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Gender and corruption

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Item Type	Journal
Authors	Transparency International
Publisher	Transparency International
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-11 01:06:00
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/177552

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Gender and Corruption: Understanding and Undoing the Linkages

Policy-makers increasingly are seeking to ‘mainstream’ gender into anti-corruption initiatives by taking into account the implications that planned interventions have on women and men. Such considerations can lead to better designed and targeted policies to combat corruption. They can also create the space for civil society to become engaged and carry out more effective corruption monitoring, which contributes to improvements in policy formulation. However, research findings on the subject have varied over the years and there is still no clear consensus about the inter-relationship between gender and corruption. This paper will explore recent evidence on the topic in an attempt to determine whether and how women have an impact on — and are affected by — corruption.

Distorted institutions are likely to distort the individuals working in them, whatever their gender.

1. Does gender influence corruption?

In recent years a hypothesis has been put forth that women are less corrupt than men and are a positive force in political systems. It is based on the assumption that increasing women's involvement (and influence) in politics will correlate with a reduction in a country's corruption. However it ignores one important factor: gender may be conditioning opportunities for women to be corrupt.

Some noted researchers on the topic of gender and corruption, such as Ann-Marie Goetz, have begun questioning why most studies find that women appear to be less corruptable.¹ Is it because they generally have less money? Or is it a result of their dealings being typically focused on the home and outside the formal economy? One assertion is that perhaps women use 'informal' payments to access public services or are exhorted to provide sexual favours rather than money. As a result, these incidents may go underreported by current surveying techniques and are left off the radar of corruption indices.

In many countries, corruption does occur primarily through male-to-male networks and in forums where women are often excluded, such as in commerce or politics. As a result, various studies have shown that men are more likely to be victims of corruption than women.² In the case of Latin America men are usually the ones involved in government and business dealings and suffer increased demands for extortion and bribery when compared to women. However, if workplaces become more feminised or when women take the top leadership jobs, it cannot be taken for granted that women will be less corrupt or not form their own networks. Distorted institutions are likely to distort the individuals working in them, whatever their gender.

Women also may be making or accepting bribes but doing it from behind the scenes or through proxies. Research in South East Asia has shown that women may indirectly participate in corruption in order to get ahead in political bureaucracies. Since there is a cultural taboo against interacting with men who they are not related to, women may engage in bribery and extortion using their male relatives as the mediators. Their indirect participation may mislead observers into concluding that men are the root cause of corruption and women are less susceptible.

Attitudes towards corruption may even be more a question of culture rather than a matter tied to one's gender. Certain studies have indicated that women perceive their country to be less corrupt than their male counterparts while other findings suggest that both males and females have very similar perceptions about the problem. In some cases, women may be even more preoccupied by corruption than men — an assertion supported by TI's Global Corruption Barometer and other quantitative research.³ One recent study showed that while women are less tolerant of corruption than men in Australia, there are no significant differences in attitudes among the sexes in India, Indonesia and Singapore.

In spite of these mixed findings, governments keen to tackle corruption have overhauled their staffs to increase women among their ranks, particularly in public service delivery positions. In Brazil, for example, municipal governments have experimented with hiring all-female traffic police to eradicate petty corruption. While positive results have been recorded, some observers have noted that these may be influenced by other changes that accompany staffing reforms. These include improving incentives to build workers' pride in their jobs and creating accountability mechanisms to allow for performance-based monitoring.

Even empirical results have not completely helped to resolve some of the questions about the relationship between women and corruption. Recent findings point to a statistically significant correlation between the increased participation of women in governance and reduced corruption.⁴ However, no causality has been shown between gender and corruption, suggesting one's sex does not directly determine corrupt behaviour. Increasing women's role in governance should be promoted, but on the basis of equality rather than as part of an anti-corruption drive.

2. Effects of corruption on women

While findings may vary on how gender and corruption interact, there is no split on the harsh effects that corruption exacts on women's lives. Women often confront social, cultural, political and institutional discrimination in their countries, which are compounded when a society is corruption ridden. With institutions already restricted for women, corruption creates additional obstacles for accessing public goods (including basic services) and their political participation.

Some ways in which women are affected disproportionately by corruption are:

- 🌐 Access to decision-making. Corruption undermines a level playing field for women and men in decision-making. When political parties can be bought and sold, officials are elected through vote-buying and promotion is related to personal connections rather than merit, there are fewer opportunities for women to access decision-making circles in a country's government, political system and companies.
- 🌐 Protection and advancement of rights under the law. Women's civil rights are often grossly inequitable and not protected when it comes to key social, political and economic issues: marriage and divorce, human trafficking, allegations of adultery and rape, child custody, inheritance, property rights and financial independence, among others. Under a corrupt law enforcement system, broader human rights for women and girls — as well as for minorities and less-advantaged groups — suffer (see sidebar). A corrupt judiciary perpetuates these problems and will reinforce existing discrimination, explicitly and implicitly.⁶ Since women generally lack access to resources, any case brought to remedy claims against discrimination will likely be lost if the defendant can pay off the prosecutors and/or judges involved.

Women and corruption in Azerbaijan

The Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) of Transparency Azerbaijan provides legal advice and follows up on complaints of corrupt activities, many of which reflect the different types of corruption women confront.

One shocking case relates to a woman who came to the ALAC in the capital of Baku. She lodged a complaint about the corrupt behaviour of police officers who had detained her and a friend in the street for prostitution (which is not a criminal offence and can only be ticketed). After being fined, the police argued the women were 'disseminating venereal diseases' and forcibly brought them to the hospital for treatment, something well beyond their authority. The women claimed the only way they could leave the hospital was to pay a bribe to the chief doctor in exchange for their release.

As part of their response, the ALAC sent letters to the ministries of internal affairs and national security, as well as the prosecutor general's office. The government reacted by backing the police's actions although it took an important step by decommissioning the hospital as a holding facility, eliminating an important channel for bribes in the country.⁵

‘Corruption which drains public resources and takes much needed funds away from national economic development or social services, disproportionately affects women and the poor who are most dependent on them ... Women may also be in less powerful positions to challenge corruption when it occurs...’⁸

- Access to and control over resources. Corruption reduces public revenue, often resulting in lower levels of spending on education, healthcare, family benefits and other social services. These decreased outlays predominantly affect the welfare of women and children who often rely most on accessing the vital services provided by the state (although men also equally lose out when they are a household’s primary care-giver and/or home-manager). Corruption in the water and energy sectors can particularly impact poor women, who bear the burden of seeking drinking water and fuel for their families.⁷ Apart from basic services, corruption also increases obstacles for women wherever they must interact with the government. For example, corruption can distort women’s access to credit and makes it more difficult to obtain licenses and permits — whether for starting a business, driving a car or constructing a house.

3. Approaches to mainstreaming gender

If policy-makers are well informed about the different ways in which corruption affects men and women differently (as well as other groups), they are better equipped to design targeted and more effective anti-corruption policies.

Bringing a gender focus to the fight against corruption — or mainstreaming it — ensures that both sexes benefit equally from policy interventions. To be effective, the design, implementation and monitoring of anti-corruption initiatives must consider men’s and women’s unique concerns and experiences when setting out a course for action.⁹

Recent efforts in gender mainstreaming have highlighted three good practices as part of promoting this policy alignment:

- Policy-makers need gender-specific information (e.g. disaggregated data);
- Policy-makers need to combine targeted anti-corruption policies with efforts to empower women in governance; and
- Effective gender-sensitive approaches in anti-corruption efforts must include participatory planning and monitoring activities focused on women.

Key entry points for mainstreaming gender considerations into the design and implementation of anti-corruption strategies have been highlighted by leading bilateral and multilateral organisations, including the Council of Europe (COE), the German Technical Cooperation agency (GTZ) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).¹⁰

In many cases, the mainstreaming process is divided into different stages and steps. UNDP has developed 10 steps for devising a policy-making cycle that incorporates gender concerns. One of these steps includes developing arguments for gender equality (see Step 6) in order to promote a shift in cultural norms and behaviours. Another crucial consideration is how to incorporate

efficiency calculations into mainstreaming efforts: e.g. a cost-benefit analysis of the effectiveness of policy interventions. As part of this assessment, policy-makers and civil society partners must determine the degree to which the goal of mainstreaming can be met, social justice addressed (including gender equality) and the costs minimised (social, political, financial and cultural).

Based on these calculations, gender-sensitive approaches that focus on women's participation tend to be some of the more effective alternatives for gender mainstreaming. GTZ has shown through its fieldwork that participatory budgeting and planning activities aimed at increased transparency and accountability can serve as a good means for incorporating women into anti-corruption efforts.

Regardless of the mainstreaming approach embraced, changes in institutional rules and practices are essential if these initiatives are to be lasting, sustainable and successful. Related interventions in countries such as Ghana have showed that targeting women's participation in government will fall short in addressing corruption without equal changes in gender-based attitudes (see sidebar). To promote these, broader institutional and cultural shifts must be pursued to reframe gender roles and society's perceptions of women. Otherwise, mainstreaming gender and anti-corruption efforts is in danger of remaining an elusive end-game.🌐

Mainstreaming gender to combat corruption in Ghana

Data on male and female attitudes of corruption in two public sector institutions in Ghana (police and education system) has raised questions about using gender mainstreaming as the only means for tackling corruption.

Findings showed that targeting women's participation in the public sector as an anti-corruption strategy would not likely address the problem unless paired with complementary initiatives. To combat public sector corruption in Ghana, the gender system — the roles and responsibilities ascribed to males and females — would need to equally undergo reforms.¹¹

Gender and corruption

This Working Paper was prepared by the TI-Secretariat's Policy and Research Department in 2007 and revised in 2008 with new data and text. We gratefully acknowledge inputs from Claudio Weber Abramo (Transparência Brasil), Joke Muylwijk (Gender and Water Alliance), Namawu Alhassan Aholo (Islamic Relief, UK) and Transparencia Mexicana in reviewing the first version of the paper.

For more information about this working paper and others in the series, please contact Craig Fagan at the TI-Secretariat: ples[at]transparency.org.

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- ¹ Anne Marie Goetz, *Political Cleaners: How Women are the New Anti-Corruption Force. Does the Evidence Wash?* (Brighton, United Kingdom: IDS, 2003). www.u4.no/document/showdoc.cfm?id=124.
- ² 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.
- ³ The survey includes 63,199 respondents in 60 countries. For more information on the Global Corruption Barometer, see: www.transparency.org/news_room/latest_news/press_releases/2007/2007_12_06_qcb_2007_en. Other TI research has explored gender differences in attitudes towards corruption and concluded that these cannot be taken as universal. These include: *Corruption and Governance Measurement Tools in Latin American Countries* (Berlin, Germany: TI, 2006). www.transparency.org/news_room/latest_news/press_releases/2006/2006_08_14_report_measurement_tools_la. See also: *Transparencia México, Índice Nacional de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno* (Mexico City: Transparencia México, 2005). www.transparenciamexicana.org.mx/ENCBG/.
- ⁴ For more on the statistical correlation between gender and corruption, see: Anand Swamy, Stephen Knack, Young Lee and Omar Azfar. 'Gender and Corruption'. *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol. 64, 2001, 25-55. www.williams.edu/Economics/wp/Swamy_gender.pdf; David Dollar, Raymond Fisman and Roberta Gatti. 'Are Women Really the 'Fairer' Sex? Corruption and Women in Government.' Working Paper Series, No. 4. (Washington, DC: World Bank, October 1999). www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/fairer.pdf; Vivi Alatas, Lisa Cameron, Ananish Chaudhuri, Nivan Erkalb and Lata Gangadharan. 'Gender and Corruption: Insights from an Experimental Analysis'. Department of Economics Working Paper 974 (Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne, 2006). www.economics.unimelb.edu.au/lcameron/papers/gender1.pdf; S. Hellsten 'Trust Me! My Hands are Dirty Also: Institutionalized Corruption and the Competing Codes of Public and Private Ethics', *Professional Ethics*, Vol. 11:1, 2003. Council of Europe, *Gender and Corruption in South East Europe: Making an Impact* (Strasbourg, France: COE, 2004). [www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_cooperation/combating_economic_crime/3_technical_cooperation/PACO/PACO-Impact/PC-TP\(2004\)45.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_cooperation/combating_economic_crime/3_technical_cooperation/PACO/PACO-Impact/PC-TP(2004)45.pdf); Namawu Alhassan Aholo *Fighting Public Sector Corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa: Does Gender Matter*, IDD, School of Public Policy, (Birmingham, United Kingdom: University of Birmingham, 2004). www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/research/events/PoliticalCorruption/documents/Alolo.doc.
- ⁵ Case reported to ALAC on 27 July 2005. For more information on the case, see: www.transparency.org/publications/newsletter/2006/april_2006/anti_corruption_work/azerbaijan_alac.
- ⁶ Celestine Nyamu-Musembi, 'Gender and corruption in the administration of justice', *Global Corruption Report: Corruption in Judicial Systems*, pp121-128 (Berlin, Germany: TI, 2007). www.transparency.org/publications/gcr.
- ⁷ For more details, see the 'Gender and Water Alliance', which aims to mainstream gender into water policies, making sure that women are involved in the planning and carrying out of water policies (www.genderandwater.org/page/669).
- ⁸ Charlie Sever, *The Gender, Poverty, Governance Nexus: Key issues and current debates* (Dublin, Ireland: Development Cooperation Ireland, 2005). www.dci.gov.ie/uploads/gender-poverty-governance.doc.
- ⁹ The BRIDGE knowledge service, housed within the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) of the University of Sussex, supports gender advocacy and mainstreaming efforts of policy-makers and practitioners by bridging the gaps between theory, policy and practice with gender information. See: www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/index.html.
- ¹⁰ See: Astrida Neimanis. *Gender Mainstreaming in Practice: A Handbook* (Bratislava, Slovak Republic: UNDP, 2002). http://www.undp.org/women/docs/RBEC_GM_manual.pdf; Council of Europe, *Gender and Corruption in South East Europe: Making an Impact* (Strasbourg, France: COE, 2004). [www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_cooperation/combating_economic_crime/3_technical_cooperation/PACO/PACO-Impact/PC-TP\(2004\)45.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_cooperation/combating_economic_crime/3_technical_cooperation/PACO/PACO-Impact/PC-TP(2004)45.pdf); GTZ, *Corruption and Gender: Approaches and Recommendations for TA*. Focal Theme: Corruption and Trafficking in Women (Bonn, Germany: GTZ, 2004). www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-corruption-and-gender.pdf.
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**TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL**

Telephone

+49-30-343820 -0

Fax

+49-30-347039 -12

International Secretariat

Alt-Moabit 96

10559 Berlin

Germany

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