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Gender dimensions of corruption

Background document prepared by the secretariat

1. Introduction

The relationship between gender and corruption is an issue which has recently become of interest for international organisations, academics, NGOs and others anti-corruption scholars. Main research themes focus on deferential impact of corruption on men and women, gender perceptions towards this phenomenon and the promotion of women representation in the public life as an effective anti-corruption deterrent. Research findings on these and other questions have already generated a wealth of policy-relevant insights showing that corruption is not a gender neutral phenomenon and calling for stronger linkages between existing gender, development and anti-corruption policies be set up. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is willing to explore this relatively new subject and examine if there is room for parliamentary initiatives.

2. The work of the Council of Europe

The Gender Equality Division of the Council of Europe defines gender equality as “equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life”.¹ Achieving gender equality is central to the protection of human rights, the functioning of democracy, the respect for the rule of law, and economic growth and competitiveness. The Council of Europe’s pioneering work in the fields of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a solid legal and policy framework which, if implemented, would considerably advance women’s rights and bring member States closer to real gender equality. Overall, the Council of Europe seeks to combat gender stereotypes, sexism and violence against women in its many forms. It aspires to change mentalities and attitudes, promote balanced participation of women and men in political and public life and encourage the integration of a gender perspective into all programmes and policies.

While most member States are committed to equality *de jure*, the Council of Europe has also underlined the importance of achieving *de facto* equality in Europe and is itself taking steps to embed gender mainstreaming in all its various committees and organs. “Gender mainstreaming” is the process whereby a gender perspective is included from the earliest planning stages to final decisions on policy or implementation in a specific field. This approach is meant to ensure that as work is developed it is investigated from the perspectives of different population groups – specifically women and men – so that the decisions made benefit the whole population.

The Council of Europe’s anti-corruption conventions have traditionally been viewed as gender neutral. That said, the Council of Europe’s anti-corruption body reflects the multifaceted approach of the organisation and it is accordingly committed to promote gender equality. This is the basis on which, since 2012, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) has been looking into gender dimensions of corruption and reflecting on whether and how a gender perspective could add value to its work.

¹ “Equality between women and men”, Directorate General of Human Rights and Law, Gender Equality and Human Dignity Department.

For the time being, most national anti-corruption policies/strategies do not include any gender dimensions. An exception is Austria, which is currently developing its anti-corruption strategy to include aspects of gender within it.²

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in particular the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, has also been instrumental in the promotion of Council of Europe's standards concerning all matters affecting equality between women and men. The Committee ensures in fact the promotion of gender mainstreaming in the work of the Assembly and a balanced representation of women and men in the Assembly structures, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated at all levels and in all fields.

The Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, from its part, has recently supported the creation of a PACE anti-corruption platform. Under this forum for dialogue and cooperation, elected representatives from the parliaments of the 47 member States, observer States and partners for democracy have now the possibility to share information, spread good practices and to explore together new issues such as the gender dimension of corruption.

3. Investigating the relation between gender and corruption

Existing literature on gender and corruption focuses on different interrelation aspects which is a part of a broader process of exploring the gender dimensions of democratic governance.

3.1. Corruption impacts women and men differently

Great attention has been paid to corruption's differential impacts on the well-being and human capabilities of women and men. According to a study by UNIFEM, women are generally more vulnerable to the impact of corruption than men. This is particularly true concerning corruption in public service delivery, access to justice, security and in the engagement in public decision-making.

One of the main reasons why corruption has a disproportionately negative impact on women is because they represent the larger proportion within socially vulnerable groups relying on freely provided public service.

Furthermore, in countries where decision-making circles are generally male dominated, promotions are based on personal connections rather than merits thereby depriving women from access to key positions.

As a result, corruption exacerbates gender-based asymmetries in empowerment, access to resources and enjoyment of women rights. This ascertainment has serious implications for the design of policies to combat corruption, to strengthen public accountability systems, and to advance in the gender equality agenda.

3.2. Gendered specific manifestation of corruption

Corruption may also lead to sexual abuse of women. Sexual extortion can involve various types of sexual assault against women, ranging from sexual harassment to forced sex. Some of the most serious evidence of sexual extortion for access to services can be found in cases of sexual abuse in schools or in the workplace. This relates, for instance, to male teachers who have demanded sex from female students in exchange of fair examinations or educational supplies.³

In a recent report Transparency International identifies five types of gender-based corruption linked to sexual extortion in the workplace, namely: sexually suggestive language between managers and employees; sexual extortion by senior staff to gain access to various services; sexual favours in order to access opportunities; lack of access to services because of perceptions that women would not give

² Report by Helena Lišuchová, GRECO's Gender Equality Rapporteur, GRECO 58th Plenary Session (Strasbourg, 3-7 December 2012).

³ "Corruption and gender", Bianca Schimmel and Birgit Pech, GTZ, 2004.

into corruption; and denial to access a given advantage for having resisted sexual proposals. These forms of corruption are normally more frequent in the private sector than in the public one.⁴

Further studying this form of corruption would enable an effective investigation and prosecution of such acts.

3.3. *Gender specific attitudes and corruption risk*

Some scholars have also looked into whether a person's gender may influence perceptions of corruption and how or whether it is reported.

A 1999 study by the World Bank on "corruption and women in government" claimed that women are more trustworthy and public-spirited than men. It was reported that in a large cross-section of countries greater representation of women in parliaments led to lower levels of corruption. While outlining a strategy for integrating gender into workplace policies, the World Bank finally suggested that gender equality in rights and resources was associated with less corruption and better governance.⁵

Recent researches suggested that integrity was not an inherent condition of women or men. For instance, A. M. Goetz argued that the supposed greater honesty and integrity of women in public service in some contexts is due to the lack of opportunities for women, because they have not yet integrated into networks of effective power, even though they are present in politics and bureaucracy.⁶

In this connection, in a report published on August 2014 the UNDP wondered what would be the consequences if a critical mass of women occupied the networks of power and the political and administrative leadership or businesses. One possible answer was that the change of leadership would bring a less corrupt practice. But it is also possible that the number of women and men involved in corruption deals would be similar.⁷

The debate regarding women's propensities to engage in corruption is far from been resolved, though increasing women's political participation remains an important goal.

3.4. *Measuring corruption, a gender perspective*

Most anti-corruption strategies do not include gender needs assessments conducted prior to the policies' implementation, nor do they mention how corruption was affecting men and women in a different manner. These plans are generally gender blind in the sense that they do not account for the specific forms of corruption experienced by women, or for the role that gender plays in increasing women's vulnerabilities.

Gender-specific corruption assessments should include consultations with civil society in order to understand how corruption impacts women differently than men within similar socio-economic groups; where and why corruption occurs in its various forms and frequencies; and what its costs are to women's and men's well-being.⁸ Seppänen and Virtanen 2008's study proposed a method to analyse the gender dimensions of corruption by integrating sector-specific situation analyses of corruption into those currently conducted on gender and poverty. This can generate gender-sensitive anticorruption plans for those sectors in which corruption has the most negative impacts on women.

The many facets of corruption will be more accurately defined and the anti-corruption policies and strategies better tailored if gender is deliberately considered when examining the typology and impact of corruption in different contexts.

⁴ "Gender based corruption in the workplace", Transparency International, 2011.

⁵ See David Dollar et al, "Are Women Really the Fairer Sex? Corruption and Women in Government", World Bank Working Paper Series No. 4, 1999; Swamy et al, "Gender and Corruption", IRIS Centre Working Paper No. 232, 2000; Mason and King, "Engendering development through gender equality in rights, resources, and voice", World Bank Report No. 21776, 2001.

⁶ "Political cleaner: how women are the new anti-corruption force. Does the evidence wash?", Anne Marie Goetz, U4 Paper, 2003.

⁷ "Gender and corruption in Latin America: is there a link?", UNDP, August 2014.

⁸ "Corruption, accountability and gender: understanding the connections", UNDP and UNIFEM, 2010.

4. Parliamentary action

The role of parliamentarians is an essential and inalienable part of any anti-corruption strategy given that its action is focused on establishing an appropriate anticorruption legal framework and strengthening the parliamentary oversight functions in sensitive areas.

Parliamentarians have to be invited to actively support and adopt a gendered approach to anti-corruption strategies. Bringing up the gender dimension while conceiving anti-corruption strategies will enable that policies be designed in a more targeted and effective manner.

Also, parliamentarians can take action by:

- ensuring women's participation in designing policies and programmes that govern the distribution of resources and accesses to services
- commissioning studies and researches on the relation between gender and corruption;
- combining targeted anti-corruption policies with efforts to empower women in governance;
- promoting women's active participation in political life;
- ensuring effective equal opportunities as to the access to decision-making bodies at all levels;
- creating working groups and organising events to raise awareness about the gender dimension of corruption;
- creating partnerships with international organisations, academics, NGOs and others, to further explore this issue.

Bringing a gender focus to policy-makers strategies on anti-corruption will ultimately ensure that both sexes will benefit equally from policy interventions and that policies will be designed in a more targeted and effective manner.

5. Conclusions

The state of research on the relation between gender and corruption clearly indicates that the gendered dimensions of corruption are complex. Understanding the role of women in corruption or assessing its impact need to be examined in relation to socio-economic and cultural norms that shape their lives.

There is currently a great need for more gender disaggregated data on corruption offences. Addressing the different impacts that corruption has on men and women requires a gender analysis of its effects as well as ensuring that women are adequately engaged in efforts to address and prevent corruption. Unless anti-corruption initiatives are accompanied by a deliberate attempt to involve women, the gender-specific effects of corruption are unlikely to be identified and addressed.⁹

National monitoring mechanisms must be made more gender responsive by including more women, by identifying the kinds of corruption that primarily affect women and by implementing accountability mechanisms that address these dimensions.

⁹ "Gender and corruption", UNDP, concept note, 2011.