Cau Giay street.

Photo credit: Andreas Mattsson

Authors:

Andreas Mattsson[1] and Måns Svensson[2]

Abstract

This policy brief looks into the role of social norms to fight corruption in the school system in the Cau Giay district in Hanoi. An ongoing research project has conducted multiple ethnographic field studies in schools and included parents, teachers, and other school personnel in the research data. Their experiences and reflections are the core of this brief. The results show the existence of informal transactions to ensure good care and schools results backed up on social norms such as the celebration of national holidays throughout the school year, but also exist on an everyday basis with the practices of home teaching, and the recruitment of new teachers to schools. By applying a socio-legal anti-corruption perspective to the findings, we suggest a list of actions that could be implemented by local school administrators and headmasters to ensure that no child experiences corruption nor the impact of corruption on his/her schooling.

About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organization is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments.

Using Social Norms to Fight Corruption in Local Governments:
A Case Study of the School System in Hanoi, Vietnam

Introduction

The impact of corruption in the Vietnamese society affects most citizens in the country in everyday life (cf. Hansen, 2017; Leducq and Scarwell, 2018; London, 2015). The 'socialist rule of law' in Vietnam has been investigated in the discourse of human rights and analysed with models of inclusion and exclusion and understood in the given political context where the risks and forms of corruption are present (cf. Giang et al., 2016; McCornac, 2015; Phuong, 2017). When approaching the case of the school system in the Cau Giay district, one also has to include values, norms, and obligations that co-exist in the Vietnamese society juxtaposed with national and supranational law. The patrilineal ancestor worship and the family is a centrepiece of the society influencing individuals' decision-making and career choices. (Rydstrøm, 2003, chap. 1; Drummond and Rydstrøm, 2004, chap. 1; Hoang, 2015, pp. 6–8) An important distinction should be made between salary (luong cung) and income (luong mem) where the latter includes bonuses and other benefits, often linked to what is called corrupt practices. The individual's network comes with extra opportunities, work tasks, and extra jobs 3 (Gainsborough, 2010, p. 178)

In this policy brief, we examine and reflect on the co-existence of corruption and social norms within the Vietnamese school system using findings from our case study in the Cau Giay district in Hanoi. We also elaborate on to what extent corruption limits child rights by teachers and other school personnel and suggest actions that could be taken to address the issues followed by the impact of dysfunctional norms in

[1] PhD student, University of Helsinki, andreas.mattsson@helsinki.fi
[2] Project Leader, Halmstad University

[3] The role of social norms in the Vietnamese society is summed up in a contemporary Vietnamese saying regarding different factors of importance in the Vietnamese labour market: 'nhất hậu duệ, nhì quan hệ, ba tiền tệ, bốn trí tuệ' ("The first importance is descent, second are social relations, third is money, and fourth is the intellectual capital") Even though it might seem simplified, it is noteworthy to pay attention to the importance of social networks to find the solutions to various problems in the daily lives of Vietnamese citizens. (Luong, 2016)

Using Social Norms to Fight Corruption in Local Governments:
A Case Study of the School System in Hanoi, Vietnam | Policy Brief No 9

2021 | www.icld.se   1

What is a norm?

The socio-legal definition of norms (both legal norms and other social norms) used in this project is based on their having three essential attributes. The first is that norms are individuals' perception of surrounding expectations regarding their own behavior; the second one tells us that norms also are materialized expressions that are socially reproduced and thus can be studied empirically; while the third one states that norms are carriers of normative messages.

It is mainly through norms in society (both legal and social) that mutual decision-making arises. Norms constitute social controls, which are decisive for shared expectations, and from the individuals' perspective, for part of their situated cognition. Hence, trust and reciprocity are central to the collective action approach to corruption. Informal norms are dysfunctional when they counteract the achievement of organizational goals and values.

Together with a group of teachers with experiences from public and private schools in Hanoi, the research group identified what could be seen as missing points among the findings, and what could be examined further.

Photo Credit: Andreas Mattsson

schools. We use a collective action approach to corruption to identify how norms, behaviour, and level of trust in society can represent challenges facing anti-corruption efforts. This approach emphasizes the need of inclusive community engagement geared towards building trust and integrity (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015; Schwertheim, 2017).

Methodology

In the initial stages of the project, a systematic literature review was conducted to review the scholarly literature on corruption from a multi-level perspective (global, national, and local), with the purpose of underlining the importance of a local approach. An ethnographic case study was utilized to map and understand informal practices in schools in relation to corruption regulations on different levels (global, national, and local). The project team conducted multiple field-visits to primary and secondary schools in the Cau Giay district, interviews with teachers and parents of children in public- and private schools, and focus group interviews with teachers from both public and private schools in the district.
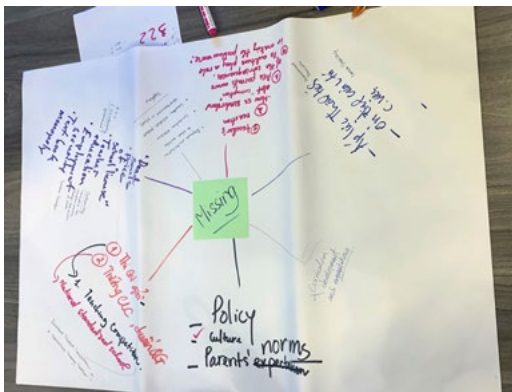
Research, results and conclusions

Below we will summarize some of the findings from the research project in relation to the policy brief and the impact of dysfunctional norms in the school system in the Cau Giay district. It is noteworthy that the results are consistent in both public and private schools with big differences in the tuition fees, and school faculties.

Gift giving to celebrate national holidays

In Vietnam, the celebration of national holidays such as Lunar New Year, New Year's Eve, Vietnamese Teacher's Day, International Teacher's Day, Women's Day, and the end of the school year comes with the social norm of gift-giving. On these occasions, the parents are supposed to give gifts to their children's homeroom teacher. The gift varies in scale and amount; from soaps and gift baskets with groceries to envelopes with money. In meetings with parents and teachers, we have found that the value varies from 300 000 VND up to 2 million VND per occasion (equivalent to 10 Euros up to 70 Euros). For parents, it is important to stay well informed about what is expected from the teacher and the school. In some schools, the practice has been systematized by the parents' board in each class who hands over a common gift from all parents in the class, whilst other schools have put a maximum amount limit on the gifts.

Home teaching for an extra fee

It is common for teachers in both public and private schools to offer home teaching for a fee (payment). The social pressure of forced home teaching exists as in teachers give lower grades to students who do not participate in the home teaching, while other teachers feel obliged to offer this service after school hours. One interviewee shares how

Using Social Norms to Fight Corruption in Local Governments:
A Case Study of the School System in Hanoi, Vietnam | Policy Brief No 9

2021 | www.icld.se   2

Cau Giay street by night.

Photo credit: Andreas Mattsson

she re-decorated one bedroom in her apartment with facilities needed for a classroom to adjust her home for evening classes. The existence of home teaching has led to several actions: a) some school managers have banned teachers from providing home teaching to their students, b) educational centres have evolved nearby the school campuses, and c) some school managers have shared how they sack teachers after disclosure of how grades have been impacted by home teaching.

Paying to get a job

To get a job as a teacher sometimes requires money. One interviewee shares how she cannot afford to apply for a job in a certain school because of the large amount of financial compensation that is needed in that school. The estimated costs vary between 150 to 300 million VND (equivalent to 5 000 Euros up to 10 000 Euros) to get a job depending on each school's reputation.

School equipment

It is expected that parents contribute with money for some facilities in the classrooms such as fans, air-conditioner, and IT-equipment. Fundraising campaigns exist, and the amount of money from each parent is listed.

Buying an address in a good school district

Many districts in Hanoi are growing as a result of rapid urbanization and the construction of new houses. The good reputation of the schools and many private schools make Cau Giay an attractive district for families. (Leducq and Scarwell, 2018) Some parents in this study, share experiences of an informal market for addresses where families are buying a fake address in a certain district to access its public schools. The establishment of new schools to cater to the urgent and future needs of education comes with business agreements regarding rental, ownership, and construction work, which may require financial transactions between the school management and the landowners.

Policy recommendations

The results illustrate how corruption and social norms impact the school system and affected teachers, parents, and students to a large extent and hinder a full enjoyment of child rights. By applying a socio-legal concept of norms to examine the findings, we find that imperatives of social conduct and subjective beliefs influence everyday practices of corruption in the school system. Norms, in turn, constitute social controls, which are decisive for shared expectations, and part of the individual's situated cognition. (Svensson, 2013, 2008; Leo, 2010) With this approach, we can gain an understanding of how the school system in Cau Giay is structured, how the teachers and other school personnel view and reflect on their jobs, and in what ways child rights are implemented in the everyday environment. As professional norms

Using Social Norms to Fight Corruption in Local Governments:
A Case Study of the School System in Hanoi, Vietnam | Policy Brief No 9

2021 | www.icld.se   3

During holiday celebrations, the importance of gift baskets, flower bouquets, and other goods, is shown in grocery stores, markets, and on the streets. This picture was taken on a street corner in central Hanoi on Women's Day 2019.

Photo Credit: Andreas Mattsson

are formed and reformed in the social context, the socio-legal norm perspective provides us with opportunities to understand actions and patterns of actions. It is also of high relevance to emphasize that social and professional norms are subjects to change in relation to time and place, which must be stressed in the Vietnamese context where the societal development is rapid in terms of economic growth and urban planning.

With the socio-legal norm concept in mind, we have identified several potential solutions where dysfunctional norms are transformed into functional norms in regard to child rights and an anti-corruption perspective. Below we list a few suggested actions in relation to the dysfunctional- and functional norms we have identified.

Using Social Norms to Fight Corruption in Local Governments:
A Case Study of the School System in Hanoi, Vietnam | Policy Brief No 9

2021 | www.icld.se   4

Questions for local governments

- What are the core values of your organization?
- What dysfunctional informal norms can you identify in your organization?
- How do you initiate change processes aimed at counteracting dysfunctional informal norms?

1 Home teaching:

Parents identify the importance to pay their children's teachers for home teaching to ensure good grades and care. Teachers share experiences from the expectations to conduct home teaching during evenings to ensure good school results for the students. This should be regarded as an informal business and source of income for the individual teacher.

Recommendation: By formalizing and regarding home teaching as a pedagogical effort, one can decrease corrupt behaviour. The establishment of home teaching centres where teachers do not meet their ordinary students, provide an extra service that is well-sought after.

2 Gift-giving:

Parents show gratitude and respect to their children's teacher by providing gifts on 5-6 occasions per school year. The gift is also seen as ensuring good grades and care. It is expected from teachers to accept gifts and keep count of what parents provided which gift.

Recommendation: Anonymizing test results in the school. If tests are anonymous, the risk of corruption in the gift-giving procedure is minimized.

3 Informal transactions in the school:

It is expected for parents to contribute with money for facilities in the classrooms such as fans, air-conditioner, and IT-equipment. The informal transactions are important to get reimbursement for the costs of school equipment. It is also vital to keep track of which parent contributes with a large amount to verify their financial engagement in their children's schooling.

Recommendation: The fundraising should be anonymized, and the amounts should be equalized.

Summary

With the above-proposed changes in accordance with existing social and legal norms, we propose that the policy change can be conducted on a local level where teachers, parents, and other school personnel are keys to enable change and the enforcement of child rights by enabling a school environment where children are not exposed, nor their school results are affected by corruption.

Using Social Norms to Fight Corruption in Local Governments:
A Case Study of the School System in Hanoi, Vietnam | Policy Brief No 9

2021 | www.icld.se   5

References

Drummond, L.B.W., Rydstrøm, H. (Eds.), 2004. Gender practices in contemporary Vietnam. NIAS ; Singapore University Press, Copenhagen : Singapore.

Gainsborough, M., 2010. Vietnam: Rethinking the State. Zed Books, London.

Giang, D., Xuan, P., Hai, N., 2016. Corruption risks in Vietnam's household business sector. Crime Law Soc. Change 65, 395–422. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-016-9604-z

Hansen, A., 2017. Transport in transition: Doi moi and the consumption of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi. J. Consum. Cult. 17, 378–396. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515602301

Hoang, K.K., 2015. Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work, 1st ed. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Leducq, D., Scarwell, H.-J., 2018. The new Hanoi: opportunities and challenges for future urban development. Cities 71, 70.

Leo, U., 2010. Rektorer bör och rektorer gör: en rättssociologisk studie om att identifiera, analysera och förstå professionella normer, Lund studies in sociology of law. Sociologiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, Lund.

London, J.D., 2015. Is Vietnam on the Verge of Change? Curr. Hist. 114, 229–235.

Luong, H.V., 2016. Social Relations, Regional Variation, and Economic Inequality in Contemporary Vietnam: A View from Two Vietnamese Rural Communities, in: Taylor, P. (Ed.), Connected and Disconnected in Viet Nam: Remaking Social Relations in a Post-Socialist Nation. ANU Press. https://doi.org/10.22459/CDVN.03.2016.01

Marquette, H., Peiffer, C., 2015. Corruption and collective action (DLP Research Paper No. 32). University of Birmingham, Birmingham.

McCornac, D., 2015. Corruption in Vietnamese Higher Education. Int. High. Educ. 0. https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2008.50.7992

Phuong, N.T., 2017. 14 - Corruption in Vietnam: The current situation and proposed solutions, in: dela Rama, M., Rowley, C. (Eds.), The Changing Face of Corruption in the Asia Pacific. Elsevier, pp. 221–231. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-101109-6.00014-9

Rydstrøm, H., 2003. Embodying morality: growing up in rural northern Vietnam. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Schwertheim, H., 2017. Innovations in Anti-Corruption Approaches A Resource Guide. IDEA - International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm.

Svensson, M., 2013. Norms in Law and Society: Towards a Definition of the Socio-Legal Concept of Norms. Soc. Leg. Norms 39–52.

Svensson, M., 2008. Sociala normer och regelefterlevnad: trafiksäkerhetsfrågor ur ett rättssociologiskt perspektiv, Lund studies in sociology of law. Media-tryck, Lund.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

Kubbe, I., Engelbert, A. (Eds.), 2018. Corruption and Norms: Why Informal Rules Matter, Political Corruption and Governance. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66254-1

Rothstein, B., Varraich, A., 2017. Making Sense of Corruption. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316681596

Rowley, C., Rama, M. dela, 2017. The Changing Face of Corruption in the Asia Pacific: Current Perspectives and Future Challenges, 1st edition. ed. Elsevier, Amsterdam, Netherlands ; Cambridge, Massachusetts.