



OXFAM

10th AFRICAN UNION GENDER PRE-SUMMIT

Theme: “Winning the fight against corruption: a sustainable path to gender equality and women’s empowerment in Africa”.

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Topic: Corruption and its adverse effects on efforts towards Gender Equality

Introduction:

The last decade has seen Africa make significant progress on attaining gender equality with commitments made by African governments through; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, African Union Gender Policy and the launch of the African Women's Decade-2010-2020. All these have in one way or another translated into national policies and programs that advance gender equality. Women continue to break political glass ceilings, occupying positions that were traditionally for men. Gender parity seems to have been attained in primary education, however girls continue to face barriers like early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation that hinders their educational aspirations.

Corruption on the other hand threatens the gains made on gender equality and exacerbates inequality in the continent despite it being high on the governance reform agenda for decades. Corruption constrains development, exacerbates and causes conflict, and is one of the biggest obstacles to achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

Corruption disproportionately affects people living in poverty and people whose voices are marginalized, the significant majority of whom are women. It is a tax on the poor that distorts how income, resources, power and services are shared between men and women, boys and girls and creates additional obstacles and risks for women to access, utilise and manage public goods and services. Corruption starves public services of revenue postponing development, equality and exacerbating gender inequalities.

Unequal power relations between women and men make women more vulnerable to the impact of corruption. As an abuse of entrusted power for private gain, corruption continues to exacerbate these uneven power dynamics between men and women, including when it comes to access to resources, decision-making, information and other areas.

Some of the impacts of corruption in relation to gender equality include the fact that; corruption creates barriers to accessing essential services; corruption takes the form of sexual extortion which is rarely recognized as a form of corruption; corruption reduces women's access to land, markets and credits excluding them from meaningful participation in the economy; and corruption reinforces women's social and economic marginalization.

The Oxfam Pan African Programme Gender Justice Programme approaches Corruption and the Gender discourse using a rights framework. From our work, there are 4 aspects that are emerging:

- 1) **Access to essential services and financial resources:** Corruption in public service delivery creates obstacles and risks for women and girls to access and use public goods. When public services are not accessible, of poor quality or fees are charged, it is women and girls who are disadvantaged or excluded first. But it is also women and girls who pick up the burden in the form of unpaid care when their family and friends cannot access health care – a hidden subsidy to governments health budgets that is never acknowledged. Unequal responsibilities for unpaid care compromise women's economic and social freedoms and reduce their opportunities to escape poverty and fully participate in society. Women in some phases of life also have greater needs for health services, especially in their reproductive years. Corruption in the form of bribes being demanded for their delivery 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. ¹

- 2) **Corruption & Social Economic exclusion of women:** Women's economic empowerment and the impact of corruption on their agency is no different. The bias is clear in public spending and international aid initiatives. A report commissioned by [UNDP](#) on 8 developing countries in 2012 showed that corruption had a significant negative impact on women's participation in the labour market (formal or informal), in getting their children admitted in schools, protesting physical abuse against family members, enlisting in government subsidised programmes and participating in elections. Additionally, empirical findings from more than 63 countries show that where corruption is less prevalent, it correlates to better development indicators, higher levels of foreign direct investment and increased crop yields (UN-Habitat 2004). Another report by ONE calculated that [one trillion dollars](#) go missing every year from developing countries due to corruption, money laundering and illegal tax evasion. Loss in state funds due to corruption reduces government resources for social services and this burden is then passed on to citizens, hitting the poorest and marginalized in our society the worst. This turns out to be poor women often from marginalized communities. When states fail to support citizens, women's unpaid reproductive labour and household contributions steps in to fill the care gap for the elderly and future tax-paying citizens.

- 3) **Political participation of women and decision making:** 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. 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 policymaking. 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. ² Land is one the key assets to building better lives and equality for poor rural women in the continent. However, corruption that mostly manifests in the use of political and economic power to subvert laid down rules for individual gain continue to hinder the realization of women's rights to land. 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.³ Corruption is inherently leads to gender inequality as women

¹ SIDA, Gender Tool Box

² SIDA, Gender Tool Box

³ Transparency International Policy Brief N01/2014

don't have easy access to a seat at the table in political decision making and lack the resources to buy their way to influence in the way many wealthy men are able to, ensuring that decisions are more likely to be weighted to their disadvantage thus hindering with women's ability to advance in politics and decision making.

- 4) **Gender Based Violence in conflict and post conflict situations:** During conflict, there is a fundamental breakdown of the structures of law and order and the unfortunate reality is that sexual and gender based violence which is an issue even in peace time escalates exponentially. Studies have shown that SGBV is often used as a strategy by opposing forces and as a result the scourge of SGBV disproportionately affects women. Women tend to be victimised differently by corruption because vulnerabilities created by their gender. Crimes of sexual torture, sexual humiliation and forced nudity likewise constitute sexual violence. Despite this reality, there is a lack of accountability on the part of national governments to tackle the appalling trend that render women's bodies' as tools of war. It is imperative that we recognize sex extortion as double crime that constitutes sexual abuse and corruption, both punishable by law. There are forms of corruption that affect women and girls more specifically, such as sexual and gender based violence and extortion- the use of 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). 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. 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. In Sierra Leone the government has had to launch a 'no sex for grades' campaign as girls are so routinely asked by teachers and officials for sex as a prerequisite for learning or to get access to their examination results.

Recommendations:

- There is need to develop gender responsive anti-corruption strategies including gender responsive reporting mechanisms and involve women in the design of gender specific approaches to curb corruption.
- Anti-corruption policies must account for the social construction of gendered behaviors (as opposed to the assumption that they are innate

to individual's biology), Gender analysis and collection of sex disaggregated data on corruption and the application of collected data is important in formulation, implementation and monitoring of anti-corruption policies.

- There is need to take into account grassroots women's experiences and strategies when developing and implementing anti-corruption policies at the continental and national levels. (Include case study on land and corruption)
- Forms of corruption that affect women most such as sexual extortion and human trafficking should be recognized as such and should be a specific area of anti-corruption initiatives. This may include; providing a supportive environment where women can report and take action to tackle this form of corruption in male dominated spaces.
- Continued support for women leadership programs. 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 applied⁴
- Improving access to essential services should be prioritized and funded to reduce incentives/opportunities for corruption.

Conclusions:

Making the link between gender and corruption may help to develop a better understanding of corrupt practices and craft more effective strategies to reduce their adverse effect on gender equality. As part of this agenda, under the theme; ***“Winning the Fight Against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation.”*** 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 are an important source for understanding corruption and designing effective strategies to address the problem that affects their everyday lives.⁵

⁴ Transparency International

⁵ Transparency International Policy Brief No1/2014