



GENDER, EQUALITY AND CORRUPTION: WHAT ARE THE LINKAGES?

Gender inequality and corruption are closely inter-linked. Gender inequalities undermine good governance, sustainable growth, development outcomes and poverty alleviation. Where countries have made advances in women's empowerment and gender equality, they have witnessed lower levels of corruption over time.

Women experience, perceive and suffer from corruption differently than men, reflecting the differences between the genders that are evident in other spheres of life. Women's social, political and economic roles in a country will condition how they interact with and are vulnerable to specific types of corruption such as sexual extortion.

With women typically the primary care takers for children and the elderly, they tend to experience corruption in their daily dealings with education, health and other public services. And since corruption hits poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups the hardest,¹ women are also more likely to bear a heavier burden as they are often marginalised and over-represented among the poorest. According to the UN, an estimated 70 per cent of the world's poor are women.²

Corruption also is likely to exacerbate gender inequalities further as a result of its correlation with poverty. Corruption represents a tax on the poor, undermining efforts to break the cycle of poverty and further distorting how income, resources and services are shared between men and women, boys and girls.

Making the link between gender and corruption may help to develop a better understanding of corrupt practices and craft more effective strategies to target them. As part of this agenda, focusing on and empowering women must form an important part of the solution. Higher levels of women's rights and participation in public life are associated with better governance and lower levels of corruption in many countries. Women also are an important source for understanding corruption and designing effective strategies to address the problem that affects their everyday lives.

ARE WOMEN LESS CORRUPT?

There is a growing consensus, and a large body of evidence from many regions of the world, that countries with more women involved in government or parliament are less prone to corruption.

For example, a study in the early 2000s by the World Bank of 150 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia suggested that women are more trustworthy and less prone to corruption,³ a finding later corroborated by additional research. More recent studies, including some which have looked at the correlation between women's representation in government and corruption in transition countries⁴ as well as in Mexico at the state level,⁵ have confirmed such patterns across and within countries.

While the correlation between women's involvement in public life and lower levels of corruption is generally not disputed, a second wave of research has nuanced these initial findings and questioned the direction of causality. For example, it could be questioned whether women are intrinsically less corrupt, or whether it is democracy which is the underlying condition behind the argument that more women's participation in government, is associated with less corruption. In fact, countries where women are more represented in government tend to also have more liberal democratic institutions, providing for more effective checks on corruption as well as 'fairer systems' that promote gender equality.⁶ Some scholars also suggest a correlation between discrimination against women and corruption, with higher levels of corruption occurring in countries where social institutions deprive women of their right to participate in social life. This is substantiated by the range of research done on women's experiences, perceptions and tolerance of the problem that look at the economic, political, social and cultural forces at play within a country.⁷

Still there is no consensus on the exact interplay between gender, inequality and corruption. Therefore, if women are increasingly confronted with corruption as they enter into the work force, take up more senior management positions and achieve greater equality, there is no evidence to suggest that women will not participate in corruption.

WOMEN'S TOLERANCE OF CORRUPTION

Research has suggested that women and men have different levels of tolerance for corruption and its different forms.⁸

However, there is still no definitive conclusion if this is due to differences tied to gender or whether it is a consequence of the cultural and societal context. Moreover, gender differences in tolerance of corruption may not be as universal as initially thought.

Beyond cultural factors, social institutions and political regimes may also play a pivotal role in shaping gender attitudes and behaviour with regard to the tolerance of corruption. One recent study⁹ found that women are less susceptible to tolerate corruption in democratic contexts and more in autocratic contexts when compared to men. The authors suggest that women are more disapproving of corruption than men where democratic institutions condemn corruption but no gender gaps exist where corruption is accepted as a social norm.

Some scholars have suggested that these gender patterns in terms of attitudes and behaviours could be due more generally to differences in risk-taking behaviour based on women's role in society.¹⁰ Some have hypothesised that women's social roles, which entrust them with the care of the young and the elderly in the family, make them more averse to risk and less likely to engage in

WHAT IS GENDER

According to the World Bank, the term "gender" refers to the socially-constructed differences between men and women that may influence social and economic activities as well as their access to resource,³⁸ and decision making.

As such, gender is distinct from "sex", which refers to men and women's biological differences. Men and women across all cultures play different roles, have different needs, and face different constraints due to their gender roles. This may also impact their respective exposure and experience of corruption, defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.

Early findings on the link between corruption and women's participation in public life have fuelled the assumption that women may be less corrupt than men.³⁹

MADAME POLICEWOMEN

Based on this assumption, there are some examples of anti-corruption initiatives that have used the feminisation of the workforce to fight corruption.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s the police chief of Mexico established a women-only force of traffic police to fight corruption with some success in terms of reducing corruption.⁴⁰

In Lima, corruption also reportedly went down following efforts to feminise the police force.⁴¹ However, while rates of lower level corruption reportedly fell, corruption persisted at higher levels within the institution.

corruption out of fear – that they will be caught, lose their job or suffer other forms of punishments.¹¹

Perceptions of risk may also be influenced by the institutional context. In liberal democracies where corruption is stigmatised, being detected for committing acts of corruption is perceived as riskier, creating a system of deterrence for women to engage in corruption. This context, combined with gender discrimination, encourages women to comply with the rules rather than violate the social norms imposed on their gender.

WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION

When looking at men and women broadly, findings differ across studies whether women perceive corruption differently than men — and how they perceive it based on their class, education and where they live.

For example, the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer suggests that both men and women tend to generally perceive corruption in the same ways for the same institutions. Also their perceived levels of corruption have increased since 2010 when the barometer was last conducted, indicating either a worsening in or a greater awareness of the problem.

Still, differences do exist for specific institutions where women as a group feel there are higher levels of corruption: political parties, parliament, the military, the private sector, judiciary and medical services.¹² If education and income are accounted for, more educated and wealthier women feel that there is an overall higher level of corruption in their country as compared to men.¹³

There are also variations in how women from different social and economic groups view the problem. According to the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, urban and highly educated women have the highest levels of perceived corruption for institutions such as political parties, parliament, the military, private sector, and medical and education services when compared to other women as well as men (in urban and rural areas).¹⁴

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF CORRUPTION

Globally, according to the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, 27 per cent of men and 22 per cent of women report paying bribes to at least one institution.¹⁵ Further research¹⁶ on the topic has pointed out that this difference in experience between genders may be a result of reduced opportunities for women to be exposed to corrupt practices.

Differences in social roles for men and women across various cultures play an important factor in their exposure to corruption, with a higher level of exposure in daily life likely resulting in a higher tolerance for corruption. This is one of the reasons why power dynamics are often pointed to when explaining why women experience corruption differently than men. For example, in Latin America, it is men who tend to be more active in government and business than women, leaving men more exposed to corruption through extortion and bribes.¹⁷ Where women are new-comers into the political or business arena, they may be also less familiar with the rules of the game and lack the experience to engage in corrupt transactions¹⁸.

Differences due to gender may also exist in relation to the type, nature and level of corruption in which men and women respectively engage. For example, experimental research has also shown men and women tend to behave differently when facing the same situation of corruption, with women less likely to offer or accept a bribe. When women do bribe, a lower bribe is usually offered.¹⁹ However, another experiment testing men and women's resistance to corruption

NO WOMEN ALLOWED

Due to gender roles women's dealings are typically focused on the home and outside the formal economy limiting their interaction with corruption. Women may therefore be less frequently in a position to take advantage of opportunities for corruption in such settings.

This fact is substantiated by the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, which shows men have higher reported rates of interaction and bribery – up to five per cent higher - as compared to women when it comes to their dealings with formal institutions such as the judiciary, police, and registry and land authorities.⁴²

THE WEIGHT OF CULTURE

A recent study showed that while women are less tolerant of corruption than men in Australia, there are no significant gender differences in attitudes among the sexes in India, Indonesia and Singapore.⁴³ This could be explained by differences in social roles of men and women across various cultures and institutional contexts, which may be an important factor in their individual exposure and how they respectively shape their attitudes to corruption.⁴⁴

indicates that while women were more likely to report, they were also significantly more likely to keep the bribe without reciprocation, suggesting that men are more trustworthy as partners in a corrupt transaction.²⁰

THE IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON WOMEN

While past research originally focused on the different likelihood of men and women to pay bribes, a new emphasis is on whether corruption impacts women and men differently²¹.

Findings clearly show that corruption is not even handed when it comes to its impacts. Unequal power relations between women and men make women more vulnerable to the impact of corruption. As the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, corruption is likely to exacerbate these uneven power dynamics between men and women, including when it comes to access to resources, decision-making, information and other areas. Corruption also serves to reinforce social, cultural, political and institutional discrimination that women confront in their daily lives.

Corruption creates additional obstacles for women to access and use public goods (including basic services) as well as to participate in their country's political processes. For instance, as the primary care takers in families, women have a higher likelihood of experiencing corruption, whether enrolling their children in school, seeking medical treatment for their kids or older relatives, or interacting with public officials to access government subsidised programmes.²²

While the whole family is affected by such practices, women can be disproportionately exposed to corrupt behaviour at the point of service delivery, as they tend to be more reliant on public services than men (see sidebar).

Below is a list of some ways in which women are disproportionately affected by corruption:

GENDER-SPECIFIC CORRUPTION

Women can be victimised differently by corruption on account of vulnerabilities created by their gender. There are forms of corruption that affect women more specifically, such as sexual extortion, using sex as an informal currency in which bribes are paid, attacks on their honour and human trafficking (where the majority of people trafficked are female)²³. These corrupt acts often escape reporting or measurement as they are not always perceived as corruption and because of the shame associated with sexual crimes. This can happen also in countries where overall public and private sector corruption is quite low and effectively controlled.

HOUSEHOLD RESOURCES

In many countries, women often lack access to personal income and control over resources. In such settings, they are more frequently denied access to services in corrupt environments because of their inability to pay bribes²⁴. In poor families, high bribes may also result in girls dropping out from schools due to the intra-household allocation of resources in some developing countries. For example, research in South Asia has shown that poor families tend to invest in quality education for boys while girls must often take care of the household in the absence of their working mothers.²⁵

Corruption also hampers women's ability to gain financial resources, such as accessing credit and conducting business. While men may resort to bribing to bypass cumbersome regulations and complex legal requirements, women tend to lack information, experience and resources to engage with corrupt networks.²⁶

HEALTHCARE, YES; CORRUPTION, NO

As compared to men, women have a higher and differentiated demand for health services in their reproductive years. In the case of Nicaragua, a study has shown that women alone represent two-thirds of all patients in the public health system.⁴⁵

Being more reliant on public health services can turn complicated when these are plagued by corruption, making women more vulnerable than men to abuses. This is corroborated by findings from the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer that show women have a higher interaction rate with medical services in their countries and also perceive these services to be more corrupt when compared to men.

RWANDA'S GENDER CORRUPTION PHENOMENON

Rwanda, which has relatively low levels of measured corruption, a study by the Transparency International national chapter showed that 5 per cent of those surveyed experienced gender-based corruption in the work place.⁴⁶ A significant proportion of respondents perceived the level of gender based corruption slightly higher in the private sector (58 per cent) than the public sector (51 per cent) and non-governmental organisations (43 per cent).

TRAINING WOMEN TO LEAD

Findings from India point to the need to prepare women to take on a public service role once they have finally been able to break through the boundary created by gender.

The study's results show that female leadership in the governance of a large public programme, either when these women leaders had previous political experience or after they had undergone capacity building, is correlated with fewer inefficiencies, leakages and vulnerabilities of the programme being captured by village councils.⁴⁷

PUBLIC SERVICES

Corruption in public services can come in the form of bribes being demanded for their delivery as well as other abuses. It can also materialise as systemic corruption that reduces the overall quality and quantity of the services provided to and demanded by women. Corruption reduces public revenue, often resulting in lower levels of government spending on education, healthcare, family benefits and other social services²⁷. Women, who often do not have access to financial resources, lack the ability to opt out of the public system to find private, better quality alternatives.

PUBLIC LIFE AND DECISION-MAKING

Women have specific needs that are unlikely to be addressed by political systems dominated by men, especially in terms of budgetary and resource allocations. This changes only when women become an integral part of policy-making. Once a critical mass (30 per cent) of women makes it in the political sphere over a sustained period, one can observe a shift in policy priorities. For example, research done in Scandinavian countries finds public policies (and budgets) better reflect women's issues where women have a greater level of participation in public life over a period of time.²⁸

However, corruption, clientelism and government ineffectiveness substantially hamper women's participation in public life and have an impact on women's political representation, as evident in the proportion of women elected to public office. Around the world, although women represent over half of the population, they hold only 21.4 per cent of all legislative seats and represent 14.7 per cent of all speakers of parliament.²⁹ A recent study of 18 European countries shows that corruption in political processes discourages women's participation and limits their opportunities to access public life.³⁰ Corruption often manifests in political parties, making it necessary to be part of the "old boys' network" in order to be put forward as an electoral candidate.

WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS

In countries throughout the world, women's civil rights often go unprotected and women are treated unequitably before the law. This is particularly of concern regarding how women's rights are respected on key social, political and economic issues: marriage, divorce, child custody, access to land and property rights, domestic abuse, human trafficking, allegations of adultery and rape, and financial independence, among others. When a law enforcement system is corrupt, these issues and broader human rights — for women, girls, minorities and less-advantaged groups — are not fulfilled.

According to findings from the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, the police and judiciary are perceived as the most corrupt institution in the 109 countries surveyed, respectively, only behind political parties, and are where the highest rates of bribery are reported.³¹ When judiciaries are corrupt, justice can be bought at the highest price. As women often lack resources, fighting for one's rights in a corrupt legal system is simply out of reach. As a result, corruption serves to reinforce existing discrimination, explicitly and implicitly, and women's rights may not be adequately protected.³²

REPORTING AND REDRESS MECHANISMS

Due to the often reduced space that women have in a society, women in many parts of the world are less likely to report corruption than men. In 2013 for example, women only represented 38 per cent of the corruption-related complaints received by Transparency International's Advocacy and Legal Advice

SEX AS CORRUPTION

There is growing evidence that women and girls are being forced to provide sexual favours rather than money to access public services.

In a study of 560 students from Botswana, 67 per cent of school girls interviewed had been subjected to sexual harassment by teachers. Of the girls that reported having been asked for sex by teachers, half said that they had accepted out of fear.⁴⁸

Sexual harassment at the work place also tends to affect women more than men. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), a 2008 telephone poll revealed that 31 per cent of the female workers (compared to 7 per cent of the male workers) reported they had been harassed at work.⁴⁹ These acts and the impunity that follows exact a high cost on women's and girls' health and human dignity. They may feel shamed, stigmatised and traumatised, and ultimately may be unwilling to speak out.⁵⁰

Centres which are in more than 60 countries across the world.³³ This may be due to the type and number of reporting channels available. In some cultures, for example, girls (as in Somalia) will not complain to males.³⁴ In addition, reporting may be hampered by lack of knowledge of their options or out of fear to be stigmatised.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To be effective, men's and women's unique concerns and experiences must be addressed when setting out a course for action to design, implement and monitor anti-corruption initiatives. There are a number of recommendations and entry points that emerge from the literature to achieve this.

Address forms of corruption that affect women most

- Forms of corruption that affect women most such as sexual extortion and human trafficking should be recognised as such and should be a specific area of anti-corruption endeavour.
- Petty corruption at the point of service delivery that affects women more in their role as care givers and, by extension, denies them and their families access to essential public services, should also be targeted in anti-corruption strategies. This includes strategies aimed at improving local service delivery to reduce incentives and opportunities to engage in corrupt transactions when accessing public services.

Involve women in anti-corruption strategies

- Among other factors, women play a key role in shaping the value system of any society, in particular via raising their children. Therefore, they have an important contribution to make in building sustainable integrity systems.
- Women should be empowered to get involved and efforts should be targeted to build their capacity to contribute to anti-corruption work.
- Women's groups are important allies in the fight against corruption and the design of gender sensitive anti-corruption strategies and gender specific approaches to fight corruption. In particular, many grassroots organisations have developed successful approaches to address corruption in very different settings³⁵.

Train and support women as leaders in their countries and regions

- Women often are new-comers in decision making circles and public life and often lack the necessary experience to make a difference.
- Capacity building and institutional support are necessary to make women's participation not just about numbers but effectiveness. This is especially relevant where political quotas are applied,

Ensure women actively participate in public life

- Women's education and participation in public life should be promoted as ensuring women's rights and not as only an anti-corruption strategy.
- At the same time, women's engagement in anti-corruption efforts contributes to both improving integrity and accountability as well as to building governance systems that are more responsive to women's needs.
- In advocating for greater participation of women in public life and supporting women leaders, it is recommended to build alliances including both prominent women and men already reputable in the public sphere.

Integrate women into the public service work force

- Women should be empowered to participate in public life and workforce. For example, the increased representation of women teachers has contributed to the reduction of gender-based violence and sexual extortion in school systems and provides positive role models for young women, resulting in improved performance in school enrolment and dropout rates³⁶.

REPORTING SILENCE

According to the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, a higher percentage of women either don't know where to report (18 per cent of women compared to 15 per cent of men) or are afraid of the consequences (38 per cent of women compared to 34 per cent of men).

This may be the result of women's lack of political and economic leverage, as well as lower levels of literacy and awareness about their rights and entitlements.

In some countries, the situation can turn into a vicious cycle. Some studies have shown that women tend to be targeted by corrupt officials particularly because women are viewed as being less likely to report the wrong doing.⁵¹

More educated women may also be reluctant to report instances of corruption. Insights from Palestine indicate that women senior managers hesitate to take action about corruption incidents under their supervision because they lack the supportive environment to do so, due to the existing male dominated networks.

Implement gender-responsive and participatory budgeting

- Gender responsive budgeting will help to ensure that budget formulation, execution and reporting adequately target gender issues.
- Measures can include gender disaggregated performance indicators³⁷.
- More broadly, efforts are needed to build the capacity and ensure the space for women to get involved in the full budget process, from planning to oversight.

Guarantee gender sensitive reporting mechanisms

- Complaints mechanisms to report corruption and wrong-doing should be transparent, independent, accountable, accessible, safe, easy to use, and, most importantly, gender sensitive.
- Such mechanisms need to take into account the cultural context to make sure that every women and girl has a safe channel to report corruption.
- As women are often deprived from redress when law enforcement agencies are corrupt, measures should also be taken to prevent corruption in law enforcement institutions.

Capture the gender dimension of corruption in data collection

- Aggregate measures of corruption currently used to design anti-corruption strategies do not look at the direct and differentiated impact of corruption on men and women and do not generate the necessary data to formulate the adequate policy response. New indicators are therefore needed to capture the gender dimension of corruption, including more systematically collecting and analysing gender
- The linkages between gender and corruption remain an emerging field of research and there is a need for more research on the differentiated experience and impact of corruption on men and women

NOTES

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- ¹⁷ It is important to note that only a limited number of tools and initiatives (about 20%) are addressing gender and poverty dimensions. Part of the reason is related to the sampling size and method. In order to disaggregate by gender and income, a large sample size is required, which most corruption measurement tools do not have. However, more specific surveys to better equip policy-makers could be developed by including questions targeting the poor or women.
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⁴⁶ Gender-based corruption is understood as corruption specifically targeting and affecting women. Of the respondents, 85 per cent were women. See: <http://tirwanda.org/en/component/content/article/1-latest-news/185-reporting-gender-based-corruption-can-deter-its-persistence-in-the-rwandan-society>. Also see: <http://www.tirwanda.org/images/stories/gender%20based%20corruption%20in%20workplaces%20in%20rwanda.pdf>

⁴⁷ Farzana Afridi, Vegard Iversen and MR Sharan, 'Women political leaders, corruption and learning: evidence from a large public programme in India', IZA DP No. 7212 (Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor, 2013).

⁴⁸ Stephania Rossetti, 'Children in School. A safe place?' (Gaborone, Botswana: UNESCO, 2001).

⁴⁹ Workharrassment.net website, <http://www.workharassment.net/index.php/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace.html>

⁵⁰ UNDP, 'Corruption, accountability and gender: understanding the connections' (New York, NY: UNDP, 2010).

⁵¹ UNDP, 'Tackling corruption, transforming lives: accelerating human development in Asia Pacific' (New Delhi, India: UNDP, 2008).

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Transparency International
International Secretariat
Alt-Moabit 96
10559 Berlin
Germany

Phone: +49 - 30 - 34 38 200
Fax: +49 - 30 - 34 70 39 12

ti@transparency.org
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