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INTERNATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Reforming the Merits: Meritocratic Recruitment and its Effect on Corruption

Case Study of Tajikistan

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to observe the causal mechanism between meritocratic recruitment and level of corruption. Previous cross country analyses showed positive results, however what is lacking in academic literature is micro-analyses that would capture the positive and negative ways of causal mechanism which will be an added value to the academic literature.

The current research does not aim to build the hypothesis but rather complements the research on meritocracy by looking at a single case study, taking Tajikistan, a country in Central Asia. The paper identifies and analyses relative difference in implementation of the public administration reform and perception of sample agencies, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance pertaining to meritocracy and corruption.

The empirical analysis is based on twenty one interviews with persons responsible for reform making and reform implementation. To validate the answers a group of independent observers is included. The findings of the empirical analysis show that meritocratic recruitment does not have an effect on the level of corruption at its earliest endorsement in a transit country such as Tajikistan. It is formally endorsed within the new public administration system, but instead a majority of civil servants are hired and promoted on the basis of patronage and all types of contacts.

Key words: *meritocratic recruitment, public administration reform, impartiality, corruption*

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Abbreviations

ACA - Anti-Corruption Agency

ADB – Asian Development Bank

CSS – Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan

DSDEC - Division of State Directorate for Education Control

HR – Human Resources

EU – European Union

ICRG – International Crisis Risk Group

MoE – Ministry of Education

MoF – Ministry of Finance

OECD- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PA – Public Administration

PAR - Public Administration Reform

PRSP – Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

RT – Republic of Tajikistan

TI – Transparency International

TJS – Tajik Somoni (local currency)

ToR – Terms of Reference

WB – World Bank

WGI – World Governance Indicators

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1. Introduction

Corruption is a universal multi-faceted social phenomenon affecting institutional quality, hindering socio-economic growth and undermining political stability and human development in a society. Corruption cannot be identified as a single and independent phenomenon but rather it is a combination of the human behaviour and other variables, some of which is difficult to recognise (Almas, 2000:5). Hence, how can the term “corruption” be defined? There is plethora of opinion which is mainly associated with illegal activities to pursue and increase the benefits for self-interest. However the most quoted and prominent definition is given by Gray and Kauffman (1998) that describes corruption as “the abuse or misuse of public service for private gain”. The question then is - why do the officials misuse the public services for their own interest? There are various views among scholars with regard to factors that provoke the causation of corruption. This is primarily because it is seen from the perspective of an individual’s background and surrounding environment as a whole. For example, some refer to the lack of social norms (e.g., Public Opinion Survey by CSS & UNDP, 2006) and trust (e.g., Rothstein, 2007), others point to the long established historical and cultural traditions (e.g., Bardhan, 1997; de Sardan, 1999; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Hasty, 2005), while the rest believe that it is because of weak bureaucratic and dysfunctional political institution (e.g. Treisman, 2000; Montinola & Jackman, 2002; Persson, Tabellini & Trebbi, 2003; Andrews & Montinola, 2004; Keefer, 2007).

Indeed, all above-mentioned factors favour the increase of corruption. Treisman (2000) opines that very little is known about what causes corruption to be higher in one place than in another. While answering this question, Dahlström, Lapuente and Teorell (2009:1) refer to the extensive literature both on the political and bureaucratic sides i.e. effect of democracy, electoral systems, incentive mechanisms for those who take the bureaucratic and policy decisions etc. Having this opinion as a ground the root of the causation can be considered is a lack of “impartial public institutions” with “impartial norms and principles” that would not act against the law and be unmoved by certain types of considerations while implementing policies and laws.

The agents implementing those policies and laws are civil servants who are politically neutral, impartial and do not pursue their own self interest to retain power or benefits and act according to the code of ethics. Thus to be more specific and complement the existing

definition, corruption involves the *violation of impartial principles* by a holder of public office to achieve private gain (Kurer, 2005:230; Rothstein & Teorell, 2008).

A follow-up question occurs if there is any causal relationship between impartiality and level of corruption? Despite very few attention given to the bureaucratic structures within cross-country variations comparing other variables (for example, GDP, rule of law, human development etc), it has been argued that bureaucratic features are one of the ways to promote impartiality among civil servants that positively affect curbing corruption. Previous cross-country empirical studies found a strong relationship between bureaucratic features and high quality of government. To name few, Evans and Rauch (1999, 2000) found a positive relationship between bureaucratic elements and economic growth arguing that these features in comparison to others would be most the efficient tools in facilitating economic growth. Henderson et al (2003) examined the relationship between state bureaucratic capacity and poverty reduction. Their findings revealed that countries with effective bureaucratic features might significantly reduce the level of poverty through effectiveness of services they provide and therefore would improve the level of quality of government. Finally, Dahlström, Lapuente and Teorell (2011) revealed that bureaucratic feature, such as meritocratic recruitment reduces the level of corruption even though other variables like type of regime are controlled. However, competitive salaries and long term career rewards do not have a significant impact on the level of corruption.

To sum up, these cross country empirical analyses included both developed and developing countries and found positive relationship between bureaucratic features and high quality of government that is capable to reduce the level of corruption and sustain economic growth. However, what is lacking in the academic literature is cross national comparative empirical studies that would observe public and/or private agencies and capture challenges the agencies face in a country. Besides, previous research has not been able to observe the micro-foundation of causal mechanism between bureaucratic features and the level of corruption.

Therefore the current research does not aim to build the hypothesis but rather intends to complement this gap through looking at a single case study, taking Tajikistan, a country in the Central Asia, as the area of research. Besides the general goal, the paper will try to identify the factors that impede successful implementation of merit-based recruitment and (general) attitudes of civil servants on this issue. And finally the research will attempt to analyse relative difference in implementation of the public administration reform (PAR) and

perception of sample agencies pertaining to meritocracy and corruption. The research builds upon a qualitative method relying on primary resources by interviewing a range of actors among public sector senior and mid-level employees, representatives of donor community and NGOs. It also relies on secondary resources by analysing, articles and extracts from local newspapers, reports etc. to get sufficient knowledge on this topic.

Tajikistan is a developing country where low level of living standards, political preference and inherited post-soviet bureaucracy led to an increase of corruption in the country. According to the Transparency International ranking¹, the country steadily stands in the bottom thirty for the last three years (2007-2010) positioned at 150 out of 180 countries worldwide. A recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report concludes that “corruption remains at a breathtaking level” affecting every sector in the country (“Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threats”, ICG report, 2011). Despite all odds, the government is committed to fight against corruption by endorsing and implementing a range of institutional reforms. Among them are the Public Administration Reform for 2005-2015 that aims to create a skilled, adequately paid and corruption free civil service capable to develop, implement and monitor government policies (Public Administration Reform Strategy of Tajikistan, 2006). As a part of this ongoing reform, some new features of bureaucratic mechanisms, such as meritocratic (or *competitive*) recruitment and performance related pay have been introduced. Thus, this study represents an attempt to empirically and comparatively analyse the effectiveness of public administration reform and its impact on the level of corruption by looking at two public agencies – Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance. These ministries were among the first public agencies where upon successful piloting of PAR components illustrated results and therefore these PAR components had been scaled up to other public agencies. Thus, the rationale behind opting these ministries is to demonstrate effects of the reform and identify the factors that may impede the effective implementation of the reform.

The findings of the empirical analysis revealed that meritocratic recruitment does not have an effect on the level of corruption at its earliest endorsement in a transit country such as Tajikistan. It is formally endorsed within the new PAR system, but instead a majority of civil

¹ www.transparency.org

servants are hired and promoted on the basis of patronage and all types of contacts. The priority is given to networking and contacts instead of competency and professionalism and unfortunately meritocracy is hardly rewarded in the public sector. Low salaries indeed serves as an inducement for corruption, and when the civil servants are paid inadequately, many considered it allowable for them to accept a bribe. Empirical findings and data from the Anti-Corruption Agency showed that the Ministry of Education is more prone to corrupt behaviour compared to the Ministry of Finance. Whereas, the overabundance of specialists result in wide use of patronage and all types of contacts in the Ministry of Finance to select “the better” candidates.

The thesis is structured as follows: first section will equip the audience with a theoretical framework and the contribution from previous research and studies which are relevant to the research question. Equipped enough with theoretical perspective on bureaucratic mechanisms, the section will explore the causation of corruption and theoretical connections between corruption and components of public administration. Research methodology, overview of the sample agencies and limitations of the research will be presented in the second section. This section will introduce the organisational structure of sample agencies - Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance, illustrating some features in common. Further, it will give a brief intro of Anti-Corruption Agency and Department for Civil Service profile, as these agencies have a direct impact on the competency and professionalism of civil servants and corruption (revealed) cases accordingly. The third section presents the case country, thus it builds the ground for corruption and public administration system in Tajikistan. The fourth section approaches the main point of the thesis by introducing the case study and will observe the established theory by bringing and analysing the views of respondents. And finally, the last section concludes the paper by summarising main findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Defining Corruption and Impartiality

This section will first touch upon the concept of corruption and try to identify its main cause. Based on previous cross-country studies, this section will look upon bureaucratic features and identify the mechanisms through which the corruption can be curbed.

Corruption is a multi-faceted social phenomenon comprising a mixture of expression of individual and social interests and a reflection of the functioning of shadow markets (CSS and UNDP, “Corruption in Tajikistan: Public Opinion, 2010:19). The boundaries of this phenomenon are not clear enough to identify how and whether it differs from clientelism, nepotism, patronage etc (Johnston, 2005 cited in Rothstein & Tegnhammar, 2006:4). Although there is no universal accepted definition as what corrupt behaviours constitutes, the most quoted and prominent definition is given by the World Bank and Transparency International that defines corruption as “the abuse or misuse of public service for private gain” (Gray & Kauffman, 1998).

Rothstein (2007:6) argues that corruption is a phenomenon that seems to be sticky, or in other words “once the system gets there, it stays there”. In the academic literature there are plethora of opinion of its cause - some scholars argue that it is because of absence of (social) norms (e.g., Public Opinion Survey by CSS & UNDP, 2006) and lack of social trust in the society (e.g., Rothstein, 2007) while others point to the cultural dimension (e.g., Bardhan, 1997; de Sardan, 1999; Hasty, 2005; Rose-Ackerman, 1999) and the type of political regime and weak institutional capacity (e.g., Andrews & Montinola, 2004; Keefer, 2007; Montinola & Jackman, 2002; Persson, Tabellini & Trebbi, 2003; Treisman, 2000). The lack of these components certainly results in capacity of the government institutions to effectively formulate and fight against corrupt behaviour.

However, numerous prominent scholars believe that good governance apart of being a key instrument to foster economic growth is a cornerstone to curb corruption (e.g., Hall & Jones, 1999; Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2002, 2004; Easterly & Levine, 2003; Rodrik, Subramanian, & Trebbi, 2004). Rothstein and Teorell (2005, 2008) depart from “good governance” theory considering difficult to measure it and instead suggest using “quality of government” concept². In their paper they make a very crucial observation that the current paper will build its argument upon that. The essence of quality of government as per authors’ is “impartiality³” without which it is hard to achieve the high level of quality of government

² Quality of Government is a broad concept; however Rothstein and Teorell (2005, 2008) quantify it into four measurable indicators that capture the performance in the public sector: rule of law, government accountability, bureaucratic effectiveness and corruption.

³ While speaking about impartiality, the paper sticks to the description given by Cupit (2000) identifying the concept as “to treat people equally irrespective by personal relationships, personal likes and dislikes and their social status. Rothstein and Teorell (2005:9) argue that impartiality is not the same as “being objective”, as the latter implies that an individual can have a full knowledge and understanding of a (policy) case and weigh all the pros and cons and can come up with the best

that would contribute to reducing income inequality and poverty, increasing human development and strengthening democratic institutions that in turn altogether have a positive effect in lowering the level of corruption. “Impartial public institutions” is defined as not to act against the law and be unmoved by certain types of considerations like treat people irrespective of personal relations and give special preferences while implementing policies and laws.

Thus, having this in mind, the current paper supports the definition of corruption given by Kurer (2005:230) stating that “corruption involves a holder of public office violating *the impartiality principle* in order to achieve private gain”. Impartiality shall be a primary feature of the actions taken by street and professional bureaucrats, civil servants and politicians. While fulfilling their responsibilities, it is crucial to define what motives behind they pursue and distinguish the dimension of their interests. Whether a civil servant or a politician is working towards self-interest and maximising his/her profit and favouring any economic, ethnic⁴ interest for personal gain or, on the contrary, acting as an impartial body and not promoting any particular interest.

Violation of impartiality principle as well as misuse of specific normative and behavioural criterion (may) result in evolving of “particularistic political culture” where the treatment of citizens depends on their position in the society and people do not expect to be treated fairly by the state (Rothstein, 2007:3). In other words, in a preferred political culture everything depends on the connections, ability to bribe and being a member of the clientelistic networks that goes completely against impartiality. This can be referred during recruitment process in the public sector where particularistic political culture can be above merits and qualifications and things like money, political and family connections, ethnicity, and political party belongings, etc. play a central role for the decision made by the bureaucracy. The previous studies and academic literature can serve as a platform to identify and find what [bureaucratic] mechanisms can promote impartiality and reduce level of corruption in the public sector?

decision. While impartiality means that an individual/public official should be neither directly nor indirectly a part of a (policy) case.

⁴ “This action is considered to be irrelevant unless it is not stipulated in the law policy” by Rothstein and Teorell (2005,2008).

2.2 Bureaucratic Features and Impartial Mindset. Is it achievable?

The idea about impartial professional civil servant/bureaucrat is not new, where its fundamental concept is laid by Max Weber. According to the concept, a professional civil servant operating in the bureaucratic machinery is politically neutral, impartial, paid a decent salary, recruited and promoted on merit, and does not have property or business interests that conflict with the fair performance of its duties and acts according to the code of ethics (Adamolekum, 1993 cited in Ackerman, 1999:69).

Wilson K. Graham gives a complete description of bureaucracy by noting that “it is the most rational and developed form of administration” without which the management of the modern state is unimaginable as it knows how the machinery of the government operates and how to make the system work (2008:4-10). Hollyer argues that a government is less likely to be able to implement the state policies on its own; it is obviously delegated to competent bureaucratic officials, who are capable to execute “government decisions into policy outcomes” (2009:2). By providing their expertise and information, their (bureaucrats) role is not only seen at the stage of implementation but also at formation stage, thus having an important effect on the political process (ibid, 2009:2). Therefore, it is considered as one of the effective instruments in the management of the public sector.

In the academic literature, bureaucracy is compared with democracy – the provider of governance for a society. On the other hand, it is associated with hierarchical or even authoritarian forms of governing where decisions are made about citizens (Etzioni-Halevey, 1983 cited in Peters Guy, 2008). However, what makes bureaucracy high quality and impartial when it is autonomous and not pressured by the political preferences and indeed has set up clear mechanisms for bureaucratic features (e.g. recruitment, competitive salary, career rewards).

Having this as a ground, previous studies found a strong relationship between “Weberian” public institutions and high quality of government that promotes impartial [code of] conduct.

Scheme 1

Public Administration Reform → Bureaucratic Features⁵ → Impartial Civil Servants



Corruption

Among those, Evans and Rauch (1999,2000) were the pioneers to establish a relationship between [Weberian] bureaucratic features and economic growth by empirically testing some of its mechanisms such as, meritocratic recruitment, predictable long-term career rewards and competitive salary.

They argued that these features in comparison to others would be the most efficient tools at facilitating economic growth. First, meritocracy ensures that a hired individual has a set of required competences to fulfil job requirements. Secondly, long-term career rewards encourages competent people to join and perform well and, finally competitive salary makes corrupt behaviour less attractive as the cost of being caught would be high. Their hypothesis was based on 35 semi-industrialised and poor countries that incorporated Weberian features in their bureaucratic structures and has experienced a rapid economic growth between 1970 - 1990 in comparison with countries which have less Weberian incorporation (e.g when grouping the countries by regions, the East Asian countries scored high compared to African group).

The analysis of Evans and Rauch has promoted a large number of studies to use their dataset and justify further study on the relationship between bureaucratic features and variables, like poverty, growth and corruption. Henderson et al (2003) built his theory upon Evans and Rauch (1999, 2000) study and examined the relationship between state bureaucratic capacity and poverty reduction. Using their dataset on income poverty, they found a strong relationship between “Weberian” public institutions and ability of countries to reduce poverty. Their findings revealed that the states with effective public bureaucracy may

⁵ Bureaucratic features defined as 1) meritocratic recruitment, 2) long term career rewards and 3) competitive salary

significantly reduce level of poverty through effectiveness of services they provide and therefore improve level of quality of government. Meritocratic recruitment and competent public employee may enhance the effectiveness of public expenditures in public sector through effective planning, financing and implementing public sector related policy. While long career rewards promotes to raise level of competence and reduce the attractiveness in corrupt actions. Henderson et al conclude that “these services can directly reduce aspects of capability poverty (e.g. by making people literate and by improving ill health) and indirectly reduce income poverty, as educated and healthy people are more likely to be productive and to generate higher incomes” (2003:9).

Though empirical results showed positive correlation between variables, some critical arguments exist in the academic literature pointing on the shortfalls of the results. They concern methodology, design, selected variables and empirical findings.

Olsen (2005) in his critiques questions whether bureaucracy (with its features) is a panacea to curb corruption and response to challenges in public administration. He argues whether bureaucracy is a desirable form for competencies, staffing, resources, and outcomes of the public sector that could lead to the economic growth and thus lower the level of corruption. Formal [bureaucratic] organisation/institution is seen as a façade, and bureaucrats do not act in accordance with the institution’s codes of conduct that results in an unreliable and corrupt staff (ibid, 2005:5-6).

Olsen (2005) makes a very good observation by identifying types of bureaucracy as 1) it is not bureaucratic enough and 2) it is extremely bureaucratic. This criticism in fact does not only question [professional] bureaucracy but impartiality of civil servants. Acting as a semi-or-extreme bureaucrat, one can suppose that “impartiality” concept is not fully clear to them (i.e. civil servants) therefore they are blamed for being not sensitive to issues that require a special consideration. Instead they apply a set of common rules to all cases they consider and make decisions that might be different from original intentions behind the policy. In that case they are accused of being ineffective bureaucratic machinery. Besides, pursuing self-interest and acting based on social and political belongings, gender and preferences can hardly make a bureaucrat as an impartial civil servant.

Further, Dahlström, Lapuente and Teorell (2011) touching upon methods and variables critically point at two issues. First, Evans and Rauch did not control the type of regime;

therefore the relationship between meritocratic recruitment and corruption would disappear if to include the nature of political system. Second is the question of selection bias; the number of countries has disproportionately been selected; out of 35 industrialized and developing countries only 5 poor countries that were “at critical state of economic development” represented that might have needed necessary bureaucratic characteristics. Finally the results should be replicated in other contexts as the bureaucratic structures might have been overestimated. Therefore, in their studies (2011) they departed from Evans and Rauch study but still looked at bureaucratic mechanisms such as recruitment and career patterns. Their empirical findings based on 520 experts from 52 countries revealed that meritocratic recruitment reduces level of corruption despite other variables, such as political regime, number of veto players, etc. are controlled. However, competitive salaries, long term career rewards and internal promotion do not have a significant impact on level of corruption.

Swamy et al. (2001) and Treisman (2000) support this argument by revealing that the impact of wages on corruption is very insignificant in their respective studies. Lambsdorff (2005) opines that increase of wages would be a costly approach and lost to fight corruption, if a public servant is caught and fired (2005:19). Van Rijckeghem and Weder (2001) in a sample of 31 developing countries found a negative influence of civil service wages on the level of corruption, by arguing that low wages is the inducement for public servants to complement their income via acting impartially. The authors further opine that corrupt governments tend to have a poor budgetary performance or might consider that civil servants make enough profits from corrupt behaviour, and as a result reduce civil service salary.

The issue of high wages is however, debatable, as some previous studies⁶ (e.g. La Porta, Rafael et al, 1999 and Gary S. Becker & George J. Stigler, 1974) at the same time found a positive relationship between public sector wages and corruption. This bureaucratic feature [competitive salary] is very crucial especially for countries in transit where the simultaneous process of developing market economy, designing new political and social institutions creates the ground for corruption and therefore the bureaucrats/civil servants experience less impartiality. Pay reform and incentive systems can be one of the ways to reduce corrupt behaviour otherwise corruption will be a survival strategy among bureaucrats/civil servants.

⁶ They measure the relationship between public sector wages and corruption.

Ackerman (1999) believes that low pay in the public sector has several drawbacks. First, the officials are most likely to take a second/or supplementary job or accept payoffs. Secondly, they may operate their business by misusing their government positions. Third, some qualified staff may seek the job in the private sector or leave abroad, leaving the less qualified behind, and causing brain drain to some extent. Because of that, “labor market equilibrium” may arise with low skilled specialists in low paid government jobs they are unqualified to perform (ibid: 73). At the end, the civil service will be disproportionately staffed with two kinds of workers: low-productivity workers who are not employed in “comparable” jobs and those, who are willing to take bribes (Besley & McLaren, 1993 cited in Ackerman, 1999:74). Though, it does not mean that high salary is the best way to incentivise public employees and a magic bullet to deter the level of corruption. In order to make it work, indeed, degree of meritocracy and probably some kind of internal auditing of checks and balance mechanisms are to be established.

Another important element that is worth mentioning is the principal (or *ruler/ manager*)-agent (or *professional/street bureaucrat*) relationship and their accountability. It is mostly argued that the high level of corruption can be expected from the agents, even though they are selected on the basis of professional qualifications (Dahlström, Lapuente and Teorell, 2011). It is primarily assumed that a principal always take the role of controlling corruption (Klitgaard, 1988; Galtung & Pope, 1999; Rauch & Evans, 2000; Andvig & Fjeldstad, 2001; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006 cited in Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2010). In other words, a principal cannot observe whether a law or policy is implemented honestly or impartially by an agent as s/he does not possess all the information that an agent may have (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell, 2010). This might be true; however there is other side of the theory, which probably is less tested empirically. It can be possible that a principal may behave opportunistically, acts in his/her own interest and is free to choose the agents. Thus a network of people who share the same values and principles can be established, where they can coordinate their [corrupt] actions. And when it comes to the issue of accountability, the agent is yet accountable to the principle, as a principal monitors the behaviour of the bureaucratic agent and applies either incentives (e.g. performance based pay) or sanctions (in case if any corrupt activities are revealed) to improve agent’s performance (Weigast & Morgan, 1983, Weigast, 1984, McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984 cited in Nistotskaya, 2007:2). Whereas the accountability of the principal is not clear that may result in maximizing the profits and

opportunity for self-enrichment. Persson, Rothstein and Teorell (2010) opine that if a principal is also corrupt, and no actors are willing to monitor and punish corrupt behaviour, the use of the principal-agent framework becomes useless. In that case, what can be done? To reduce the level of self-enrichment opportunities among principals, one can apply the same control mechanisms as towards the agents like discretion, limit the monopoly, and increase the level of accountability in the system by introducing internal auditing of checks and balances (Klitgaard, 1988 cited in Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2010:8) that is mentioned earlier in this section.

The extensive literature review illustrates that [high] quality of government matters to curb corruption, and impartiality of civil servants/bureaucrat is a crucial element in it. Impartial behaviour especially among bureaucrats/civil servants should go as a built-in mindset once they are recruited in the public sector and they should not see it as an opportunity or an asset that can be misused for self and family/clan interests. Rather it is expected that policies should impartially be implemented in accordance with given legal framework. However, it is important to strengthen both the legal framework and bureaucratic mechanisms in order to make civil servants accountable and not to step outside of code of ethics.

2.3 What bureaucratic mechanisms to study?

Having backed up with sufficient and solid background and inspired by Dahlström, Lapuente and Teorell’s (2011) work, the paper will explore and test further what particular bureaucratic elements [may] deter the level of corruption and through which mechanisms it can be seen (Table 1).

Table 1. Bureaucratic Features and its Mechanisms

1. Professional Bureaucrats	Competence is required to select the qualified candidates.
2. Well-paid bureaucracy	To get paid well in order not to complement the income by corrupt behaviour
3. (Internal) auditing mechanism	Monitoring of checks and balances

First is the selection of candidates based on their competence. In order to perform well and deter the level of corruption it is believed to select the most competent ones. It is usually done through CV screening to choose potential candidates and conduct competence based interview afterwards. The latter is very common and widely practiced in many countries in comparison with competence based entry level exam. The concept of competence based recruitment in general allows choosing best candidates, however one can track some limitation if the screening is done publicly i.e. based on actual merits and competence of a candidate or on the contrary with consideration of connections or loyalty to political superiors.

Second, the wage policy or competitive salary is a necessary component that would strengthen impartiality of civil servants. The economic literature assumes that reforming civil service with adequate form of remuneration is a prerequisite for public officials (civil servant) not to be tempted to get involved in corrupt behaviour. Ackerman argues that if public sector is not a financially attractive place comparing to other sectors of economy, only those “willing to accept bribes will be attracted to the public sector, while others work in the private sector or just emigrate” (1999:47). Therefore, one of the reasons to keep the competent public employees incentivized and not let public servants be engaged in corrupt behavior is to increase or make equivalent to private sector wage and set up an adequate remuneration package.

And finally, it is a necessary prerequisite to introduce a monitoring device to audit for checks and balance that may enable civil servants not to step out of codes of conduct. Following the above logic, Ackerman opines that for reforming of civil service, “the increase of salary is a necessary, but not a sufficient component” (1999:47). It, indeed, reduces the level of inducement, however, not to the absolute zero level. Because, once public officials begin to take bribes, there is no guarantee that by introducing a wide range of policies to incentivise public officials, corrupt behavior will be totally eradicated. In that case, as a parallel action, some penalties or internal check and balances are worth of being introduced. One of the methods of internal monitoring, suggested by Ackerman might be a probability of detection and punishment and the level of punishment should be designed in a way, where the expected penalty increases, as the level of inducement is increased. In that case, the law should be equally applied and (legal and administrative) penalties should be imposed to both bribe-givers and bribe-takers, compelling both sides pay a multiple gain from the bribery (ibid: 48).

In many cases, an anti corruption measure includes penalties for bribe-takers leaving aside those who actually induced.

Another method, suggested by the author (Ackerman, 1999) is the involvement of an independent and outside institution staffed with impartial individuals, being accountable to and representing the interest of the civil society, to complement the internal monitoring system and publish any occurred wrongdoings of checks and balances in mass media.

Having this logic to follow, the empirical analysis will identify if such bureaucratic mechanisms are in place, and to what extent they are being established and implemented within ongoing public administration reform.

3. Research Design: Aim, Methodology and Limitations

3.1 Aim of the Research

This section will give an overall description of the research methodology and introduce the aim of the research. Further, it will give a brief overview of the selected agencies and discusses the rationale of the selection of interviewees. Finally, the section describes the process of the field research and touches upon the delimitations that occurred during the field work.

The research represents an attempt to empirically and comparatively analyse the effectiveness of bureaucratic features and its impact on the level of corruption in the public sector. The research will look at Tajikistan, a country in Central Asia, as a case study, where corruption has become wide spread both systemic and at individual level, thus affecting negatively the pillars of the quality of government. To tackle the corruption and its consequences, the Government of Tajikistan has been undertaking a number of institutional reforms for the last five years to bring transparency, integrity and efficiency both in the public and private sectors. Among those efforts is the public administration reform that aims to establish an effective public administrative system that will strengthen professionalism of the bureaucrats. The public administration reform is concerned with the entire public sector for the period of 2005-2015 and is mandatory by legislation for the entire public sector. The reform comprises two types of components which can be labelled as “sectoral” – those that are dealt with specific agencies and “general” – that is applied by all public sector agencies. Among those

“general” components is the introduction of merit based recruitment (or *competitive recruitment*) as a prerequisite for a civil servant to enter a public agency.

The aim of the research is not to build a hypothesis but rather to analyse in-depth if there is any causal mechanism between PA features and the level of corruption by answering the following research questions:

- What merits does the reform bring for the meritocratic recruitment?
- Does merit based recruitment have effect on level of corruption in the public sector?

Furthermore the research will attempt to study a relative difference in PAR implementation and perception and attitudes of representatives of the sampling agencies, donor community and NGOs pertaining to meritocracy and corruption.

The research is based on primary resources i.e. illustrating the answers of respondents, and secondary resources in order to obtain necessary background information from reports, articles and extract from newspapers.

Thus to measure both positive and negative effects of the PA reform and to have a comparative analysis, the research is aimed to look at two ministries -Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Finance (MoF), the central bodies, over the period of 2007 and 2010⁷. According to the data provided by the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), corrupt activities are more pervasive in the MoE with 16 in 2007 and 67 revealed cases 2010 in comparison with the MoF with no case in 2007 and only one case in 2010 accordingly. Therefore, the rationale for opting for these ministries is to illustrate the effects of the reform and to identify the factors that may impede an effective and successful implementation of the reform. Moreover, the key “general” components of the PAR have been piloted in these ministries that might have an indirect effect on the whole process of reforming.

⁷ Initially it was planned to cover 2005-2010 to capture any significant changes in civil servant system and track the corruption variation in the sampling agencies over this period. Since the data on corruption is collected from Anti-Corruption Agency, it turned out that the data are available only since 2007, as the Agency was established on January 10, 2007. Therefore, the time period has been changed to 2007-2010.

3.2 Brief Overview of the Sample Agencies

Before moving on to the main part of the field study, it is reasonable to introduce the sample agencies in brief - Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance with their organisational structures. This section will also give a brief intro of Anti-Corruption Agency and Department for Civil Service under President's Office (and Institute for Civil Service Training) profile, as these agencies have direct impact on competency and professionalism of civil servants and (revealed) corruption cases accordingly.

According to the ADB Governance Report (2004:16) public service employs approximately 300,000 employees, where education sector makes up a sizeable proportion of employment accommodating about 165,000 employees. The civil servants⁸ represent less than 10% of the public service, where they provide overall management of the public service.

Ministry of Education is a central body which comprises 15 subordinate organisations, local education departments and Division of State Directorate for Education Control (DSDEC). However, only central ministerial staff and DSDEC are considered to be civil servants (overall number of civil servants is 138), while the rest are public servants providing education services.

The MoE is responsible for developing and implementing policies on education, including standards and norms, setting plans and procedures for all educational institutions in the country (UNESCO, 2010:3-5). It also has a key role to monitor the execution of all education related policies and programmes. It is headed by the Ministry since 2005, and is assisted by the first deputy minister and two deputy ministers. Ministry of Education cooperates with education departments at the region and district levels which in their turn are responsible for pedagogical improvement and inspection of educational institutions at region and district levels (UNESCO, 2010).

According to the Anti-Corruption Agency, MoE is considered as one of the most corrupt public agencies in 2010. The tendency is observed among public servants being engaged in

⁸ For consistency, the current paper uses the term "civil servant" as a public bureaucracy i.e. a person employed in a governmental structure (for example, at the ministry or state agency level) and has a managerial authority, while a "public servant" is a public service provider (for example, teachers, doctors etc).

corrupt behaviour while providing education services, and effecting negatively on the entire image of the Ministry of Education⁹.

Likewise the MoE organisation structure, the central apparatus of the *Ministry of Finance* comprises 8 finance bodies. However the employees of 3¹⁰ out of 8 bodies, and the central apparatus itself are considered to be civil servants that accommodate 232 employees. The employees of the local branches in regions and districts are public servants or finance executive bodies. The MoF is a central finance public agency responsible for budget planning and development, projections and allocations of funds for all public agencies.

MoF, in one way, is implementing other components of PAR reform which is related to the public finance management and medium term expenditure framework¹¹ (MTEF) to enable each ministry to be responsible for planning and development of budgets at all levels of their respective areas. In other way, the central body of MoF is a part of a piloting process, where a common wage rate distribution is piloted since 2010. The logic behind is that a starting point of the salary is multiplied by coefficient (steps or grades) and plus employment years. It is opined that upon successful piloting, the common wage rate distribution will cover all public agencies; however, meanwhile the salary of the MoF is higher among other public agencies.

It is reasonable to mention two other agencies/institutions that have direct impact on implementation of PAR and civil servants' competency and professionalism and level of

⁹ The occurrence is mostly seen during the enrolment to the higher education institutions, and it is quite common to get enrolled to the universities by bribing the representatives of the Ministry of Education. According to the Head of Anti-Corruption Agency, the bribing mechanism is quite complex going through third and fourth hands, and the MoE is aware of the phenomenon. At the same time, MoE has acknowledged the existence of corruption in the higher education institutions [though indicating that such a thing] should not be a cause for bright and smart students to get enrolled. [in other words, do not need to pay a bribe in order to get enrolled]. (www.ozodi.org)

¹⁰ They are as following: 1. State Assay Inspectorate, 2. State Safe Vault, and 3. State Insurance Inspectorate

¹¹ The MTEF is a three year fiscal policy programme which determines main economic parameters and the fiscal environment for the budget over the next three years. The primary objective of the MTEF is to facilitate medium-term policy-based budgeting. A classic MTEF divides the budget into sectors, like health and education, based on inter-sectoral strategic priorities. The sectors themselves draw up medium-term sector expenditure plans linking expenditures to their policy objective over a three-year period. As the three-year period moves along, expenditures in each year inform the planning for the next year and the projections for the following years. The Ministry of Finance gives the sectors medium-term sector ceilings, determined by overall budget resource constraints and the government's inter-sectoral expenditure priorities. The sectors then prioritise their expenditures to maximise the achievement of their objectives within the hard budget constraint of their expenditure ceilings (extracted from UNESCO and Japan Trust Fund report on MTEF, 2010:12).

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/52645395/Education-Financial-Planning-in-Asia-Implementing-Medium-term-Expenditure-Frameworks-Tajik-is-Tan>

corruption (occurrence of corruption cases). These agencies are not a part of the sample agencies, but are complementary part of the research design.

Department for Civil Service under President's Office (and Institute for Civil Service Training), established in 2001, is a central institution that is responsible for overall implementation of the law “on civil service”. The department also supervises the implementation of PAR components, and monitors the execution of meritocratic/competitive recruitment in the public agencies. It has a pivotal role in participating during the interview process in any of public agency and giving recommendations to the interview panel. The Institute for Civil Service Training is in charge of training and re-training opportunities for civil servants. The OECD Anti-Corruption Report (2010) acknowledges some positive dynamic in Institute’s performance stating that “the Institute has the capacity to launch a series of educational, methodological and research projects in the area of civil service”. Since 2007, the Institute has a training curriculum for civil servants that include a course related to corruption prevention.

Anti-Corruption Agency is an independent specialised anti-corruption institution established in 2007, directly reports to the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (RT) and is assigned to detect any corruption related cases both in public and private sectors in the country. Despite a low comparability over time, it discloses corrupt cases categorised as fraud, bribes, misuse of public funds etc. in public and private agencies and brings these cases for further investigation, if necessary.

3.3 Research Methodology. Field Work Process

The nature of the research is qualitative with a case comparison analysis. The main goal is to observe the effect of public administration reform and to find a causal mechanism between bureaucratic features defined as meritocratic recruitment and the level of corruption. The idea of the case comparative analysis is to give an in-depth understanding of differences or similarities between old and newly introduced public administration system and illustrate what outcomes the ministries achieved insofar. Therefore the analysis is two-fold: to compare over time i.e. between 2007 and 2010 and between public agencies i.e. Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance.

Given the nature of the research that compares corruption level between two public agencies, the study will use data provided by *Anti-Corruption Agency*. The rationale and main argument to rely on ACA data is that data on corruption by leading corruption measurement institutions such as Transparency International, ICRG, WGI, Freedom House etc. reflect the perceptions of the “target” audience not the actual situation and do not show the variations between public agencies, towns, districts and regions at national level. In addition, they represent the aggregated measure at national level and do not break down by (most affected) public/private sectors and type of corruption. Finally, half of the sources are either purely business oriented sampling or a mixture of public/private orientation. Thus having all these arguments as a basis, the research relies on data provided by the Anti-Corruption Agency for 2007 and 2010.

The field research was carried out in March 23 - April 8, 2011 and covered 21 respondents from MoE and MoF, Agency of State Financial Control and Fight against Corruption (or Anti-Corruption Agency), Institute of In-service Training under President’s Office and representatives of the donor community and local NGOs. In order to validate the answers and have a comprehensive qualitative analysis, the research attracted different actors and therefore divided [respondents] them into three groups i.e. reform makers (Department for Service Affairs under President’s Office and donors), reform implementers (sample ministries) and independent observers (representatives of NGOs).

Among the donor community and international and local organisations only few are focusing on issues of accountability, integrity, transparency and good governance. These include “Reforming Public Sector” by the World Bank “State Enhancement and Improved Governance” by UNDP, “Support to the Civil Service Reform” by the EU and “Anti-Corruption Education and Propaganda” by Republican Public Organisation. WB and EU were the main actors that support and administer the process of reform where the former focuses on the overall implementation and introducing public sector components, including wage rates distribution, meritocratic recruitment etc., while the latter provided its support to the Department for Service Affairs under President’s Office in strengthening its capacity to implement the Law “On civil service”.

Considering that corruption is a sensitive issue especially in the public sector one can hardly get sufficient information from respondents about this phenomenon. During the field work it

was quite often to hear a standard response for example “corrupt behaviour is not practised in our ministry” or “our civil servants act in accordance with the impartiality principle” among sample public agencies staff. Despite the respondents expressed their willingness to participate in the research they were cautious about questions about corruption stating as non disclosure of internal and confidential information. Therefore the sub-questions on corruption were rephrased during the interview and supplementary follow up questions were asked.

It shall also be mentioned that during interviews the tape recorder has not been used since the intention was to get sufficient information and 1) the consent to participate in the interview would be a challenge among respondents of sample agencies, 2) the respondents would not provide essential information and instead one would get a standard set of information.

Only two public agencies, Ministry of Education and Anti-Corruption Agency requested both an official letter asking to meet with their respective staff members or provide relevant statistical data and a supporting document confirming that the research is a part of the thesis work and has some kind of external support by the institution. Other respondents were chosen strategically on the basis of their current job position either senior level of mid level professionals or via personal contacts. However years of working experience in the public sector was a general requirement.

Number of employees being interviewed per agency is at least one and no more than four depending on the scope of activity of the organisation and availability of employees. However for two sample agencies (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance) the selection of the respondents were based on three categories: 1) civil servants with about 10 years of experience, 2) civil servants with no less than 5 years of working experience, and 3) from human resource department to get the idea about recruitment and remuneration policy and process.

Last but not least, the research questions were initially developed in English. They were translated into Russian afterwards as most respondents especially in the public sector did not possess working knowledge of English. One questionnaire¹² was designed and divided into sub-questionnaires as per institution’s profile to collect perceptions about the civil service

¹² Quality of Government Institute (www.qog.pol.gu.se/) conducted researches related to this topic in previous years, therefore the current paper utilizes some of the relevant to this area questions in this research.

system, recruitment process, and corruption perception. The total number of questions is 26 and covered issues such as recruitment process, salary scale, employee qualifications, and civil servant system and corruption level in the public sector ([Annex 2](#)). Considering the sensitivity of the issue that research look upon an unwillingness of some respondents to mention their names, full anonymity of all respondents is maintained.

3.4 Research Limitation

Initially it was planned to have four ministries as the sample agencies that would illustrate both positive and negative ways of reform implementation and its effect on corruption. Since the approach of reforming is almost the same in the public sector, the research experienced difficulties in finding the most suitable ones to this study. As a result it had narrowed down to two public agencies; however it still meets the initial requirement and captures the elements of positive and negative side of reform implementation.

Originally, it was planned to capture 2005 and 2010 time period in order to compare and observe the impact of the reform on corruption. However, it was learned that public administration reform was adopted in 2007 and data for corruption is available also since 2007 as the agency was set up earlier that year. In spite of the research examining the impact of variables within three years, instead of initial five, the study does not shed its significance.

Another limitation of the research is that it does not have the quantitative element as the scope of the sampling does not allow it. Consequently, the research does not measure or control other variables, such as GDP, human development index, type of regime etc., as it will require a study of bigger scale. Although the latter variable is vaguely touched upon in this study.

4. Introduction to the Case Study

4.1 Case Selection

This section gives the overview of Tajikistan country context by building the ground for corruption and public administration system in the country.

Tajikistan with over 7.6 million population is located in the Central Asian region bordering Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan became an independent country in 1991 and shortly it has been plagued by internal conflict and political instability during 1992-1997. The consequences of the civil war and traditional economic and institutional structures inherited from the Soviet system affected greatly the economic development. It is still the least developed country in Central Asia with GDP per capita of US\$570 or 2545.3 TJK. Average monthly salary is 287 TJK (~\$64.27) and around 47.2% of the population lives on or below the poverty rate (State Statistical Agency, www.stat.tj; WB Information Brief www.worldbank.org).

Tajikistan is a presidential republic and according to the Constitution, the President is both a head of the state and government. The president is in power since 1994 and was re-elected for 7 years in 2006 as per adoption of amendments in the current Constitution. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) led by President is a major political party¹³ in the country that has won 70.6% votes during the last elections in 2010 (OSCE, Parliamentary Elections report, 2010).

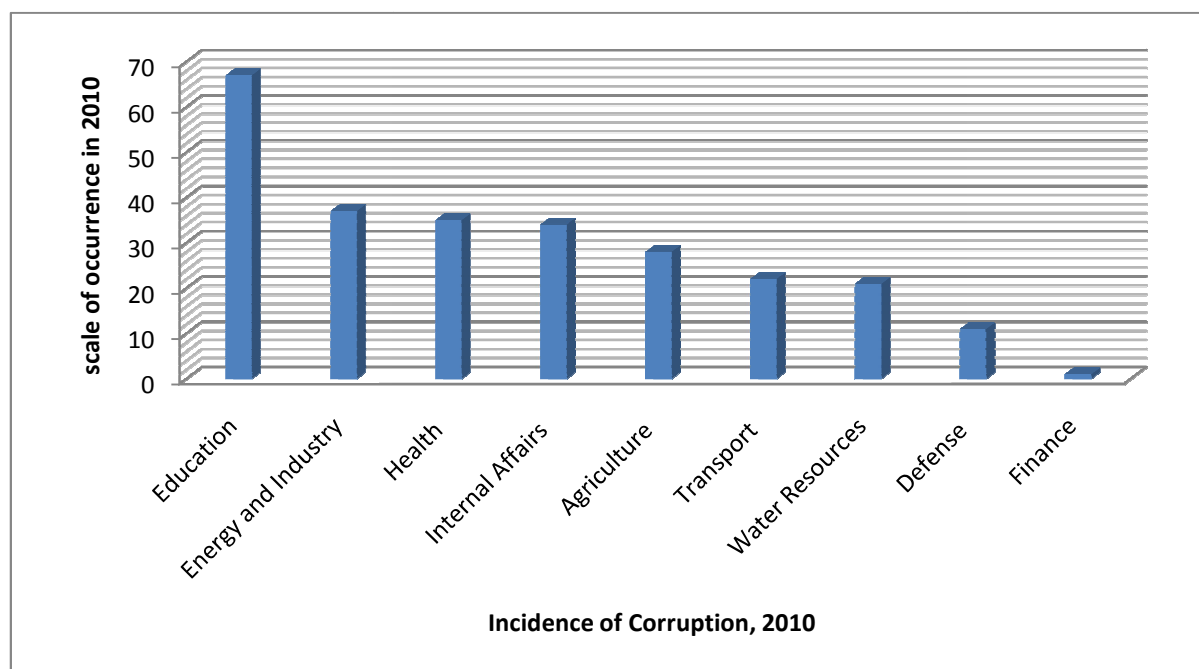
Low level of living standards, political preference, poor delivery of social services and inherited post-soviet bureaucracy led to the increase of corruption level in the country. Although fight against corruption is a high priority in Tajikistan and anti-corruption measures are included in various national programmes by the government, it is yet a pervasive phenomenon infecting almost every sector in the country (OECD, 2010:4). For instance, the findings of a very recent public opinion survey by UNDP (2010) on corruption in Tajikistan revealed quite an obvious but alarming picture. Almost half of the respondents (49.6%)

¹³ Tajikistan has a multi-party system with 8 registered political parties. As the OSCE report notes "the ruling PDPT holds a near monopoly not only on political appointments, but also on administrative posts at the national, regional and local level" (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/69061>, p.6). Other parties gained the following percentage of votes: 1. Islamic Renaissance Party – 8.2%; 2. Communist Party – 7.0; 3. Party of Economic Reforms -5.3%; 4. Agrarian Party – 5.1%; 5. Democratic Party – 1.0%, 6. Social Democratic Party – 0.8%, and 7. Socialist Party – 0.5 %.

believe that the majority of officials come to power only for their own self-enrichment, which means they tend to take bribes, while 14% of respondents opined that “civil servants extorts bribes from people because they have to do it for people” (Public Opinion Survey by CSS & UNDP, 2010:20-63).

Statistical data for 2010 provided by the anti-corruption agency shows the tendency of corruption in the public sector. The top five public agencies where the corruption related crimes were committed are: Ministry of Education with its 67 cases, Ministry of Energy and Industry – 37 corrupt behaviour, Ministry of Health with 35 cases, Ministry of Agriculture - 28, and Ministry of Transport with its 22 corruption activities accordingly (anti-corruption press-release for 2010).

Figure 1. Corruption Trend



(Data are generated from Anti-Corruption Agency, 2011; Anti-Corruption press-release, July 2010, October, 2010)

The pervasiveness of corruption in the country definitely effects negatively on the world ranking. Thus in Transparency International¹⁴, the country stands steadily in the bottom thirty being positioned in 150 out of 180 countries worldwide (**Table 1**).

¹⁴ Transparency International scoring system is based on a scale of 1 to 10, representing 1 the lowest and 10 the highest level of corruption perception score (www.transparency.org)

Table 2. Corruption Perception Ranking

	Place	Ranking	Place	Ranking	Place	Ranking	Place	Ranking
	2007		2008		2009		2010	
TI CPI	150	2.1	151	2	158	2	154	2.1

(Source: www.transparency.org)

The law on corruption was adopted in 2005 and is very generic and descriptive in nature, where it lacks a proper mechanism for implementation. Supposedly, to make the law workable, the anti-corruption strategy was adopted in 2008 and prior to having a full-fledged framework, the corruption component was scattered in various national programmes mostly focusing on increasing the capacity to fight against corruption, transparency and accountability in the public sector. Since the adoption of the strategy, almost all state and local authorities have elaborated anti-corruption programmes. However, the comprehensiveness and efficiency of these measurement programmes to tackle corruption-related activities are yet difficult to assess (OECD, 2010). For example, during the research interview no example of such document was provided, despite all interviewee participants among sample agencies mentioned about anti-corruption programme in their respective ministries.

Nevertheless, to make these normative documents feasible, Anti-Corruption Agency was established in 2007 following the recommendations of the OECD anti-corruption network, where Tajikistan is a part of it. As mentioned in previous section, the anti-corruption agency has a very broad mandate; it focuses more on its full capacity in the field of investigations both in the public and private sector.

Probably, one of the recent corruption scandals revealed in mid 2010 is around the son of the former Prosecutor-General who was charged against a bribe-taking incident involving 20,000 USD while serving as a chief prosecutor in one of the district. Upon thorough investigation he was involved in at least 13¹⁵ cases related to corruption, such as bribing, misuse of authority etc. Despite the head of the anti-corruption agency in his press-conference made an official statement¹⁶ that no high level official has the right to appoint his/her family members

¹⁵ Available on: <http://news.tj/en/news/investigation-case-son-former-tajik-chief-prosecutor-under-way>

¹⁶ The statement is available in Tajik language at Radio Free Europe: <http://www.ozodi.org/content/article/2114774.html> - in Tajik

or close relatives in the public sector posts, the Law “On civil service” does not clearly indicate this point. This situation indicates that nepotism is one of corruption causes and is being practiced in the public sector that makes civil service to suffer. As argued by Hollyer (2009:3) nepotism and patronage require that posts are given to those who are able to “pay” for their position. The more such constraints occur excluding high skilled candidates to compete based on their merits, the more costly would be a patronage/nepotism system, and the less likely the use of merit based recruitment (ibid, 2009:3).

The occurrence of such situation can be explained that countries in transit, like Tajikistan experience less impartiality from government bodies. It is probably because of the move from planned to market economy, design of new political institutions and that all together created the ground for corruption. On the other hand, the legislative part is narrow and somehow it lacks the concept of impartiality, professionalism and competence in the code of ethics.

Despite the occurrence of such situation, the need for the institutional reform, especially in the public administration arose in early 2000 where the major problems of public management and administration were reflected in Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper stating that “poverty reduction requires better management and more effectively and efficiently operating institutions both in state and private sector” (PRSP, 2002:13). The main stress was given to realign the functions of ministries/public agencies and to create a skilled, adequately paid and corruption free civil service capable of developing, implementing and monitoring government policies. ADB Country Governance Report (2004) indicates that the governance transformation is yet incomplete. There are vested interests that are resistant to change, therefore creating the challenges for developing effective institutional structures with effective management system.

Nevertheless, much attention and actions taken were only during the last five years with adoption of Public Administration Reform that somehow is in line with current socio-economic needs. While not all elements of the reform implemented in full capacity, yet some progress can be traced. The Law “On civil service” provides the ground for competitive recruitment to fill vacant position (-s) in the public sector, thus giving rise to a transparent and unbiased conduct of competitions and recruitment of the qualified and competent candidates. One of the core stages of the recruitment process is an interview, though it lacks competence based test that is considered to be as an inseparable part of a competition on filling vacant administrative positions in the public sector. Another development can be

referred to the remuneration/or wage scale that provides the increase in salary as per qualifications and working experience. However, the wage scale in its pilot phase, covering only selected agencies among of them is Ministry of Finance. The thorough discussion of the reform implementation and its effect on corruption will be given in the next section.

Having a brief overview of the current situation in the country with respect to corruption pervasiveness and steps undertaken to improve the situation in the public sector, the next section will discuss the implementation of the reform components and what factors impede [successful] implementation by providing and analysing the responses of the interviewees.

5. Empirical Findings

This section provides a thorough analysis of the field work. Given the nature of the research which is two-fold that compares public administration system over time and between sample agencies (i.e. ministries) - the paper first identifies significant changes that occurred in the recruitment process of the civil servant system. Further, the study separately looks at components of current civil servant system, and will try to trace the comparison between sample ministries. Upon each component, the section will attempt to analyse what problems may cause corruption and if there is any causal mechanism between bureaucratic features and level of corruption.

5.1 Civil Service System – Before and After. Are there any significant changes for real?

As noted above, the need to reform the civil service system raised in early 2000 where the transition process entailed socio-economic changes. At this point, the international community raised their concern on developing a solid platform for management of public affairs. Particularly, ADB Country Governance Report (2004:18) stressed that civil service must be free of partisan interests and ought to be structured based on competency and integrity. However, the move from a patronage based system to competency one seems to be wrenching, and the Government is cautiously approaching these changes. Nevertheless, the

Government recognized the need to professionalise public administration, by starting with the civil service system.

Until 2001, there was no government institution that would deal with civil service and monitor the human resources status in the civil service system. Therefore, one of the reasons to establish the Department for Civil Service was to have a capacity to develop and implement the law on civil service that would fill in the gaps of previous civil service law adopted in 1998 and to create an effective public administration structure with a clear role and functions of employees. As a result, the new Law “On civil service” was adopted in 2007 and since it was amended twice in 2010. Moreover, the PAR Strategy for 2005-2015 was developed, where the main stress was given to improve the prestige of civil service at the labour market. The core problem which is seen in the strategy is that competitive (meritocratic) recruitment, staff assessment and overall human resource management is lacking. Besides, one can observe the lack of motivation (both material and non-material), insufficient of incentives aimed at increasing the effectiveness among civil servants.

The World Bank and EU were the major actors at central level that assisted the Government to improve its institutional capacity. In order not to overlap with activities, the EU focus was on strengthening the capacity of the Department for Civil Service, especially in drafting the law, while the WB input was on piloting and implementation of reform components, including meritocratic recruitment and pay reform.

Despite adopting the Civil Service Law in 2007, one could not expect its immediate implementation due to the lack capacity and overall understanding of the concept and its new approaches. Therefore, the approaches of the old system were applied yet commonly by all public agencies in 2007. The **Table 3** generates opinion of respondents, not in a sequential order, with regard to different approaches that were either formally or informally applied during recruitment process.

Table 3. Comparison of Recruitment Approaches

Before/in 2007	After /in 2010
Decentralised recruitment	Centralised recruitment
Announced internally	Externally. Through mass media
A generic job description	Detailed job description
Several stage of separate interview	One round of interview w.interview panel
Relevance of competency is not a priority	Competency is required

When asking the very first question about the difference between the “old” and “new” approaches of the recruitment process from the group of “reform makers” and “sampling agencies”, the respondents named several of them. For instance, the following response was opined:

“The recruitment was quite decentralised i.e. each ministry was assigned to recruit new staff. In other words, after graduation from universities, a new/young specialist was placed per public agencies/ministries. Now it is centralised, where the Department for Civil Service under the President’s Office monitors the entire recruitment process”.

View of respondents among “Reform-Makers” and “Sample Agencies”

The placement system of the young/new specialists in the public institutions upon graduation was inherited from the Soviet system. Despite this approach not being of wide use after the collapse of the system, the ministry, especially Education, was practising it due to the lack of competent young specialists both at the central and local levels. Although the placement system is not widely exercised anymore in both ministries; the respondents admitted that 1 to 3 new graduates are placed annually through this approach. At the same time, decentralisation type of recruitment was associated with internal hiring, where only a small number of people were aware of any vacancies available within two ministries. The only way that information of any available vacancy could reach the potential candidates was through the internal newspaper that is circulated within the ministry and its subordinate organisations. The announced vacancies only included the posts of junior positions (for instance, junior specialists), while senior position posts had internal promotion characteristic in many cases. However, the information was not available for the majority of population, who had not access to the internal-type of newspaper. As respondents from both ministries

acknowledged many of the public officials/civil servants have been hired on the basis of personal and political contacts and it is yet preserved up to this date.

“The use of personal and other type of ties is an inevitable part of the hiring process”.

View of respondents among “Sample Agencies”

This statement was the most repeated one by almost every respondent especially among independent observers. Most of them tend to believe that this feature was inherited from the Soviet system, but had been evolved deeper during the transition period, where the cronyism and clan played a significant role that was rather a normal way of hiring. As noted by a respondent:

“Each Ministry is a ‘clan’ with strong informal system of promotion or demotion based on personal relationships”.

View of a respondent among “independent observer”

In terms of recruitment of new employees in both ministries, all respondents maintained that personal and political ties are very important during the hiring process. Unlike some EU countries, where personal and professional contacts matter to get a job, but based on meritocratic principles (EU report 2010 on QoG), in Tajikistan, such issues as cronyism, family affairs and personal contacts are pervasive almost at all levels that in many cases do not meet competence requirements.

Another outstanding feature, mentioned by the respondents is that there was no centralised way of interview panel, where all short-listed candidates invited for an interview. Instead an applicant would go through several stages of separate (informal) interviews, starting from HR section, head of a concerned section and finally with a head of a concerned department. The absence of public and transparent way of admission process limited access to external candidates to be aware of any vacancies and apply for it accordingly. Since it was a decentralised and internal way of recruitment, the perception of population about public agencies, especially with regard to these ministries is that the public power is often used for self own interest. The root of the problem could be seen in the lack of accountability, transparency and interaction; therefore it created a gap in understanding clear roles and responsibilities of public sector employees. It is associated with bureaucracy that in turn is

perceived in a negative way which is predominantly related to opportunity for corrupt behaviour, such as bribing and misuse of funds.

A generic job description is another prominent characteristic found in the old system. The respondents of both ministries acknowledged that very basic terms of reference (ToR) was used in previous years of recruitment with insufficient information about level and/or category of the announced position. It can probably be explained that the senior posts were technically filled in via internal promotion, while the posted vacancies were mainly targeted entry and junior to mid-level positions, hence a standard and generic terms of references was used.

The terms of reference in both ministries did not have a thorough description of the tasks and responsibilities, including analytical ones. The overall stress was put on a good command of Tajik (native) and other languages (e.g. Russian and English), computer skills and relevant education background as the evidence that a candidate is capable to handle the work.

Another notable characteristic identified by the respondents was about competency of the candidates. By “competency” the respondents referred to the work experience, a good command of native and other (foreign) languages, and computer skills. However, respondents differed in opinion. For instance, a respondent from ministry of education noted that work experience did not really matter, especially if a candidate was a recent graduate. This statement can be explained that pedagogical background is not a popular qualification among young people, and therefore an impression was that a candidate with minimum credentials could enter the ministry. This might entail another problem such as outflow of civil servants, especially among young specialists, as noted by another respondent, where they would not fulfil their expectations and low level of wage that is one of the main incentives force them to move to the private sector. This was quite possible for MoE to conduct internal way of hiring process to fill in the existing human resources gap.

At the same time, a respondent from ministry of finance had an opposite opinion stating that anyone with necessary skills had equal chances to get a job, however those without any personal and other type of contacts need to show more enthusiasm during the selection process. Due to the fact that economic background is very popular among young people and is considered as one of the prestigious qualifications to have, the labour market is overabundant by people with economic and finance management background.

The differences in hiring process captured in the comparison with **Table 3** indicates that prior to adoption of the PAR reform - the recruitment was closed and barely based on meritocracy. The promotion of the staff seemed to happen internally, giving fewer opportunities for outside candidates to be aware of any possibilities. The only distinctive feature between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance is that the former was lacking of competent people due to the nature of hiring process, lack of motivation among young specialists, and indeed lack of material and non-material incentives that would stimulate employees not to be engaged in any corrupt behaviour. While the latter is considered to be a prestigious public agency to work in, where a hiring process was on the basis of networking rather meritocracy, however, a relative competence could yet be observed.

5.2 Reforming Civil Service System

5.2.1 Recruitment Process

The move from old type of system to the new one requires time and adaptation. Therefore elements of the previous approach are yet preserved in the ministries despite all efforts given to introduce new approaches of hiring process of civil servants.

Nevertheless, having a solid legal ground, government commitment with technical and financial support from international donor organisations, the reform introduced new approaches of hiring process. One of the novelties, as per reform makers, is an open and transparent selection process, where anyone with necessary skills and competence has equal opportunities to apply for a job in the public agencies. In accordance with the PA reform it was compulsory for all public agencies to advertise vacancy in the mass media and their respective websites. This approach has definitely played an important role to achieve the openness in the recruitment process, where any jobseekers among both internal and external candidates had an opportunity to compete equally in the selection process.

Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance were among of first public agencies where open and public selection procedure was introduced. The representatives of the personnel department (hereafter referred to as HR) of both ministries underlined that according to the

adopted rules and regulations, any available administrative positions¹⁷ are subject to external announcement which is published in a public (designated) and internal newspaper¹⁸, and a vacancy advert is kept for 14 days. In average they usually receive 6-8 applications in the MoE and 10-12 applications in case of MoF per announced vacancy. Even though, all applicants are screened based on their merits and competences, they are all invited for the interview, including those who meets partial or minimum requirements. The representatives of both ministries explained this approach as “*to give equal chances for every applicant to go through the next stage i.e. interview*”. The chairman of the interview panel is the minister himself both in MoF and MoE; they have an authority to nominate the members of the interview panel, who are usually among heads of departments. A representative of the Department of Civil Service is also a member of the interview panel, and his/her presence considered to be obligatory, but many respondents during the interview stressed out that their representation has rather a nominal presence.

A very interesting aspect of vacancy announcement was revealed in both ministries. The representatives of HR section admitted that to publish an advert in any of public and well-known (popular) newspaper (-s) is costly and administrative costs are very scarce, which they cannot afford to publish every single vacant post in the public newspaper. Instead, once in a quarter, they compile all vacancies into one advert with a very generic term of references and highlight minimum qualifications that match all vacancies they post. Usually, under this category fall the vacancies for junior and mid level specialists with 2-3 years of experience. While, a position for a higher level is either promoted or announced internally.

Hence, it seems that a hiring process is established and all administrative vacancies undergo via competitive and meritocratic recruitment. However, supplementary information with regard to the whole process was provided by the independent observers claiming for non-transparency of hiring process. The announced positions are predominantly published in

¹⁷ There are eight categories that falls under “administrative position” – one high category ((first) deputy minister(-s)) and seven categories (for instance, first category is entitled for head of department and 7th category is entitled for junior specialist). Even though, the high category falls under administrative position, it does not go through open type of recruitment. The head of government appoints both first deputy ministry and deputy ministries.

¹⁸ Almost all public agencies have their internal newspaper, where the sector related news is shared within the agency and its subordinate organisations. The subscription for this newspaper is a must for all civil and public servants and it is circulated once a week or bi-weekly. Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance has each their own internal newspaper, where the latest news related to their respective sector (discussions of programme and strategies/interviews/latest achievements) is published.

internal ministerial newspapers rather than in the public ones. Due to the lack of information, very few outside candidates may know what types of vacancies are available at the ministry. Even the information with regard to the vacancies is either empty or out of date on their official website. Besides, the observers were cautious about the way how the vacancy announcement is designed; even though one of the EU report recommendations (2007) was to have detailed description of duties along with job description and required competency in order the potential applicants can have an idea about types of available vacancies.

Another novelty in the hiring process is a good command of native (Tajik) language which is an important requirement when a person applies for a position. A recent adopted law on language in 2009 makes mandatory to use Tajik in official communications, and especially in the public agencies eroding Russian that was widely used until that time in both public and private sectors. Although respondents opined that it is not mandatory to speak Tajik to get a job in the ministry, but it certainly represents an advantage since both official and daily communications is held in Tajik. In this sense, language becomes a barrier though not a formal one, but still to get a job. It especially concerns those who graduated Russian speaking schools/universities, where the education is believed to be a way better than in Tajik ones. Nevertheless, such informal obstacle narrows down the opportunity of competent people to compete in the selection process and it indeed creates an implicit preference towards Tajik language speakers.

The overall impression of independent observers is sceptical on the whole process of reform implementation pointing out that recruitment process is technically impartial and transparent, however in fact, it is affected by patronage, relativism and personal and political relationship.

“The announced vacancies are conducted in a nominal way to show up they follow the necessary procedures. If young and talented Tajiks were allowed into the public administration it would be a great thing. It just does not happen unless it’s a case of nepotism or cronyism . Nepotism is firmly entrenched in the recruitment and it is the rule rather than the exception”.

View of a respondent among “Independent Observer”

Almost all respondents, even among sample agencies acknowledged that relativism and cronyism is a common way to get employed and personal ties supersede the official way of

hiring process in the public sector. This especially concerns Ministry of Finance, as discussed in previous section, being one of the prestigious places to work in among other ministries, and therefore personal or political contacts often are given merits. A respondent confirmed that some vacancies are not even posted and employers replace the candidates via political contacts. For example, a head of a department who had the extensive work experience in the ministry was downgraded to a lower position as a leading specialist. Instead, he was replaced by a son of a political actor without any formal recruitment process.

The independent observers critically opined that meritocratic or competitive recruitment, transparency and professionalism are lacking in the public sector. Cronyism and nepotism negatively affect the quality of civil service, as those who are more competent and capable always are left behind and have fewer opportunities to get a job.

5.2.2 Career Development

The tendency of career development is observed among mid-and high level civil servants, while the turnover is high among young specialists. As one of the respondent critically opined:

“...young and perspective specialists do not pursue their civil servants’ career due to low level of salary, lack of social package benefits and lack of government’s responsibility to secure their future opportunities”.

View of a respondent among “Independent Observer”

Career development first of all is motivated by material and non-material incentives. A very interesting observation was done by a MoE respondent. According to the statement, the departments in the ministry are categorised by “prestigious” and “non-prestigious”, where in the former, the employees are willing to get promoted and develop their skills. According to this logic, under “prestigious” classification fall the following departments such as, marketing and procurement department, international relations department, and finance/accountant department etc. It turns out that the interest for career development pretty much depends on the place you work in; if a formal material and non-material incentives are lacking, civil servants try to find the advantages out what they have. For instance, specialists in the

international relations department are motivated by meetings with international partners to strengthen their negotiation capacity and learn best practices in the area of education from their colleagues or get stimulated by study tour (out-of-country) travels as non-material incentives. In contrast, the outflow of civil servants is seen in the “non-prestigious” department, where they could hardly meet their expectations and do not get motivated by dealing with just paper work.

Another aspect of career development is internal promotion that occurs once a position is upgraded. Not all vacancies operate through open position system where external candidates can apply for it. Once in three years the internal examination (or *attestation*) of the staff is conducted to assess their performance. An evaluation committee is generally formed of heads of sections and departments, where they examine the qualifications and competency of staff. The attestation process can be equaled to the interview process, where the members of the committee examine the knowledge of regulatory and legal documents/aspects, language proficiency and computer skills. As the representatives of HR departments of both ministries opined, roughly 7-10% of employees do not get through the attestation/evaluation process that may result in losing their jobs. If an employee passes the attestation successfully, s/he will be upgraded in position that also effects on increase of salary. Besides, if a staff is overqualified and professional, s/he is nominated to the “cadre reserve system” of civil servants. So called “cadre reserve system” is aimed to provide a career development for qualified and professional specialists. The idea behind the “cadre reserve system” is that a pool of qualified specialists is identified and their personal history is kept in the Department for Civil Service. Once any vacancies appear they either are placed automatically or nominated as an internal candidate to get through the next stage, in case there are few “reserve” candidates. For example, Ministry of Education accommodated 4 candidates and Ministry of Finance 6 via reserve system in 2010 accordingly. An independent observer opined that the system is politicized, where the nomination of the candidates are done from current ruling party.

5.2.3 Analysis of Causal Mechanism: Merits and Meritocracy

The advantage of meritocracy, comprising a formal way of examination/interview, competency and professionalism is clear. By providing transparent benchmarks, it helps to

identify those who are knowledgeable and qualified for a position. Moreover, it facilitates competition among number of competent candidates, thus restricting the use of other mechanisms, such as patronage and relativism. Thus, the idea about meritocracy is that it helps to ensure that the civil service is staffed with capable and skilled individuals and “it is thus relatively productive” (Hollyer, J, 2009:10). Many studies have pointed out the importance of selection of professional bureaucrats to government performance. For instance, the East Asian experience in 90-s of last decade became the arena for research, where findings were quite diverging. WB (1993) noted the competitive nature of the recruitment process, where meritocracy was given high priority and merit-based examination administered among students of prestigious universities of their respective countries. Studying this question, Geddes (1994) comes up with a different opinion, stating that political competition might lead to increased use of patronage, thus moving away from meritocracy

The empirical findings illustrate that meritocratic recruitment is endorsed formally, but instead a majority of civil servants are hired and promoted on the basis of patronage and all types of contacts. The priority is given to networking and contacts instead of competency and professionalism and unfortunately meritocracy is hardly rewarded in the public sector. It does not mean that there is lack of competent people, but rather there is a misbalance of qualified specialists.

Tajikistan like other countries in transition faces difficult tasks to create a professional civil service system; they have one advantage over many developing countries. They have a well educated population capable of performing the tasks of modern government. However, many people need retraining to be able to take on the new responsibilities required of civil servants in a market economy (Collins, 1993:335 cited in Rose-Ackerman, 1999:71).

Despite the quality of education has been deteriorated in recent years, the level of education in the country is considerably high and it is quite common after (general) secondary education¹⁹ to pursue the postgraduate path. This feature has remained since the Soviet system. According to the data provided by the Department for Civil Service about 30 000 young specialists graduate the universities annually. For a country, like Tajikistan the number

¹⁹ General education system in Tajikistan is three fold which consists of primary education (grades 1-4), secondary education (grades 5-9) and upper secondary education (grades 10-11).

of new specialists is enough to get employed, however it turns out that qualified and competent young specialists are lacking. It is because, the labour market is overcrowded with the so called “prestigious” specialists, which are predominantly in the area of business administration and finance management such as: economists, managers, accountants etc.; while pedagogy and education management background is not qualified as prestigious and therefore competent and skilled professionals are lacking.

The overabundance of specialists may entail a wide use of patronage and relativism to get a job in the public sector, especially among the so-called “prestigious” ministries. As Hollyer argues, patronage is characterized by skilled and unskilled candidates devoting their energies to the pursuit of private gain instead providing public service (2009:1). This may result in exclusion of skilled candidates from competition by such constraints, and therefore the more patronage system is in use, the less likely meritocratic recruitment will be practised (ibid: 3).

5.3 Salary, Incentives and Pay

Adequate financial remuneration plays an important role to incentivise public/civil servants to perform duties and responsibilities impartially and not to be engaged in corrupt behaviour. There is high wage disparity in the country, where the salary in the public sector is the lowest compared to the private sector and international organisations. According to the MoE source, the minimum wage scale in the ministry is 200 TJS (\approx 44 USD) and it has recently been increased by 10% in 2010. A pay system is grounded to the bureaucrat’s longevity in the ministry and his/her rank (or grade) (Nistotskaya, 2009:30-31). There are indeed incentives, such as bonus payment and long service bonus²⁰ on top of salary that somehow stimulate public employees.

As a part of the PAR reform, a common wage rate distribution (salary grid) is being piloted since later 2010 in five public agencies, where MoF is among them. The current salary of the MoF is higher by 30% according to this system. It is too early to say anything or measure its

²⁰ Long service bonus can be both material and non-material. For instance, as a non-material bonus, a civil servant may be awarded a rank an “Honoured Worker” for dedication and excellent work. However, this non-material award will be transferred to a material incentive which will affect to the increase of a pension for length of the service once an awarded civil servant goes to the retirement.

impact; however a gradual transition from current pay system is anticipated by joining other five ministries in late 2011. The difference between the current pay system and newly introduced one is that the salary grid varies as per budget allocation in public agencies within current system. In the newly introduced one, a civil service salary grid will link compensation to the level of responsibility, experience and complexity of civil servants' work. In other words, a starting fixed salary is multiplied by the coefficient (steps and/or grades) and plus employment rate. For instance, the starting point of the salary is fixed – 350 TJS (≈77 USD) and will be increased per upgraded step by 5% (there are 14 steps) and per upgraded categories by 22% (there are 7 categories).

As an ongoing process of the reform, a vertical functional review was carried out in 2010 in both ministries, where the proposition of each new central ministry apparatus and its subordinate agency structures were reviewed and submitted to President's Executive Office. The idea about reorganisation of the ministry is to assess the impact of staffing levels and estimate the budget implications. One of the recommendations that included in the review was to increase the salary for civil servants by reducing their overall number. This is, however, at the stage of discussion and consideration, however some of the respondents, especially at the MoE did not agree with such recommendations.

5.3.1 Analysis of the Causal Mechanism: Salary

The respondents were asked to assess effectiveness of measures intended to reduce corruption in the public sector. As anticipated, the most effective mean to reduce corruption is to increase their salaries. Low salaries seem to be an inducement for corrupt behaviour, and when civil servants are paid inadequately, many of them may consider it acceptable to take a bribe (Mirzoev, 2006). The empirical findings and figures from Anti-Corruption Agency serve as an example, where the Ministry of Education is more prone to corruption. Given the fact the allocation for education²¹ is lower in comparison with other public sectors; the salary respectively is anticipated to be lower in education sector. This can probably serve as the main reason why corruption is unfortunately pervasive among public [education] service providers.

²¹ GDP allocation for education is 3.8 and a high proportion of the expenditures goes on personnel costs – about 77%. (MTEF report by UNESCO and Japan Trust Fund, 2010:10) <http://www.scribd.com/doc/52645395/Education-Financial-Planning-in-Asia-Implementing-Medium-term-Expenditure-Frameworks-Tajik-is-Tan>

As Rose Ackerman argues that low salary and misuse of public/government position may be an inducement for corruption. With no civil service tenure secure, the civil servants who expect to lose their jobs may simply put money away for the future (Rose-Ackerman, 1999:70). Simply saying for public employees the payoffs acceptance to supplement salary and second jobs are the survival strategy (ibid, 1999:72). Although, the study did not measure the types of survival strategy or impact of cultural aspect, most respondents²² cautiously mentioned that running a small business apart from their main job is a permissible for them to support their families. By them, it is considered as a “forced” coping strategy rather than something wrong.

5.4 Checks and Balances

Out of all asked questions, corruption seemed to be a sensitive issue for respondents of sample agencies stating it as a non disclosure of internal and confidential information. The most frequent and general answer one could get from the sample agencies is that corruption behaviour is not practiced in the ministry, and civil servants act in accordance with impartiality norms and principles. Talking about corruption data by ACA was like a taboo, therefore one could expect no reaction from both ministries stating that they did not have any information or not responsible for this issue. Although they admitted that in general it is pervasive in the public sector, thus changing the direction of the interview smoothly.

The causation of corruption, according to the respondents is access to “easy money”, lack of financial incentives, and lack of proper checks and balances in the public agencies. A very critical note was done by an independent observer stating the following:

“Each Ministry has its own mechanisms for corruption but the root cause is the same –there is no accountability or transparency in the operations of the Ministry and it is treated as a means of rent collection by civil servant in a vertical structure”.

View of a respondent among “Independent Observer”

A very interesting observation was made by a respondent from sample agency claiming that, individuals and private sector provoke corruption in the public sector by bribing or presenting

²² Almost all independent observers and couple of respondents from sample agencies admitted.

gifts in order to avoid “long-lasting” bureaucratic chain. The thing is Tajikistan is a culture oriented country, where giving gifts is very popular and considered as a common and normal feature – as a means to express gratitude. The assumption among public employees is that “to accept small gifts and inexpensive presents should be rather interpreted as acknowledgement of one’s power or showing respect and hospitality, which is one of the traditional features of the Tajik society” (Mirzoev, 2006:31).

The corruption prevention mechanisms are multi-dimensional. As reported, public agencies elaborated anti-corruption programme. During the interview, no sample was provided and therefore it is difficult to say anything about the effectiveness of measures undertaken and what tools and mechanisms are to be used in deterring corruption. Institute of Civil Service developed module training on issues related to corruption and its preventive anti-corruption aspect. A handbook on “Ethics and integrity in the civil service” that has the sections about ethics, regulation of conflict interest, and fighting with corruption was developed with the financial support of EC funded project and disseminated among public agencies. The Anti-Corruption Agency established in 2007 is a responsible body to detect and disclose corruption related cases both in the public and private sectors. As reported by the anti-corruption representative, they conduct two types of inspection: 1) “ad hoc” inspection once a year, that is a random department or section is chosen (for example, procurement, accounting etc) to investigate the checks and balances, and 2) a comprehensive inspection of the entire public agency. The level of punishment of a public/civil servant caught in any corrupt cases depends on the scale of corrupt actions and whether it is revealed internally or externally. As explained by the respondents of sampling agencies, if a civil servant is caught internally, the individual would either be dismissed or obliged to pay the fine. If the case is caught externally by anti-corruption agency, in many instances, the case is brought to the court. The non-disclosure of internal affairs can probably be explained that public agencies do not want the public to know and therefore, they try to settle the problem in a way they consider to be the best.

5.4.1 Analysis of Causal Mechanism: Checks and Balances

There is lack of information about anti-corruption programmes developed by ministries to see if any concrete measures are taken or any internal checks and balances conducted. The establishment of the Anti-Corruption Agency shows a nominal way of transparency in checks

and balances in the public sector. Almost all respondents were not satisfied with the work executed by the anti-corruption agency, questioning the impartiality of agency staff. At the same time, lack of professionalism and competency is observed in the agency. It is mentioned during the interview that the agency is lacking of impartiality behaviour by disclosing the corrupt behaviour only among street bureaucrats, while the pervasiveness of corruption is observed among high level officials. The credibility of the ACA is questionable. The respondents felt that the agency is not accountable to people, but rather acts on its own, where the issue of transparency is under a big question. They were doubtful whether the ACA is a right organisation being responsible for checks and balances. The following quotation represents the idea about this agency by, mostly, independent observers:

“The State Agency on Corruption operates as the State Agency for Extortion especially of the private sector. There is a very low rate of voluntary disclosure generated by detection of corruption in agencies”

View of a respondent among “Independent Observer”

This quotation is quite similar to the opinion of a recent Public Opinion Survey (2010) by SCC and UNDP that included the Agency in the list of the most corruptive state bodies (2010:28). The following is extracted from this survey report:

[The purpose owing to which the Anti-corruption Agency was created have not been achieved. In our eyes it does not have any credibility, because they do not work and the results of their work are not visible. They did not ease our life, but only become rich. Only those who cannot pay off are punished]

extracted from Public Opinion Survey by SCC and UNDP, 2010:21

Besides ACA no other independent institution is involved in the internal monitoring system. The mass media provides ad hoc information collected mostly from the ACA or via independent investigation mainly among street bureaucrats. All this evidence indicates that the lack of proper monitoring mechanism entails the flourish of corruption in the public sector.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has explored the issue of meritocracy and its effect on corruption by observing the causal mechanism both theoretically and empirically in the context of Tajikistan. Given the nature of the research which is two-fold that compares over time and between sample agencies, the paper attempted to look at previous and current civil service system and identify any significant changes that might have occurred in the recruitment process of the civil service system. One of the main shortfalls in the previous system encountered in the research is that the hiring and promotion and information about vacancies in the sample agencies were close and to large extent relativism and patronage was an inevitable part of the recruitment process. Relativism and all types of the contacts still preserved in the current system, however one of the significant changes that have occurred in the current system is the merit based (or *competitive*) recruitment.

The empirical analysis revealed that meritocratic recruitment does not have an effect on the level of corruption at its earliest endorsement. However it is early to assess its overall impact, as it is being practiced for only 2-2,5 years and therefore some shortfalls and drawbacks can yet be observed. It is formally applied within the new PAR system, but instead a majority of civil servants are hired and promoted on the basis of patronage and all types of contacts. The priority is given to networking and contacts instead of competency and professionalism and unfortunately meritocracy is hardly rewarded in the public sector. Financial motivation and incentivisation of civil servants is not sufficient. Low salaries indeed serves as an inducement for corruption, and when the civil servants are paid inadequately, many considered it allowable for them to accept a bribe. There is a huge disparity in wage distribution between sample ministries that possible explains the high level of corruption in the MoE in recent years. It is too early to measure the impact of the new salary grid system, and there is no guarantee if the system will give a positive outcome.

The data from the Anti-Corruption Agency showed that the Ministry of Education is more prone to corrupt behaviour compared to the Ministry of Finance. The low level corruption cases in the Ministry of Finance is not the indication of the positive case, but rather the overabundance of specialists result in wide use of patronage and all types of contacts in the Ministry of Finance to select “the better” candidates.

The root of the corruption causation can be traced in the poorly functioning institutions and policy implementation that undermine the competition based on competency in the public sector. On the one hand, the change from a command to market economy created the opportunities for inducement, which is considered the source for rent-seeking behaviour among bureaucrats (Mauro, 1995). On the other, a country in transition, Tajikistan, a wide range of institutional reforms have been introduced, where the capacity was lacking and the system of checks was not developed properly that entails the flourish of corruption in the public sector.

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Appendix 1. Map of Tajikistan



Capital: Dushanbe

Total Area: 143,100 sq km

GDP by sector: 19.2% agriculture, 22.6% industry, 58.1% services (2010 est.)

Independence: September 9, 1991

Administrative Division: 4 regions

Population below poverty line: 53% (2009 est.)

Government type: Unitary, Semi-Presidential Republic

Major languages: Tajik, Russian

Work force: 2.1 mln (2009); agriculture: 49.8%, industry: 12.8%; services 37.4% (2009 est.)

President: Emomali Rahmon (1991-ongoing)

GDP (PPP): \$14.74 billion (2010 est.)

Exports: aluminium, electricity, cotton, fruits, vegetable oil, textiles

Population: 7,627,200 (July 2011 est.)

GDP per capita (PPP): \$2,000 (2010 est.)

(Sources: <http://www.state.gov>; <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/tajikist.pdf>)

Appendix 2. Sample of Questions

1	Selection Process in previous system and within new PA reform
1.1	How do you fill vacant position in your ministry? Any changes/amendments in the recruitment process over the period?
1.2	What is the approximate length of the hiring process and is there any formal way of an examination system?
1.3	When recruiting public sector employees, are the skills and merits of the applicants taken into consideration to get a job? What are the minimum requirements? How many applications do you receive for a position? Roughly, tentatively?
1.4	When recruiting public sector employees, do the political/personal/business connections of the applicants matter to get a job?
1.5	Approximately what is the proportion of currently working employees who have entered the service via the competitive recruitment (formal examinations, interview) procedure?
1.6	In your opinion, does meritocratic recruitment have a (positive) impact in your ministry?
1.7	Are senior public officials recruited from within the ranks of the public sector?
1.8	Once one is recruited as a public sector employee, does one stay a public sector employee for the rest of one's career? What is the appr. percentage? What is the percentage of staff turnover?
1.9	What is necessary for ensuring efficient competitive selection of personnel?
2.	Career Development
2.1	How do you perceive the long-term stability of young employees and their interest in a career within your ministry?
2.2	Are various types of contacts (personal/ business/ political) important when hiring new employees? Do you think it differs between the ministries/public agencies?
2.3	What is the percentage of employees who have been hired on a political/personal/business contacts basis?
3	Civil Service Training
3.1	How often does a public sector employee have training and retraining opportunity? What is the duration of the training programme?
3.2	Does each ministry have its own training and retraining programme that you work with or do you have a common programme for public agencies?
3.3	In your opinion, when recruiting public sector employees, what occurs most - political/personal/business connections or qualifications of the applicants to get a job in the public sector?
3.4	In general is the selection process in the public sector is competitive and free of bias, unlawful discrimination, nepotism or patronage? Is nepotism being practiced in the recruitment process in the public sector?
3.5	In your opinion, do the qualifications of new/young specialists meet the needs of the public sector? Do you feel they are well prepared?

4.	Salary/Incentives
4.1	What is the salary scale in your ministry?
4.2	Are salaries of public sector employees linked to appraisals of their performance? How often the performance of the staff is evaluated by supervisor?
4.3	Are there any additional incentives to motivate new/young specialists?
5.	PA reform
5.1	How do you assess the implementation of public administration reform?
5.2	What are the major differences between the old and new civil servant system? Training programme?
5.3	What are the main problems/challenges to effectively implement the public administration reform?
6.	Corruption
6.1	What situations do civil servants face once they found corruption and fraud?
6.2	Are corruption and fraud more prominent in the public or the private sector or is it about the same in both?
6.3	In your opinion, what is the main cause of corruption in the public agency?