people than any other sector. However, given that the sample is made up entirely of people involved in the education system, the result is hardly unexpected. More surprisingly, some 60% of respondents think corruption is less serious in education because the sums involved are smaller than in other sectors. The fact that corrupt individuals in education are not very wealthy encourages a perception that the small amounts paid in bribes are somehow excusable. Corruption in education is also perceived as less serious because it occurs only at the beginning and end of the school year.

Although poverty and low levels of remuneration are considered the major causes of corruption in education, the most often cited cause is the lack of personal integrity (see table 4). This shows that poverty is not considered an adequate reason for an individual to lose his or her moral integrity.

Table 4: Causes of corruption

Causes	Number of respondents	Proportion
Lack of integrity	77	15.4%
Poverty	75	15%
Bad governance	64	12.8%
Low level of remuneration	57	11.4%
Desire for personal enrichment or easy earnings	46	9.2%
Impunity	20	4%
Fall in the level of the students	20	4%
Student laziness	15	3%
Injustice	15	3%
Other	12	2.4%
No reply	99	19.8%
Total	500	100%

Nearly 53% of respondents think that it is impossible to eliminate corruption. Indeed, corruption is considered the main activity of some individuals in important economic sectors. Some respondents said that it would be difficult to fight corruption so long as the salaries of public employees remained so low and that, as a consequence, it was not worth denouncing it. Respondents do not approve of denunciation, particularly when those concerned are parents and teachers.

With respect to bribes paid by parents, while most parents considered this an immoral act, the success obtained gave them satisfaction. If a student still fails, parents rarely claim back the bribe, and then only with discretion. Claims are rarely made to the authorities.

Replies from an interview with a woman respondent

Have you heard anything about corruption in Niger in recent years?

Reply: (Laughs) You must know better than me, Madam, or why have you asked the question. It's become part of life in Niger over the last few years, since the arrival of democracy and a multi-party system with the recession in the 1990s. We are all aware of it, but that's how it is.

Why do you say that corruption is more developed and very serious in the education sector?

It's in this sector that corruption can do a lot of damage to the economy, as it's the sector that should teach moral values and integrity to children. Corruption in the education system compromises the future as the sector is at risk of producing corrupt politicians ("elected representatives").

Have you personally encountered any corrupt practices in the education sector?

Yes, several times. I attempted to corrupt a teacher and I also tried to act as an intermediary. If you don't do that, it's the children of the rich who get the qualifications and jobs, and our children will always fail and remain poor like us. I am illiterate but I have a lot of contacts in the education sector. You do what you can to survive in a poor country like Niger.

Do you think that corruption can be eliminated in Niger?

It's impossible at the present time. It is even a job for some people who act as the visible corrupter in dealings with corrupt individuals. They have become experts in the field. For example I started a *tontine* (revolving fund) at the beginning of the school year with a group of friends in order to do something for my two daughters during the exams at the end of the year.

Housewife, age 43

Conclusions and recommendations

After the survey, the results were reviewed at a workshop attended by members of ANLC/TI, representatives from several associations involved in the defence of human rights and the team that carried out the survey. ANLC/TI sent the final report to the relevant ministries, the Prime Minister's Office, the media, the institutions investigated and various interested associations. The results were published in the newspapers *Le Démocrate*, *Le Républicain* and *La Roue de l'Histoire* in January 2005.

Given that the survey was carried out several days after the presentation of the 2004 Corruption Perception Index, it had considerable impact. The Nigerien Association for the Protection of Human Rights (*l'Association Nigérienne de Defense des Droits de l'Homme, ANDDH*) and the Nigerien Workers' Federation (*Confédération Nigérienne des Travailleurs, CNT*) have encouraged the ANLC/TI to extend the enquiry to other sectors. The report may help to pressure the authorities into taking preventive measures and imposing sanctions on corrupt individuals, particularly during the examination period.

Most players think that it is difficult to combat corruption in a country as poor as Niger. The government could fight corruption in the education sector by increasing teachers' salaries, applying the laws already in force and by eliminating impunity. Civil society organisations must help by increasing awareness of the impact corruption has on the country's economic and social development. Corruption is an offence under Article 130 of the Criminal Code, as is illegal enrichment (Order 92). It is alarming to find out that the majority of those interviewed are scarcely aware of the law, though most had a high degree of education.

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