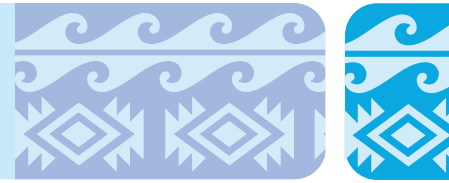


The Gender Dimensions of Corruption



The United Nations Convention against Corruption (the Convention) remains the sole global, holistic and legally binding international instrument to fight and prevent corruption. To date, 189 Parties have ratified or acceded to the Convention in recognition of the global character of the threats posed by corruption. It is widely acknowledged that corruption disproportionately impacts women and other equity-seeking groups, such as youth and persons with disabilities, thereby preventing social inclusion and deepening inequalities. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its role as guardian of the Convention, acknowledges that the fight against corruption requires an inclusive, whole-of-society approach.

In December 2020, UNODC took the lead in the discussion on the nexus between gender and corruption through its flagship publication, "[*The Time is Now – Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption*](#)". The publication explores the interlinkages between gender and corruption as well as the differentiated impact of corruption on women and men. For example, it highlights how gender inequality tends to facilitate and encourage corrupt behaviour through, *inter alia*, the establishment and perpetuation of networks that favour similarly situated individuals over others, commonly referred to as "the old boys' club". Meanwhile, research also shows that diverse and more inclusive environments are less corrupt. By distilling these synergies and presenting supporting case studies from around the world, *The Time is Now* demonstrates that gender equality and anti-corruption are mutually reinforcing endeavours.

UNODC has continued to raise the profile of the gender dimensions of corruption at the national, regional and international level through data collection, research initiatives, workshops, national policy development and commitments within high profile international fora.

Gender and Corruption on the International Stage

Most notably, the gender-corruption nexus was reflected in the political declaration adopted at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) against corruption in June 2021. Member States unanimously committed to "*improve [their] understanding of the linkages between gender and corruption, including the ways in which corruption can affect women and men differently, and [to] continue to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, including by mainstreaming it in relevant legislation, policy development, research, projects and programmes, as appropriate and in accordance with the fundamental principles of domestic law*".¹ The incorporation of this paragraph is a milestone and powerful acknowledgement of the need to further explore the gender dimensions of corruption. This was again reflected in three resolutions² adopted at the ninth session of the Conference of the States Parties (COSP) to the Convention – another milestone, seeing as only three prior resolutions,³ out of a total of 61 resolutions adopted in the preceding eight COSPs, had included the word "gender" or "women".

Gender and Corruption in the Pacific

Regional initiatives within the Pacific similarly demonstrate the growing momentum around, and the need to address more adequately, the gender dimensions of corruption. In view of exploring areas close to women's reality in the Pacific, UNODC, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The Women Entrepreneurs Business Council (WEBC), the Fijian Competition & Consumer Commission and the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC), produced an "[*Anti-Corruption Toolkit for Women-Owned Micro, Small and Medium Businesses in Fiji*](#)".⁴ The toolkit provides practical guidance on identifying, preventing

¹ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 June 2021, OP 69, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/S-32/1>.

² Conference resolutions 9/1, 9/4 and 9/8.

³ Conference resolutions 6/10, 7/8 and 8/4

⁴ This publication was produced as part of the United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Project, a joint initiative of UNODC and UNDP.

and reporting corrupt practices and was developed in direct response to needs raised by women entrepreneurs at a workshop held in Fiji. Furthermore, the recent information note “[Breaking the Silence on Gender and Corruption in the Pacific](#)”⁵ explores the gender inequality and corruption nexus and looks more in detail at the differentiated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the Pacific.

Publications produced by the inter-governmental forum on Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) have also highlighted the importance of empowering women and mainstreaming gender in the fight against corruption. These include “[The Role of Women’s Empowerment in Anti-Corruption](#)”, published in March 2021, and “[Gender Mainstreaming and Mentoring in APEC Anti-Corruption Agencies](#)”,⁶ published in December 2021, both of which address gender-based differences in the impact of corruption and the importance of more strategically engaging women in corruption prevention.

Paths Forward to Explore the Gender Dimensions of Corruption

Although the differentiated impact of corruption on women and men has begun to receive increasing attention among stakeholders and policymakers, it remains insufficiently understood and inadequately addressed, not only within the Pacific region, but worldwide. Therefore, various avenues for pursuing this work have begun to appear, all of which build upon existing initiatives in the region and capitalize on the momentum created by the UNGASS political declaration and recent UNCAC COSP resolutions. Such approaches include, but are not limited to:

- **Quantitative and qualitative data collection:** While the body of research and data on the gender dimensions of corruption is growing, there is still a lack of empirical, primary, interdisciplinary and sex-disaggregated data capturing the linkages between gender and corruption. Quantitative and qualitative data regarding the legal and political landscape as well as the lived experiences in a country can form the baseline for advancing gender-sensitive anti-corruption policies and strategic objectives. However, ideally data collection should go beyond sex-disaggregation to include targeted questions and analysis that unpack the nuanced relationship between gender inequalities and corruption to provide a basis for evidence-based policy solutions.
- **Developing gender-responsive whistleblower reporting and protection**

mechanisms: To be most effective, whistleblower mechanisms must be inclusive and cater to the needs of women and other marginalized groups. For example, adopting measures such as anonymous or confidential reporting channels and anti-retaliation protections have been found to encourage women to report misconduct. Institutions can further expand the reach and utility of their reporting mechanisms by ensuring that trainings and communications are clear, widely available and inclusive. It is also critical that report recipients are adequately trained, including on the gender-sensitivities associated with whistle-blowing to avoid any re-victimization.

- **Building integrity through inclusive public procurement:** Gender-responsive procurement processes can provide a strategic avenue for pursuing both gender equality and anti-corruption objectives. By ensuring that women are more effectively integrated as government contractors and served by government contracts, States can socially and economically empower women. To this end States have adopted gender-related procurement quotas, implemented pay equity requirements among large government contractors, and/or increased procurement opportunities for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Other procurement-related strategies include gender-responsive budgeting and gender-sensitive analyses of procurement processes. Such efforts also inject public procurement processes with greater diversity, competition and transparency, all of which can prevent corruption.
- **Mainstreaming gender within anti-corruption institutions:** Anti-corruption bodies shape national and local anti-corruption priorities. It is therefore essential that the members of these bodies are representative of the populations that they serve and that each member, regardless of his or her gender, fully appreciates the gender dimensions of corruption. These objectives can be pursued through the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies, gender parity targets throughout anti-corruption institutions, and regular gender-awareness trainings for staff, among other avenues. One important aspect is to also monitor the implementation of such policies to assess their effectiveness – and be ready to adapt and revise them in view of reinforcing their intended impact.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This publication is an output of the New Zealand-led APEC-funded *Symposium to Develop Gender Sensitivity Training and Guide – To Enhance Gender Mainstreaming and Women’s Empowerment in Fighting Corruption*, held in 2021.