

Corruption and gender inequality are closely connected. Corruption exacerbates gender inequalities and improving gender equality can help reduce and counter corruption. Men, women and non-binary persons are affected by corruption in different ways while people experience corruption differently depending on social variables such as age, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity and religion or other beliefs. An intersectional gender perspective is therefore important for developing effective strategies to combat corruption, reduce gender inequalities and achieve sustainable development. This brief explores the inter-linkages between gender and corruption relevant in Sida's work and provides recommendations for policy dialogue.

LINKING GENDER, DEVELOPMENT AND CORRUPTION

Corruption is a major obstacle to development and the fight against poverty. It hinders economic growth, reduces trust in public institutions, undermines democracy and aggravates inequalities. Anti-corruption was therefore included in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under goal 16 'Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies'.

Corruption tends to affect poor and vulnerable groups the most. Therefore, women and girls are more likely to be affected by corruption, since they are overrepresented among the poor.¹ Also, existing power relations and structural gender inequalities such as the lower status and position in society of women, girls, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI persons and people living with disabilities makes them more exposed to corruption and its consequences. Various surveys shows that overall men are forced to pay larger sums in bribes, but due to the unequal access to financial resources and existing social norms, women carry the heavier burden of corruption in relation to income.²

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

2 U4 Brief (2015), *The gendered impact of corruption: Who suffers more men or women.*

Definition of Gender equality

Gender equality is achieved when women and men, and girls and boys, have equal rights, life prospects and opportunities, and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society.

Definition of corruption

Sida defines corruption as an abuse of trust, power or position for improper gain. Common forms of corruption are bribes, extortion, embezzlement, kickbacks, nepotism, fraud and breach of trust. Bribes may be in money, in services or in the form of achieving undue influence. Another form of corruption which has a long history but only recently has been made visible is sextortion, the abuse of entrusted power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage.

Despite corruption being a major impediment to development, most corruption policies do not make a clear connection to gender equality. Likewise, corruption poses a barrier to the achievement of gender equality and should therefore be addressed in gender policies and programs. When we look at the relationship between gender and corruption, we need to consider how women act and are affected, but also look at the role of men and social constructions of masculinities.³

HOW CORRUPTION DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS WOMEN

Corruption in accessing basic services. In many societies, women are still the primary caretakers of the family and are regularly confronted with corruption when dealing with education, health and other public services. In the healthcare sector, women are particularly affected as they have reproductive health needs that may require regular attention.⁴ In these situations, women may be subjected to corruption, for example in the form of bribery demands, by health service providers. If, however, a certain activity is typically a male responsibility, men will in principle be more vulnerable to corruption linked to that activity.

3 Bjarnegård, E. (2018) *Focusing on Masculinity and Male Dominated Networks in Corruption.*

4 Merkle, O. (2022), *Anti-corruption and gender: the role of women's political participation.*

Furthermore, corruption shrinks public revenue, cutting spending on education, healthcare, family benefits and other social services. This undermines the welfare of those who rely most on public services – mainly women and children.

Women in positions of power and corruption.

Research on political representation has shown that the effect of corruption is not gender-neutral but benefits the recruitment of men to political office as; nepotistic and clientelist male dominated networks are a major impediment to women's political participation.⁵ Research on political representation shows that women elected to office are more likely than male counterparts to seek improvements in public service deliveries, particularly services that tend to benefit women and children.⁶

Evidence shows that female officials are less likely to engage in vote-buying or get promoted through personal connections. 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.⁷

Corruption also affects women's 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, where they face demand to pay bribes, women risk to 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.⁸ Situations where their rights are violated and where women are further discriminated 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 human rights of women, girls and marginalized groups. They often lack access to resources and any case on discrimination they file in court are likely to be dismissed if the defendant can bribe the prosecutors and/or judges involved.

In conflict situations it is even worse. Fragile states are characterized by weak governments and

poor rule of law. As a result, corruption is often out of control of the authorities or may also be perpetrated by them. It often plays a role in the abuse of human rights.⁹ Corruption in humanitarian assistance results in a reduced quantity and quality of aid reaching the targeted beneficiaries (of which women and children are the most vulnerable), which, as a result, could prolong humanitarian crises.¹⁰

GENDER-SPECIFIC CORRUPTION

Women and girls are subjected to the same forms of corruption as men, although often – due to gendered power relations, discrimination, and vulnerability – to a greater extent.

Sextortion is a form of corruption and of gender-based violence.¹¹ The term was first defined by the International Association of Women Judges in 2008 as 'a form of sexual exploitation and corruption that occurs when people in positions of authority [...] seek to extort sexual favours in exchange for something within their power to grant or withhold'¹² and thereby abuse their entrusted authority. The guidance for Sida's work on corruption as a development obstacle, published in 2019, defines sextortion as "the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage" and mentions it as a form of corruption that has a long history but only recently has been made visible.

The responsibility for sextortion always lies with the actor that abuses their entrusted authority (the perpetrator), and the transactional aspect of sextortion adds to the shame, fear, and invisibility by making the victim appear 'complicit'.¹³ Although men are also subject to this type of corruption, women, girls and LGBTQI persons are disproportionately affected. Transparency International's research from 2019 shows that 1 in 5 people in Latin America has experienced sextortion when accessing a government service or knows someone who has¹⁴, while 57% of women have experienced sextortion in Zimbabwe.¹⁵

For women, girls and LGBTQI persons to get access to basic services (education, health, water, sanitation, and employment), documentation (licenses, residence and identity papers), and law

5 Stockemer, D, Wigginton, M, Sundström, A. *Boys' Club or Good Ol' Boys Club? Corruption and the Parliamentary Representation of Young and Old Men and Women*, (2020) Parliamentary Affairs, Volume 74, Issue 2, Pages 314–332.

6 Bauhr, M, Charron, N, Wängnerud, L. (2019) *Exclusion or interests? Why females in elected office reduce petty and grand corruption*.

7 Merkle, O. (2022), *Anti-corruption and gender: the role of women's political participation*.

8 U4 Brief (2015) *The Gender impact of Corruption: Who suffers more – men or women?*

9 U4 Helpdesk Answer 2020:1, *The costs of corruption during humanitarian crises, and mitigation strategies for development agencies*, 2020.

10 *ibid*.

11 Eldén, Å., D. Calvo, E. Bjarnegård, S. Lundgren and S. Jonsson (2020), *Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-Based Violence*, EBA Report 2020:06, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden.

12 *ibid*.

13 Eldén, Å., D. Calvo, E. Bjarnegård, S. Lundgren and S. Jonsson (2020), *Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-Based Violence*, EBA Report 2020:06, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden.

14 Transparency International (2019), *Global Corruption Barometer, Latin America and the Caribbean*.

15 Transparency International (2020), *Gender and Corruption in Zimbabwe*.

enforcement, they may not only be forced to monetary bribery but also exposed to sextortion. These acts often go unreported due to the stigma and shame associated with sexual crimes, exacerbated by the *quid pro quo* (this for that) in sextortion. In many cases there are also no safe and gender sensitive whistle-blowing mechanisms that would protect women and men that speak up and report sextortion. There is also fear of retaliation and reprisal for reporting. This makes it difficult to monitor the nature and frequency of sextortion.

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 sextortion and other forms of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). Women migrants and refugee women and girls often face the risk of both having to pay a financial bribe and become subjects to exploitation, abuse and sextortion. Both SEAH and corruption is assessed through Sida's contribution management system.

SEAH – Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in development cooperation

Sida has a long-term commitment to respond and prevent Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. Sida's approach is based on Sweden's commitments at the London summit on safeguarding against SEAH in 2018 and is in line with the OECD DAC recommendation on SEAH. SEAH is closely linked with sextortion but has a broader coverage.

The root causes of SEAH are power imbalances linked to structural gender-related inequalities and patriarchal structures. Risks are particularly heightened in fragile, or conflict-affected contexts where power imbalances can be particularly acute and staff rotation is higher.

WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TO CORRUPTION

There is an apparent gender difference in attitude towards corruption.¹⁶ Factors such as gender roles, social status and life experiences makes women and men subject to different forms of corruption, as well as having different attitude towards corrupt behaviour¹⁷. Research has shown that women in general have a stronger aversion towards corruption, are more likely to condemn corrupt behaviour and are

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

It is important to note that women are a diverse group, and not all women will follow the norm. Elite women that challenge prevailing norms may be less likely to be risk averse than the average woman.¹⁸

Furthermore, in many contexts not being corrupt, or engaging in anti-corruption activities, also entails a high risk. It could also be that women simply have less opportunities to be corrupt than men, due to exclusion from positions of power.

In sum, many more elements than biological sex need to be considered when exploring – and explaining – the gender dimensions of corruption.¹⁹ Expected behaviour and social norms are examples of elements which shape women's attitudes to corruption. These may change over time, making the correlation between women's presence, power and participation and lower levels of corruption unclear. More research is needed.

KEY GENDER ASPECTS IN ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Sida's approach to corruption is to always prevent, never accept, always inform and always act. It has become apparent that the work against corruption and gender inequality is a joint mission – improvements in gender equality reduces and counters corruption, and anticorruption measures reduces gender inequality, and they tend to happen simultaneously.

Dialogue with cooperation partners – tackling corruption and building integrity in gender equality contributions

- Are aspects of corruption included in the gender analysis, e.g. which women and men are affected, and how does corruption affect women and men's access to and control over resources, agency and voice?
- How will SEAH related corruption be prevented and addressed?
- Is corruption likely to affect the implementation of the program and the achievement of the gender equality targets, and if yes how?
- What can be done to address and mitigate gender-sensitive corruption risks?

16 Merkle, O. (2022), *Anti-corruption and gender: the role of women's political participation*.

17 Bauhr, M, Charron, N. (2020), *Will Women Executives Reduce Corruption? Marginalization and Network Inclusion*.

18 Bauhr, M, Charron, N and Wängnerud, L. U4 Brief 2018:3, *Close the political gender gap to reduce corruption*.

19 UNODC (2020): *The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption*.

Dialogue questions – mainstreaming gender equality in anticorruption

- How does corruption, in your context, affect different women, men, boys and girls, including access to and control over resources, agency and voice?
- How will a lack of corruption-sensitive programming affect the implementation?
- How will SEAH related corruption be prevented and addressed?
- What measures need to be taken to address gender imbalances as part of anti-corruption measures?

FURTHER READING

- **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2020:** The Time is Now, Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Anti-Corruption
- **Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2022:** Orkel, M, Anti-corruption and gender: the role of women's political participation
- **Eldén, Å., D. Calvo, E. Bjarnegård, S. Lundgren and S. Jonsson (2020),** Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-Based Violence, EBA Report 2020:06, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden
- **Transparency International 2020 report:** Breaking the Silence around Sextortion; The links between power, sex and corruption.