

U4 Expert Answer



State of Research on Gender and Corruption

Query:

1. *What is the state of research knowledge about gender and corruption – both in terms of its impact on women and how a gender-disaggregated approach can make progress against corruption?*
2. *What are the 'quick wins' on this issue for our country offices, including what has been done by donors to date that has proved successful?*
3. *What about gender in fragile states?*

Purpose:

I am trying to establish a baseline on what research exists on this topic.

Content:

- Part 1: Gender and Corruption**
- Part 2: Good Practice in Gender and Corruption**
- Part 3: Gender in Fragile States**

Summary:

Corruption may affect progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment by limiting women's capacities to claim their rights. Evidence is inconclusive on whether women are more or less prone to corruption than men. A review of recent literature indicates that a more important dimension is corruption's disproportionate impact on women. This appears to be particularly the case in fragile state settings. Research shows that good practice to mitigate the effects of corruption on women include improved female participation in oversight processes and accountability systems.

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Part 1: Gender and Corruption

Gendered perceptions of corruption

Until recently, the debate on gender and corruption was focused on the gender-specific causes of corruption, and whether there is a relationship between gender equality in public and political life and levels of corruption in a given society.

During the early 2000s, many research reports claimed the existence of a link between low levels of corruption and more women in government. A study published in 1999 by the World Bank claimed that women are more trustworthy and public-spirited than men. They found that in a large cross-section of countries, greater representation of women in parliament led to lower levels of corruption. (David Dollar et al, 1999, "Are Women Really the Fairer Sex? Corruption and Women in Government", World Bank Working Paper Series No. 4; Swamy et al, 2000, "Gender and Corruption", IRIS Centre Working Paper No. 232; Mason and King, 2001, "Engendering development through gender equality in rights, resources, and voice", World Bank Report No. 21776).

The idea that women inherently possess greater integrity than men and are therefore less corrupt has since been challenged. Anne Marie Goetz questioned the notion that more women in government will result in lower levels of corruption. She noted that the advocates of this notion fail to acknowledge the ways in which gender relations may limit the opportunities for corruption, particularly when corruption functions through all-male networks and in forums from which women are socially excluded. (Anne-Marie Goetz, 2004, "Political Cleaners: How Women are the New Anti-Corruption Force. Does the Evidence Wash?")

In 2003, an alternative explanation was put forward by Hung-en Sung, who argued that it is 'fairer systems', not women's greater integrity, which explains why corruption is lower where more women are in government. She argued that having women in political leadership roles had a far less significant impact on corruption than liberal democratic institutions which had far more explanatory power of lower levels of corruption. (Sung, Hung-En, 2003, 'Fairer Sex or Fairer System? Gender and Corruption Revisited', Social Forces 82: 705-725).

This point of view was reinforced by V. Alatas et al in a 2006 study of individuals' attitudes towards corruption in four countries: Australia (Melbourne), India (Delhi), Indonesia (Jakarta), and Singapore. This analysis departs from previous literature on gender and corruption by using experimental methodology, acknowledging that attitudes towards corruption play a critical role in its persistence. The findings suggest that the gender differences found in the previous studies may not be nearly as universal as claimed and may be more culture-specific. Alatas et al found no significant differences between the attitudes of men and women towards corruption across the countries studied. However, larger variations were found in women's attitudes towards corruption across the countries than in men's, which indicates a stronger cultural rather than gender-based explanation. (Vivi Alatas et al, February 2008, "Gender, culture, and corruption: insights from an experimental analysis", Southern Economic Journal; another study along the same lines is Alhassan-Alolo, N., 2007, 'Gender and corruption: testing the new consensus', Public Administration and Development 27).

Differences have, however, been found in gendered perceptions of corruption. Analysing data from Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, UNIFEM has presented quantitative evidence that women are more likely than men to perceive high levels of corruption and to feel that their lives are affected by it. They found these differences to be statistically significant and consistent across most regions. (UNIFEM's Progress of the World's Women 2008 Report "Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability"). Swamy et al., who analysed gender differences in political attitudes about the acceptability of different forms of corruption, found similar results. They concluded that there is a worldwide "gender difference in tolerance for corruption". (Swamy et al, 2000, "Gender and Corruption", IRIS Centre Working Paper No. 232).

Finally, gender influences how effectively corruption is measured and evaluated. Sexual extortion and exploitation is excluded from international legal instruments tackling corruption, such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption. The UNDP has recently flagged this as a significant obstacle in measuring corruption. (UNDP presentation, November 2008, "Gender and Corruption in Development Cooperation: What do we know from UNDP

experiences?", <http://www.eadi.org/index.php?id=1090> online at:

Gendered impact of corruption

Corruption appears to have different impacts upon and takes different forms for men and women.

Recently, evidence has emerged that corruption has unique impacts on poor women and girls in a variety of sectors. Moreover, conceptualization of the definition of corruption is evolving to include sexual extortion and trafficking, which are forms of corruption disproportionately experienced by women.

The gendered impacts of corruption can be examined in three categories: access to decision-making power, protection, and the advancement of rights and access to resources.

Access to decision-making power

Corruption compounds the already high barriers women face in their empowerment – economic and otherwise. In Africa, for example, most women do not have the right to own property due to cultural constraints. They also do not have access to capital due to lack of collateral. Under these circumstances, corruption in financial schemes set by governments for women's economic empowerment has a hugely negative impact on women as this is their only hope for capital.

Corruption stifles women's voices in accountability mechanisms – not only are women disproportionately affected by corruption, they also have the lowest ability to change their own situations. When political parties can be bought and sold and public officials are elected through vote-buying, or when advancement within the civil service or corporate sector is contingent upon personal connections rather than merit, there are fewer chances for poor women. (Ngotho wa Kariuki, 2008, "Impact of Corruption on Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa").

Protection of women's rights

Corruption severely impacts on the extent to which women's rights are ensured and protected. Corruption in law enforcement - police and security forces and the justice system - has specific gender dimensions. For example, corruption can provide protection to trafficking networks of poor women and girls, perpetrators of

sexual violence can avoid punishment by bribing the police. In some cases sexual harassment and rape can even be perpetrated by the police.

The processes used by law enforcement institutions to process cases are also vulnerable to corruption. These processes often rely heavily on evidence that, in cases of sexual extortion – from harassment to assault - are usually anecdotal, which leaves a lot of room for discretion by officials and, potentially, for bribe seeking. (Celestine Nyamu Musembi and Naomi Hossain, UNIFEM/UNDP primer on gender and corruption, forthcoming).

Access to resources

Women's access to resources is an area where corruption has profound gendered impacts, especially in access to public services. While corruption affects the access of all citizens to these resources and services, women are particularly disadvantaged in at least three ways: First, resources intended to benefit poor women may be more vulnerable to 'grand' corruption, especially in the form of 'leakages', since this is particularly common with ear-marked resources for marginalized groups. Bribes requested for the delivery of basic services such as health, education and water and sanitation affect women in a significant way since their income level tends to be lower and they have fewer alternatives to acquire these services. However, limited evidence is available on the relationship between grand corruption and delivery of public services to women.

Second, corruption in accessing services and resources are less likely to be reported than other forms of corruption due to their sexual nature. For example, some of the most serious evidence of sexual extortion for access to services can be found in cases of sexual abuse in schools; in instances where such abuse results in pregnancy, a common response is to expel the pregnant girl, rather than to punish the responsible teacher. In this case, the impact of corruption is doubled on girls: not only are they required to pay 'bribes' in the form of sex, they also run the risk of being deprived of an education for doing so.

Third, the perception that women are less able to pay bribes can lead to them being 'excused' from paying bribes. However, this does not always mean that women access the required services without paying bribes. In many cases they simply cannot access the services since they are unable to find the adequate

entry-point to the network where bribes can be paid. (Celestine Nyamu Musembi and Naomi Hossain, UNIFEM/UNDP primer on gender and corruption, Forthcoming).

The literature reviewed for this query frequently calls for further research into the gendered impact of corruption. There is a great need for gender disaggregated corruption statistics which can enable analysis on how responses to corruption can be tailored to the needs of different groups. Research also needs to take into account social causes of corruption, which has gendered dimensions.

Part 2: Good practice in relation to gender and corruption

For many donors this is a relatively new area of programming and there is limited evidence on the impact and effectiveness of interventions. Most of the information available suggests that, in terms of punitive and preventative measures, three dominant strategies have been used: creating or strengthening oversight mechanisms with women's participation; enactment and use of access to information laws; and increased representation and participation of women in decision-making positions and civil service. It should be noted that, thus far, most gender-sensitive anti-corruption initiatives have been initiated by civil society organisations, communities or by individual women at both grassroots level and in senior government positions.

In 2004, GTZ published a report on approaches and recommendations for technical assistance with respect to gender and corruption. In this document they endorse approaches such as gender-sensitive participatory budget planning and analysis, and gender-sensitive approaches to corruption in connection with trafficking in women. (Bianca Schimmel and Birgit Pech, 2004, "Corruption and Gender: Approaches and Recommendations for Technical Assistance" GTZ Report), Similarly, the UNDP's 2001 handbook on gender mainstreaming contains recommendations on how to integrate gender in policy formation in various sectors. Corruption, however, is not the focus of the recommendations and is treated rather as a cross-cutting issue that affects all policy areas and sectors. (Astrida Neimanis, 2001, "Gender Mainstreaming in Practice: A Handbook", UNDP Handbook)

UNIFEM's 2008/2009 Progress Report provides a wide range of practical suggestions for preventing corruption, such as including gender-sensitive accountability systems in justice system reform, law enforcement reform, economic regulation, electoral oversight, public service delivery, and international aid and security provision. The report states that women need to have improved access to the institutions that provide these services in order to make their priorities known.

Women's participation in oversight mechanisms is an effective way to ensure that their voice is heard. In order to fulfil this goal, the report recommends strengthening gender-responsiveness of public accountability institutions. Accountability systems that impact on women's experience include elections, judicial review, public audit, and promotion and performance review systems within public governance structures, ombudspersons or human rights commissions and market regulation. Corruption in any of these institutions has negative impacts on accountability to women.

Gender-responsive anti-corruption reforms need to take place in a broader policy context that strives towards gender equality. The report states that in order to achieve this, institutional mandates must contain commitments to promote gender equality – adequate training needs to be provided on gender-sensitive issues, performance measuring and monitoring systems need to record and reward actions promoting women's rights, and, most importantly, systems need to be in place to monitor abuses of women's rights or neglect of their needs. Mechanisms also need to be put in place to correct problems and provide redress to victims. (UNIFEM's Progress of the World's Women 2008 Report "Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability").

The following are some practical examples of strategies that have been used to tackle the gendered dimensions of corruption:

- **Right to information campaigns.** This area is particularly important because women often have limited access to information, which is essential to scrutinize the quality of public services and policy decisions that affect their lives. The Mazdoor Kisan Sakti Sangathan (MKSS), in Rajasthan, India, is a well-known instance of an anti-corruption movement led and substantially driven by women that tackled this very issue. Led by a woman ex-bureaucrat, this organisation of landless people exposed corruption

in public works programmes that particularly affected poor women, by establishing citizens' right to access information about public budgets and public spending. The organisation attracted a lot of attention nationally and internationally and eventually led to a movement that successfully fought for the Constitutional amendment that created the Right to Information Law in India. Their example is now being emulated elsewhere in the world.

- **Gender budgets.** These initiatives aim to build demand among citizens for gender-responsive public spending, as well as the supply of more robust institutional procedures and frameworks that ensure spending plans target gender equality and support women's rights from the concept and planning stage. UNIFEM has funded a number of initiatives which have focused on tracking gaps between budget allocations (planned) and budget expenditures (actual), in order to identify instances where funds intended for women's needs and priorities have gone missing. For example, in Mexico, a civil society group (Fundar) that was part of a gender-responsive budget initiative supported by UNIFEM investigated the loss of 30 million pesos from the federal budget that were intended for programmes in the health sector. They documented the evidence in detail, compiled a case, and tabled it before the Chamber of Deputies.
- **Public advocacy by women's organisations.** A good example of public advocacy against corruption led by women can be found in the Philippines. Women members of PSLINK, a confederation of public sector unions of Philippine government employees, led an initiative against corruption. PSLINK has been involved in a range of corruption control initiatives, including exposing a high-level criminal network that was trafficking women through the Technical Education Skills Department Authority. These initiatives were undertaken even under threats against the Secretary General of PSLINK.
- **Use of information communication technologies for naming and shaming.** Exposure of corruption using local radios and the internet is becoming more frequent. This is a good avenue for women who often do not have access to other means for redress. One good example is the use of videos broadcasted in YouTube to denounce persecutions of individuals exposing corruption. For example, in India, the wife of a government official denouncing

corruption set up a website and videos in an attempt to make sure that he is not punished or murdered.

- **Increasing number of women in security forces.** Sexual corruption in law enforcement institutions have been shown to decrease when women personnel handle crimes of sexual violence. A good example of this is the all-women police contingent sent by India to Liberia in 2007 for the United Nation's peace-keeping mission. The effects of this intervention were two-fold: the recruitment of women to the Liberian national police increased, and gender-based violence reportedly declined in areas patrolled by women.

(Celestine Nyamu Musembi and Naomi Hossain, UNIFEM/UNDP primer on gender and corruption, Forthcoming)

UNIFEM repeatedly highlights that gender-sensitive anti-corruption efforts are still islands in a sea of large, gender-neutral (or gender-biased) anti-corruption programming. This is a problem because without a compendium of successfully applied approaches it is difficult for policy makers to formulate programs they feel confident of succeeding. Gender issues need to be more systematically understood and integrated into these larger programmes. UNIFEM's report stresses that greater resources need to be allocated to review gender-sensitive anti-corruption approaches and initiatives, regardless of their size and scope. (UNIFEM's [Progress of the World's Women 2008 Report "Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability"](#)).

Part 3: Gender and Corruption in Fragile States

Research on gender and corruption in the context of conflict and post-conflict states is even more limited than in the context of 'normalised' state settings. Fragile and post-conflict states tend to be accompanied by various levels of weakness in government capacity and a very limited rule of law. Corruption in conflict and post-conflict settings often take the form of gross abuses of women's human rights.

Human rights violations in fragile states affect women and men differently. In some situations, women and girls are vulnerable to rape and other forms of gender-based violence, as well as to forced displacement. Some documentation can be found on sexual extortion

of women and girls during conflict and post-conflict peace-keeping and reconstruction efforts. Examples include 'sex-for-food' scandals in which refugees and other vulnerable women and children have been forced to perform sexual favours for peacekeeping forces and aid workers in return for food and other resources. (Celestine Nyamu Musembi and Naomi Hossain, UNIFEM/UNDP primer on gender and corruption, Forthcoming).

Extreme poverty and corruption are common features of post-conflict and fragile states. Women are particularly hard hit by poverty in such contexts since they are likely to be excluded from full participation in the labour force or credit markets, either by law or in practice. Corruption in these circumstances therefore prohibits the realisation of basic rights to food, clothing, housing and medical care. A 2005 report by the North South Institute emphasised that tackling corruption in service delivery in post-conflict states is fundamental to ensuring gender equity. (Stephen Baranyi and Kristiana Powell, 2005, "Fragile States, Gender Equality and Aid Effectiveness: A Review of Donor Perspectives").

Part 4: Further Reading

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