



[BRIEF]

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GENDER AND CORRUPTION

Corruption and gender inequality are in many ways closely connected. Men and women are affected by corruption in different ways, and are subjects and objects of different corrupt practices and behaviours. Gender inequality breeds corruption and vice versa: corruption tends to exacerbate gender inequalities. A gender perspective is necessary if we are to find effective strategies to combat corruption and achieve sustainable development. This brief provides an introduction to linkages between gender and corruption relevant in CERC's work, and gives suggestions on how to address corruption in gender policies and gender in anti-corruption strategies.

LINKING GENDER, DEVELOPMENT AND CORRUPTION

Corruption disproportionately affects those living in poverty and those who are poor, illiterate and unaware of their rights and entitlements. Many forms of corruption affect both women and men, but given the unequal gender relations in society women are in many settings more exposed to corruption and its consequences.¹ When poor women do not have funds to spare for corrupt officials or persons holding positions of power, they risk being exposed to physical abuse, sexual extortion and exploitation; women's lower status and position in society makes them vulnerable to corruption.

Gender inequality interferes with women's ability to advance at all levels of politics and decision-making, thereby obstructing their access to political participation.

Corruption also disrupts efforts to combat different forms of violations. One striking example is trafficking in women.

Corruption tampers with justice systems and makes it difficult to struggle against trafficking and enables traffickers to go unpunished.

DEFINITION OF CORRUPTION

CERC defines corruption as an abuse of trust, power or position for improper gain. Corruption includes e.g. offering and receiving bribes – including bribery of foreign public officials – embezzlement, conflict of interest and nepotism.

Corruption is a major impediment to development and economic growth in Democratic Republic of the Congo. Yet, most corruption policies do not make a clear connection to gender equality, despite the well-documented disproportionate impact corruption has on women and girls.

Corruption further marginalizes already vulnerable women living in poverty, putting basic public services and goods out of their reach, and leaving them lagging behind in the economic, social, and political development of their communities.

¹Transparency International (2014) *Gender, Equality and Corruption: What are the Linkages?* Policy Brief No 1/2014.

Thus corruption poses a barrier to the achievement of gender equality and therefore should be addressed in gender policies. Addressing gender in anti-corruption policies furthermore makes sense from an economic and development perspective.

WOMEN'S SUBJECTION TO CORRUPTION

UNDP and other international organizations identify four intertwined areas in which women are subjected to corruption: 1) when accessing basic services, markets, and credit; 2) while engaging in politics; 3) in situations where women's rights are violated (e.g., trafficking and sexual extortion); and 4) negligence and/or mismanagement.²

When accessing basic services, markets, and credit.

Corruption in public service delivery affects women disproportionately more than men due to the higher vulnerability for women living in poverty and being responsible for the care of children and elderly. Women in some phases of life also have greater needs for health services, especially in their reproductive years. They require access to health care before and during pregnancy and after delivery. In these situations women may be subjected to corruption, for example in the form of bribery, by health service providers at different stages of their health care needs.

For women and girls to get access to basic services (education, health, water, sanitation, and electricity), documentation (licenses, residence and identity papers), and law enforcement, they may not only be forced to bribery but also exposed to sexual extortion. These acts often go unreported due to the stigma and shame associated with sexual crimes. This makes it difficult to monitor the nature and frequency of such corruption practices.

Furthermore corruption shrinks public revenue, often cutting spending on education, healthcare, family benefits and other social services. This seriously undermines the welfare of women and children who rely most on such services provided by the state.

While engaging in politics. Corrupt political parties create an unfair environment for women officials who less often engage in vote-buying or get promoted through personal connection. As a result, political cultures that are not merit-based limit women's access to decision-making processes in a country's government and political system.

²UNDP and Huairou Commission. 2012. Seeing beyond the State: Grass-roots women's perspectives on corruption and anti-corruption. New York: UNDP.

Corruption also affects women's decision-making and empowerment in other areas. Women in both formal and informal sectors face corruption when looking for employment or pursuing their own businesses, which inadvertently poses a barrier to their potential to earn income or sustain their businesses. As women form a large part of the informal sector, in which corruption tends to be more rampant, they are more likely to be under constant pressure to yield to corruption and thereby lose their hard earned revenue or even livelihood.

In situations where women's rights are directly violated.

Corrupt law enforcement systems erode the protection and advancement of women's rights under the law. Often violated social, political and economic issues include marriage and divorce, allegations of adultery and rape, child custody, human trafficking, inheritance, property rights, and financial independence. Corrupt judiciaries reinforce existing discriminatory practices by failing to protect the broader human rights of women and girls. The latter do not have access to resources and any case on discrimination they file in court is likely to be dismissed if the defendant can bribe the prosecutors and/or judges involved.

In situations of conflict the situation is worsened. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is characterized by weak government and poor rule of law. As a result, corruption is often out of the control of the authorities, or may also be perpetrated by them. It often manifests itself in the form of abuse of women's human rights.⁴

Negligence and/or mismanagement. Women and girls make up a larger portion of refugees and displaced populations in conflict and post-conflict countries or in natural disaster events. In situations where most aid workers and peacekeepers are men, opportunities arise for abuse of entrusted power, exposing vulnerable women and girls to sexual and other forms of exploitation (e.g. 'sex-for-food' scandals).

Women report poor or absent service delivery as a form of corruption because it is connected to abuse of power by leaders who enable or fail to hold accountable subordinates engaging in corruption.

GENDER-SPECIFIC CORRUPTION

Women are in many ways subjected to the same forms of corruption as men, although often – due to gendered power relations, discrimination and vulnerability – to a greater extent. But there are also forms of corruption that are gender

³ Transparency International, Working Paper #03/2007.

⁴ Nawaz, Farzana. 2009. State of Research on Gender and Corruption, Transparency International U4 Helpdesk.

specific.⁴ This includes for example the use of sex as an informal currency in bribery, the use of conceptions of honour and shame in extortion of women and girls, and human trafficking. In all these also men are subjected, although women make up the majority of those exposed. These acts often go unpunished as they are associated with private and public shame, and are in most cases not recognized as corruption.

WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TO CORRUPTION

Research has shown that women in general perceive corruption levels as worse, and are more likely to be in favour of punishing corrupt behaviour, compared to men.⁵

According to a study in Moldova, women see corruption as a more acute problem than men do. Women also reported feeling more angry and humiliated about paying bribes.⁶ There are also several studies that point to women being less prone to engage in corrupt transactions.⁷ A World Bank report including 150 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia concluded that women are more trustworthy and less prone to corruption.⁸

This has led to discussions on claims that women are less corrupt than men, and on whether there are reliable evidence on correlations between for example higher representation of women in government and lower levels of corruption. The question is however a complex one to answer.

The World Bank's 2001 Engendering Development report states that a higher level of women's political and economic participation is likely to indicate that a country is more open in general, with more transparent governance and a more democratic approach.⁹ This possibly discourages or minimizes opportunities for corruption. Data from transition countries show that corruption is less severe in situations where women have a larger share of parliamentary seats and senior positions in the government bureaucracy.¹⁰

Thus even though a correlation between women's presence, power and participation and lower levels of corruption seems to be clear, it is more complex than a direct causality. There is no evidence suggesting that women will not engage more in corruption if they are more exposed to corruption practices, take up more senior management positions and enter into the workforce to a higher extent.¹¹

KEY GENDER ASPECTS IN ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- Introduce a gender focus in anti-corruption measures through mainstreaming gender equality. This can be done through capacity development at different arenas: e.g. government, civil society, and media.
- Influence policy makers to acknowledge the need for them to understand the gender differential impact of corruption, and to design policies that address women and men's specific concerns and experiences.
- Support gender analysis and collection of sex-disaggregated data on corruption and the application of collected data.
- Combine targeted anti-corruption policies with efforts to empower women in governance.
- Implement gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that budgets are more responsive to women's needs.
- Increase the number of women in government by promoting and supporting the political participation of women and their representation in the public sector in all stages of service delivery.
- Improve access to information through promoting and advocating for an enforceable right to information for women and men.

FURTHER READING

- **Transparency International:** [Gender, Equality and Corruption: What are the Linkages?](#)
- **UNDP and Huairou Commission:** [Seeing beyond the State: Grassroots Women's Perspectives on Corruption and Anti-Corruption](#)
- **UKAid:** [Why corruption matters: understanding causes, effects and how to address them](#)
- **Mattias Agerberg:** [Perspectives on Gender and Corruption](#)

ABOUT CERC

Centre de Recherche sur l'Anti-Corruption is an independent, youth-led organization leading the fight against corruption in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. **Our mission** is to advance knowledge on the causes and consequences of corruption and support the development of new anti-corruption policies and initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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