



منظمة تنمية المرأة

Women Development Organization

l'Organisation pour le Développement de la Femme

**WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE
IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION**



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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**“In the fight against corruption,
everybody has a role to play
to ensure that no one is left behind”**

**WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE
FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION**

Executive summary

Corruption is the main obstacle to the sustainability of economic, political and social development worldwide. It hampers economic growth, distorts decision-making and increases poverty by both the misallocation of resources and the limiting of access to public services. The environment enabling corruption and its impact disproportionately affect the world's poor, the majority of whom are women. More inclusive and equitable societies supportive of global well-being can be achieved through gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Most Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have signed and ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). OIC's call for Member States to put the fight against corruption at the heart of their political agenda was a timely call, especially with the economic challenges and new realities emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. Women in OIC Member States have benefitted from legislative progress in furtherance of their empowerment as well as various support measures. Yet, gaps between men and women in many spheres including education, and public and private life persist.

OIC's commitment to women's advancement was reflected in the Programme of Action 2025, and the 2016 OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW). This commitment was culminated with the establishment of the Women Development Organization (WDO), which supports gender equality and women's empowerment in the OIC Member States. The Statute of WDO went into force on 31st July 2021 and started its operations from its HQs in Cairo in August 2021.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets gender equality and the empowerment of women as one of its stand-alone goals, as well as setting the reduction of corruption and bribery in all its forms as one of its targets. In order to assist its Members to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the WDO is proposing to improve the overall understanding of the complex interrelation of corruption and gender by taking forward the issue of the role of women in fighting corruption as one its four pillars composing its first programmatic cycle. WDO believes that increased knowledge shall enhance anti-corruption and gender equality policies for sustainable development. This belief goes in line with the Political Declaration¹ adopted by

¹ Our common commitment to effectively addressing challenges and implementing measures to prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation, A/S-32/2/Add.1.

the United Nations General Assembly Special Session Against Corruption on 2 June 2021, whereby States have committed to improving their "... understanding of the linkages between gender and corruption, including the ways in which corruption can affect women and men differently...".

"Women as agents of change in the fight against corruption" pillar of WDO's First Programmatic Cycle will shed light on ways in which corruption affects men and women, yet, how it also more often impacts women and men in different ways. It will discuss various measures to enhance diversity and inclusiveness in politics and public life as well as in the workplace to help mitigate corrupt behaviour. Finally, different programmatic responses will be presented focusing on women as agents of change in the fight against corruption through gender-responsive policies and practices.

The WDO aims to seek data behind the possible relationship between women and corruption as well as identify good practices and initiatives from across the OIC to develop evidence-based and targeted policy responses which in turn will boost progress and prosperity and address the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis to recover with integrity and build back a stronger and more equal world.

I. Background and context

A. Global Integrity and Equality mandates

It is generally admitted that corruption is one of the main obstacles to sustainable economic, political and social development worldwide, causing poverty and inequalities. Corruption is an impediment to growth, inhibiting private-sector development and causing a misallocation of resources by reducing the quantity and quality of available public services. It distorts decision-making and prevents the emergence of an open playing field for all competitors.

Corruption hampers economic growth and increases poverty by limiting access to services. Corruption can occur at every stage of the service delivery chain, from policy design and budgetary allocations to procurement, thereby undermining the quantity and quality of public services. The environment enabling corruption and its impact disproportionately affect the world's poor, the majority of whom are women. One example² of the impact of corruption in the health care sector relates to women who, when unable to pay the bribes requested or required, failed to access maternal health care leading to various postnatal complications and deaths. Indeed, the multi-layered subject affects every society and country in the world differently.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), to which most OIC Member States and all WDO Member States are committed, calls for a holistic approach to prevent and combat corruption. UNCAC was adopted as the only legally binding, international instrument against corruption. To date, 187 Member States have ratified or acceded to the Convention and considerable progress has been made towards its implementation. Its Implementation Review Mechanism (IRM) is a unique peer-review process that assists states parties in effectively implementing the Convention in a transparent, efficient, inclusive and impartial way, which facilitates the identification of technical assistance needs in a precise and transparent manner.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women is a fundamental driver for more inclusive and equitable societies. Women's economic empowerment and their participation in the labour market increase social cohesion, promote global well-being, reduce poverty and combat inequalities.

The work on gender equality and the empowerment of women, and mainstreaming women's issues at the international stage rest on a host of international legal instruments, anchored by

² The Time Is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption, UNODC, 2020 (forthcoming at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf).

the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which was instituted in September 1981 and has been ratified by 189 states, including the majority of the Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)³ and all WDO Member States. CEDAW articulates a set of norms that prohibit all forms of discrimination against women in all spheres of life. Allocation of national resources and the development of policies in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women are founded on countries' CEDAW commitments.

The broad and ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁴ adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, provided the political and conceptual framework for gender equality and women's empowerment on one hand and the target to reduce all forms of corruption on the other. Equality between women and men at all levels is a cornerstone of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite the fact that the Agenda has a stand-alone goal for gender equality and the empowerment of women, (SDG) 5:⁵ "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," gender equality and the empowerment of women is a cross-cutting issue for the whole agenda, including target 16.5 in relation to corruption.⁶

To enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of strategies to combat corruption and achieve sustainable development, it is thus essential to include a gender perspective into any preliminary analysis. To do so, it is critical to improve the overall understanding of the complex interrelation between corruption and women. Anti-corruption and gender equality efforts tend to be mutually reinforcing and synergies between the two can strengthen decision-making policies and legal frameworks.⁷ This will in turn enhance women's empowerment and increase their participation in social, economic and other activities.

So far, women's empowerment in relation to corruption and its impact on sustainable growth has

³With the exception of Suriname and Syria (the latter, which is a signatory to UNCAC, but suspended from OIC since 15 August 2012).

⁴ United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015.

⁵Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.

⁶ Target 16.5 states that substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms is one of the targets to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

⁷ See the 2017 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development thematic review of SDG5.

only rarely been envisaged and never in a systematic manner. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publication⁸ “The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption” found out that many of the gender dimensions of corruption were neither well understood nor sufficiently addressed worldwide. It underlined the complexity of the issue and that anti-corruption efforts would be limited in scope and effectiveness without a gender perspective.

B. The OIC Member States’ engagements towards integrity and gender equality

1. The commitment to fighting corruption

The OIC, a forum for cooperation among its 57 Member States in various fields of knowledge, brings their economies together. The OIC Member States, parties to UNCAC, have moved the fight against corruption to the forefront of their political agenda and their determination to address the devastating impact of corruption keeps growing. A recent OIC publication noted that overall, countries do not fare well on global governance rankings.⁹

Already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OIC had stressed¹⁰ the importance for Member States to take measures to adapt their states’ capacity for stability, ensuring livelihoods, economic reintegration, and social support for all population groups. In this new reality, the OIC has called for reflecting on how to benefit from the reorientation of supply chains and linking trade and investment policies to integrity. In this context comes the opportunity to also consider the social and differentiated impact of corruption as will be explained in the next section.

2. OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW)

Attaining equality between women and men and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women is an established human right present in several international covenants and resolutions to which OIC Member States are parties. Women’s issues were already incorporated into the OIC political agenda with the Ten-Year Programme of Action¹¹ (2005). The Action Programme

⁸ The Time Is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption, UNODC, 2020 (forthcoming at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf).

⁹ The STATE OF YOUTH IN OIC MEMBER STATES 2017; 2017 The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIIC).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For more information see the OIC Ten- year plan (2005) at: <https://www1.oic-oci.org/ex-summit/english/10-years-plan.htm>

2025,¹² includes crucial provisions aimed at promoting and protecting women's rights in addition to international human rights standards. The "OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women" (OPAAW)¹³ was first adopted in 2008 to reduce inequalities and improve the status of women in the OIC Member States; the 2016 update,¹⁴ seeks to reduce inequalities and improve the status of women in the OIC Member States as well as promote the role of women in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping and in maintaining peace and security.

The OPAAW grounds women's rights on Islam values and teachings and qualifies Member States adherence to the CEDAW provisions to be "in line with Islamic values of justice and equality." It endorses the development of women based on social justice, distinctive consideration of women, female education, health and promoting economic activities. It calls for women to be respected, developed, empowered and considered as full active participants in social, political, cultural and economic domains. The OPAAW document calls to reduce inequalities and improve the status of women,¹⁵ including by:

- ensuring political, economic, social and cultural representation of women at all levels of decision-making;
- providing equal opportunity for all women and girls to have access to quality education at all levels of vocational and skills training, as well as literacy programmes;
- improving women's and girl's access to quality healthcare and services, clean water and sanitation as well as adequate and healthy nutrition;
- enhancing women's access to equal economic opportunity in the public and private sector; and,
- improving and ensuring women's social needs, safety and well-being.

¹² The OIC Programme of Action (2025), OIC, 2016 (forthcoming at: <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=16&refID=5>).

¹³ OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, OIC, 2008 (forthcoming at: <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=3025&refID=1112>).

¹⁴ OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, OIC, 2016 (forthcoming at: https://oic-iphrc.org/en/data/docs/legal_instruments/OIC_HRRIT/38864.pdf).

¹⁵ Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (2019), HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS AND INSTITUTIONS IN OIC MEMBER STATES.

3. The Women Development Organization (WDO)¹⁶

The OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers adopted the Statute¹⁷ of the Women Development Organization (WDO) in 2010. The First Ordinary Session of the Ministerial Council of WDO that was held in October 2020, adopted the Organization's Rules of Procedure and Methods of Work, its founding organizational structure, and other documents necessary to start the Organization's work. The Deputy Executive Director of the Organization was also appointed. The First Extraordinary Session of the Ministerial Council was held from 11th till 24th March 2021 and adopted the internal financial and administrative regulations of WDO. Finally, the Second Extraordinary Session of the Ministerial Council was hosted by Egypt from 5th to 7th July 2021 during which the integrated budget of the Organization was adopted.

The newly established WDO will be the center of the gender equality architecture of the OIC and has a quadruple mandate that encompasses normative support and policy work, advocacy and outreach, coordination, and operational activities. These four components are complimentary to one another and seek to jointly advance gender equality and women's empowerment, and promote, protect and fulfill the human rights for women and girls within WDO Member States, as well as engage in cross-regional and global exchanges around the human rights of women and girls in WDO countries. "Women and the fight against corruption" is one of the four pillars of WDO's First Programmatic Cycle and is a priority area in line with the OPAAW as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as an unexpected game-changer at the beginning of 2020, and GDP growth is expected to contract across the world. The global trading system had encouraged firms to set up global production networks, placing different stages of manufacturing in different countries. But the combination of trade-policy shocks and the containment measures have had

¹⁶ Until September 2021, WDO Member States are: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Djibouti, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea (Conakry), Kuwait, Maldives, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Palestine, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

¹⁷ Statute of the OIC Women Development Organization, OIC, 2009 (forthcoming at: https://oic-iphrc.org/en/data/docs/legal_instruments/OIC_HRRIT/385106.pdf).

unexpected economic and social implications for people and businesses across sectors and generated great uncertainties on the future of global value chains.

Budget deficits are projected to be significantly larger in 2020-21 than in 2019 and will increase the public debt as governments have allocated additional resources in response to the COVID-19 crisis to the healthcare sector and certain economic sectors as well as most vulnerable households.

Falling wages, rising unemployment and a sharp drop in remittances have impacted growth and distribution. The sharp dichotomy between a formal, government guaranteed employment and the rather large fraction of the population working in the precarious, informal economy have impacted the population as informal workers were not fully benefiting from state support schemes put in place during this crisis. The formal private employment has been limited.

The pandemic has increased the risks of misappropriation of funds, including in relation to relief and stimulus funds which may be hijacked due to instance to lack of information about proper recipients, inefficiency, involuntary or deliberate administrative errors and corruption. In the urgency, countries had to facilitate procurement of critical sanitary goods to supply fast-evolving needs and critical infrastructures, such as essential supplies and healthcare facilities. Risks are serious due to countries' monopolistic economic structures that can lead to the diversion of relief and stimulus funds, the widespread informality which renders controls difficult and a culture of allegedly widespread corruption.¹⁸

¹⁸ OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19): COVID-19 crisis response in MENA countries; Updated 06 November 2020.

II. How corruption impacts women – a snapshot

As caregivers, women are disproportionately targeted by corrupt officials, usually men, across regions in services related to health, education, water, electricity. But since women's income is generally lower than that of men, they have less money to spend on bribes. This is notably due to the fact that informal employment is more common among women than men. Women make up a disproportionate percentage of workers in the informal sector. The proportion varies in different parts of the world, from over 80 per cent of women in non-agricultural jobs in informal employment in some parts to 54 per cent in others.¹⁹

Reduced resources make women more vulnerable to the consequences of rejecting requests for bribes, such as immediate loss of access to health, education, water, social acceptance, or employment. However, women are not immune to corrupt behaviour, but may simply have less access to the opportunities to engage in acts of corruption.

In order to have a better understanding of the interrelation between women and fighting corruption, the next section provides some preliminary illustrations of the gender aspect of corruption in health, education and basic services. These illustrations, which certainly are not exhaustive, will be complemented with some initial suggestions on the way to enhancing sector strategies in WDO Member States to combat gendered corruption aspects.

A. Women's exposure to corruption in the health sector

Health is a crucial factor that directly affects the well-being of individuals, families and societies at large. Healthy people are more productive, live longer and contribute to a higher extent to economic progress and development. Health is at the intersection of different fields of research. The Sustainable Development Goal 3 "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" is specifically dealing with this sector²⁰ in addition to SDG 5 dealing with gender equality and women's empowerment and SDG 16 in relation to the fight against corruption and bribery.

¹⁹ UN Women, Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016, p. 71.

²⁰ See more information about the Sustainable Development Goal 3 at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg>.

According to a study²¹ by the OECD on the consequences of corruption across all sectors, the health sector is seen to be particularly exposed to the risk of corruption due to the following factors:

- asymmetry of information between suppliers, providers and patients;
- relatively inflexible demand in health care and products; and
- complexity of health systems, with the involvement of many public and private actors.

Public health emergencies tend to reveal entrenched weaknesses in governance as well as public health systems with many countries inadequately prepared to mobilize effective responses to crises. Regional emergencies such as tsunamis in Asia and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, as well as the global COVID-19 pandemic, have also highlighted how opportunities for corruption undermine the recovery processes. As with other highly contagious diseases, COVID-19 exposes frontline health personnel to great risk, creating circumstances conducive to corruption: desperate health care workers focusing on their own survival and ability to work could be more susceptible to bribery and other forms of corruption to pay for vital protective equipment as seen in previous public health emergencies.²²

It is usually considered that higher controls of corruption can contribute to improved health performance, particularly in countries with high levels of corruption and an ineffective bureaucracy. Control systems need to build on transparent and effective accountability mechanisms which contribute to an improved selection of health resources and to better health outcomes. Yet, such controls should be put in place with due regard to the specificities of the domestic sector organization, demography and stakeholders' needs, and the associated specific corruption risks. In the absence of sex-disaggregated employment data, women's exposure to, or involvement in, corruption in the health sector is difficult to assess.

²¹ OECD (June 2018) Morocco, Strengthening Integrity in the Energy, Transportation and Health Sectors.

²² The Time Is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption, UNODC, 2020 (forthcoming at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, stress on the health system has increased in an unprecedented manner, and with that the opportunities for corruption.²³ According to the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief²⁴ on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women, the reallocation of resources and priorities of the healthcare system to respond to the COVID-19 crisis has a potentially adverse impact on health issues pertinent to women as they potentially lose funding and prioritization. In previous health crises, the impact of corruption in the healthcare sector has had a detrimental impact on women. As resources are channelled towards facing the crisis, 'normal' services were in short supply leaving those who cannot afford to pay bribes fail to access healthcare – in some cases leading to particularly precarious maternal health problems, such as postnatal complications and even death.²⁵

There are many unknowns of how corruption exactly impacts the different segments of the population. Nevertheless, pending more in-depth and specific analysis, UN Women reports that women in need of family planning services have experienced major difficulty accessing them since the pandemic began. In the context of the current crisis, corruption in healthcare services can further restrict the access or quality of services to women who due to their reproductive healthcare needs and their role in the family, they tend to be more frequent users of health services²⁶ than men. While corruption in the health sector has notably exacerbated the plight of women and infant mortality, good governance and corruption control have been seen to underpin successes in addressing high maternal and child mortality rates.²⁷

²³ For more information, see *Corruption and COVID-19: Challenges in crisis response and recovery*, UNODC, 2021 (forthcoming at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/covid-19-policy-documents.html>).

²⁴ Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women, UN, 2020 (forthcoming at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>).

²⁵ *The Time Is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption*, UNODC, 2020 (forthcoming at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf).

²⁶ For more information, see *Corruption and COVID-19: Challenges in crisis response and recovery*, UNODC, 2021 (forthcoming at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/covid-19-policy-documents.html>).

²⁷ For more information see the PMNCH Press Release "Success Factors: Ten countries spotlighted for reducing mortality rates" at: https://www.who.int/pmnch/about/governance/partnersforum/success_factors/en/index1.html; *Fighting corruption in the Health Sector: Methods, Tools and Good Practices*, UNDP, 2011 (forthcoming at: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/IP/Anticorruption%20Methods%20and%20Tools%20in%20Health%20Lo%20Res%20final.pdf>).

B. How corruption impacts women and girls in the education sector

Education is considered a key factor of development, and the groundwork on which much of economic and social well-being is built. It is the key to increasing economic efficiency and social consistency and helps to raise the poor from poverty. A higher level of the populations' education is usually associated with an increase of growth and productivity as well as higher well-being of the population. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is the education goal; it aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.²⁸ Its focus is on girls and boys alike and it is complemented by SDG 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Governance and accountable governance targets are set by SDG 16 in relation to the fight against corruption and justice.

Types of corruption in elementary-secondary education can be wide and range from academic cheating to bribery and nepotism in teaching appointments to bid-rigging in the procurement of textbooks and supplies (see section on budget processes below). Transparency International reported that 41% of the people globally thought that the education sector in their countries is corrupt or extremely corrupt.²⁹ No distinction was then being made relating to the impact on girls and boys or women and men. There is however a general consensus that corruption has long term consequences on women's education outcomes, and that it impacts their psychological and physical health as well as gender equity, ultimately affecting long term social and economic progress.³⁰

Women and girls' vulnerability to corruption involves three roles in education: students, teachers, and parents.³¹ Mothers often take care of any issues concerning their children's schools, and maybe more exposed to extortion of bribes for school admission, etc.

²⁸ See more information about the Sustainable Development Goal 3 at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

²⁹ Global Corruption Barometer 2013, Transparency International, 2013 (forthcoming at: http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013/in_detail/).

³⁰ U4 (2009) Gender, Corruption and Education <https://www.u4.no/publications/gender-corruption-and-education.pdf>

³¹ Frédéric Boehm, Erika Sierra, "The gendered impact of corruption », Chr. Michelsen Institute (U4 Brief 2015: 9).

Regarding students faced with bribery demands, resource-scarce households typically spend the available money for male children's scholastic opportunities. Unfortunately, this often means that girls are forced to drop out for lack of resources. When the teaching profession is dominated by women in primary education, women may be vulnerable during selection processes and during the COVID-19 pandemic, cases were reported of women paying bribes to avoid being made redundant.³²

C. The impact of corruption in the delivery of basic services

Women and girls are directly affected by lack of access to public utilities, such as energy or safe water, as they are frequently charged with obtaining these goods for the family or the household. Besides losing precious time needed for productive purposes, they may be confronted with the need to pay bribes as has been documented in various studies. In certain circumstances, they have to refer to informal water and energy networks which may expose them to the same corruption constraints.

It has also been reported that distribution lists for water or energy usually contain only the names of male heads of households, and exclude families headed by women. This type of discrimination makes women heads of households' easier targets for different forms of corruption.

In a recent country analysis undertaken by UNODC,³³ however, married men appeared to be disproportionately targeted for bribes than married women by public utility officers. This could indicate that some of the administrative transactions carried out by married men are done so on behalf of the family, which highlights a national perspective contrary to what is seen in many other parts of the world where women are responsible for such household-related tasks. This is an important example to show how corruption impacts men and women differently and how that impact varies from one country to another or even differs from one part of a country to another.

³² From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19, UN Women, September 2020 and Women, the young and low-paid workers are bearing the biggest health and economic risks from the coronavirus crisis, Resolution Foundation, April 2020.

³³ Gender and Corruption in Nigeria, UNODC, 2020 (forthcoming at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/Gender_Corruption_Dec2020.pdf).

D. Not all bribery involves money

The UNODC flagship study titled “State of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption: Criminalization, Law Enforcement and International Cooperation”³⁴ highlights that in UNCAC, the term and concept of undue advantage is intended “to apply as broadly as possible and also to cover instances where intangible items or non-pecuniary benefits (such as honorary positions and titles, preferential treatment or sexual favours) are offered, insofar as they create or may create a sense of obligation on the side of the recipient towards the giver.”³⁵

A non-monetary bribe is reported in many cases and many different forms. As women make up a larger part of the world’s poor,³⁶ they may give away relatively larger proportions of their income as they have to pay financial bribes to access state services. This is reinforcing the vicious cycle of poverty. However, corrupt officials may also ask for an alternative to bribes and it is not uncommon to hear of offerings such as food or drink when money for bribes runs short.

There is also evidence that exploitation of the human body, sexually or otherwise, can be used as a currency in corruption. Reports of the request for sexual favours instead of non-monetary bribes are difficult to study as there is very little data available. The abuse of power occurs when power disparities between the payer and requester of the bribe are large, and when the bribe-payer does not have any other means of payment. For the latter reason, many anecdotally reported cases of sexual favours as a corruption currency are from higher education – one report alleged that the situation was so widespread that school children nicknamed it “sexually transmitted grades”.³⁷ Nevertheless, any full-fledged analysis of the dynamics surrounding such instances, their patterns and frequency, which sectors it may be more prevalent or who is affected and at risk – all remain relatively illusive and hard to assess.

³⁴ The second edition of the study was launched during the 7th session of the Conference of the States Parties in Vienna, Austria, 6–10 November 2017, and is based on the findings and results emanating from the first cycle reviews of the implementation of the Convention by 156 States parties (2010–2015).

³⁵ Ibid. p. 19.

³⁶ For more information, refer to UNODC Corruption and gender: Women and men affected differently by corruption, but no evidence women or men are less corruptible, December 2019.

³⁷ Losh, J. (2018), “Children in Civil War Denounce Teachers Who Swap Marks for Sex”, Pulitzer Center, 16 March 2018.

III. Reflections on how to address corruption in the public sector

A. Addressing corruption through diversity and inclusion

A transparent and merit-based recruitment and promotion system in the public and private sector is part of the preventive measures prescribed in article 7 of UNCAC. By enhancing diversity and inclusiveness in workplaces may help mitigate corrupt behaviour. Indeed, “herd behaviour,” a notion that refers to the tendency of people to follow what others are doing, has been found to contribute to workplace corruption.³⁸ As senior positions in public administrations being pre-dominantly held by men in many countries, such group behaviour is also frequently referred to as the “old boys’ networks.” By their virtue of being dominated by one sex, they end up excluding the other – almost regardless of whether it is intentional or not. Hence, to help safeguard against this gendered dimension of corruption, a more diverse and inclusive environment remains the key focus.³⁹

Provisions and mechanisms to ensure women and men with equal qualifications have equal chances to access a job could involve transparency in the job descriptions, the establishment of merit-based selection and appointment procedures, backed by a regular review and reporting mechanism. For higher level positions, it may imply that nominations would only be possible if an application by a woman is also submitted. Additionally, it may be necessary to notify women to the fact that barriers to employment are brought down and encourage them to apply to announced jobs.

Many countries worldwide seek to enhance equality in politics and public life through various measures – e.g. reserved seats quota, legal candidate quota, and political parties’ voluntarily instituted quotas.⁴⁰ Yet, within patriarchal structures, ‘wasta’⁴¹ and corruption need to be adequately addressed to avoid that such actions continue to affect large parts of society and the country’s political institutions. Some women running for office, in particular those that limited experience, are vulnerable to manipulations.

³⁸DeGrassi,S.W. et al (2012), “Ethical Decision-Making: Group Diversity Holds the Key,” *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics* vol. 9(6), http://www.na-businesspress.com/JLAE/DeGrassiSW_Web9_6_.pdf

³⁹Douglas Kelly, *Diversity May Reduce Corruption Culture*, June 2017.

⁴⁰Yet, quotas may not always provide the answer. In some countries, quotas have been used to keep levels of women below a threshold. In other countries, in particular in a political context, quotas have allowed political parties to enlist spouses and family who are known not to break the party line or put in question the status quo.

⁴¹ An Arabic word commonly used to reference to a form of nepotism or favoritism.

Women rarely hold senior management positions in the private sector, and they are poorly represented in companies' boards of directors, although research indicates that companies with women on their boards and in senior decision-making roles also do better financially.

1. Women's empowerment and participation in decision-making processes

Looking at the differentiated impact of corruption also calls for examining women's inclusion into the labour market and decision-making processes as increased diversity and inclusion may result in curbing corruption. Gender mainstreaming⁴² is the most common measure globally accepted and adopted to ensure that a gender perspective becomes an integral part of the design, implementation and monitoring of any policy, programme and institution. This is done by anticipating the possible differential impacts of policy actions on women and men at the design stage in order to include policy actions that maximize opportunities for all by decreasing gender disparities.

Particular attention may have to be given to decision-making processes and whether women's concerns are adequately considered. Increasing women's political and economic participation is not only an important goal; it also improves diversity and supports inclusive work cultures. The absence of women in key control positions and in networks and sectors could be assessed as an indicator of lack of diversity and a proxy for a higher corruption risk as the like-minded are recruited and working together.

Furthermore, in relation to investment decisions such as public procurement or public budgeting, diversity in processes management and the development of gender-sensitive indicators would be necessary to address the needs of all.

It needs to be underlined that it is unrealistic to rely on women to be the ultimate solution where corruption is systemic or where only very few women attain positions of influence. However, the concrete implications are that policies that increase women's roles in organizations and public decision-making simultaneously address other determinants of good governance (e.g., transparency, political accountability, separation of powers or rule of law), and therefore might reduce corruption.

⁴² Gender mainstreaming relates to the process of assessing the implications for both women and men of any planned action.

2. Increased women's economic and political participation

Women's exposure to corruption is multi-layered. In formal employment, women may be at a disadvantage at the initial examination process; if not formally, they may be in the effective recruitment process where network considerations may come into play. As women are less involved in networks, they may effectively be hired to a much lesser extent. When positions, including in public administrations are filled through "wasta", the appointment, selection or promotion is based on personal connections to find a job, obtain services or to resolve matters that cannot be done on one's own. It allows to circumvent bureaucracy, bypass the system and is a vehicle of corruption.

However, as noted in multiple reports, women make up a disproportionate percentage of workers in the informal sector overall, and more generally so in low- and lower-middle-income countries.⁴³ Women's efforts to formalize and grow their businesses, and thus to create jobs and enhance productivity, is reported being hampered by burdensome procedures (sometimes they have to take more steps than men) which may expose them to lengthy processes and additional payment requests in the form of bribes in exchange for licenses and permits. Corruption in the business regulation sector has also been reported to disproportionately affect women entrepreneurs by distorting access to credit. Often, women seeking information by public administrations do not have the means to travel to the places to obtain information and they may not know where (which institution) to obtain the information from. This may expose them to corruption or harassment, making it a reason for women to stay in the informal sector, which then carries a higher risk of threats from officials to shut down businesses, accompanied by demands for bribes.

Worldwide, countries are working to make their legal frameworks more gender-neutral and equal on the constitutional level, which in principle affects other laws. Putting in place appropriate legislation and institutional arrangements, including pertaining to corruption, can further women's participation in the formal economy. Ensuring the presence of women in male dominated administrations and oversight bodies (see also section on the judicial system below)

⁴³ OECD/ILO (2019) TACKLING VULNERABILITY IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY;
<https://www.oecd.org/fr/publications/tackling-vulnerability-in-the-informal-economy-939b7bcd-en.htm>

as well as other relevant bodies (e.g. public or private bodies, commercial chambers, commissions or the high court) could also be a way to ease women's access to services without fearing corruption.

B. Reconsidering the processes for public spending: gender-responsive budgeting and public procurement

1. What does gender-responsive budgeting look like?

The budget process concerns the allocation of public resources to deliver the government's policy goals. Budgets that appear neutral on the surface may in fact increase gender inequalities. De facto taxation and public spending have different outcomes for men and women - perpetuating gender inequalities.

Corruption has a significant negative impact on the levels of tax revenue collected in a country. Lower tax revenues, in turn, impact the delivery of public services which may have different outcomes for women as we have seen. To ensure sound budgeting, particular attention needs to be given to transparency and integrity both on the collection of taxes and the expenses of budgets - when some take advantage of undue benefits, it is the community that suffers the loss.

In many countries, the budgeting process and the subsequent spending tends to result in women being disadvantaged as they are underrepresented in such governance and management institutions. The development of data related to gender budgeting and the capacity to analyse budgets from a gender perspective can immediately highlight gaps in gender equality and areas for further improvement, in line with the broader gender equality strategies.

In one country, the government gradually introduced a gender dimension into ministerial department budgets. Moreover, gender-budgeting capacity was then decentralized progressively, but resulting in several ministerial departments creating their own programmes to incorporate gender into budgeting processes at the local level.

Gender-responsive budgeting is an important tool for promoting a more equitable distribution of resources and contributing equal opportunities between women and men. It promotes women's participation in public-sector expenditure analysis with a view towards assessing the impacts of

public spending decisions that may impact women disproportionately. Gender-responsive budget monitoring puts women in a stronger position to challenge corruption and acts as a disincentive to public officials who wish to engage in it, by challenging the status quo and business as usual. Gender-responsive budgeting is supportive of demand- and supply-side governance reform efforts, to enforce stronger oversight of government funds. This has proven very effective when conducted at the community or local government level, where women are best able to identify the specific impacts that local spending decisions have had on their welfare.

2. Widening the scope of public procurement outreach and inclusion

Public procurement refers to the acquisition of goods and services by governments and state-owned enterprises, ranging from major infrastructure projects such as power stations and roads to building public utilities or purchasing medication and school equipment. It represents large fractions of GDP and of overall government expenditures. Public contracts are big business, carrying enormous financial power and competition for government contracts can be fierce, whether at local, national or international level.

Women's participation in procurement project definition, design, selection, and execution is restricted due to their rather low-level employment in public administrations as well as the limited number of women-owned formal companies. It may be important to involve women from the conception stage onwards to adapt public spending to all people's needs, including those of women and girls. It may also be desirable to set requirements favouring gender equality in public contracts and grants. Some authorities include gender equality as a prerequisite in public procurement contracts in order to advance social change and promote equality thus, promoting positive actions.

Some countries seek to bring gender equality considerations into this procedure as a prerequisite in public procurement contracts to advance social change and promote equality. One approach, for instance, is to ask suppliers applying to a tender to demonstrate their compliance with gender equality in the workplace. In one country, this requirement relates to ensuring wage equality for companies of more than 50 employees. In another, companies with more than a hundred staff members must demonstrate with specific indicators their compliance with the country's Workplace Gender Equality Act.

Some countries use public procurement in a strategic manner to support the participation of women-owned businesses in the procurement process by implementing set-aside measures targeted at women-owned businesses. This can range from 5 per cent of the procurement of goods and of services are to be directed to female entrepreneurs, to 40 per cent of government procurement opportunities for companies owned by women, youth, and persons with disabilities. A broader gender assessment requirement is applied by some countries to bring to light the differentiated impacts that procurement projects have on men and women. For instance, gender equality can be assessed ex-ante or a gender-based analysis has to be integrated into the Treasury Board submission for a procurement.⁴⁴

C. Strengthening judicial integrity

Well-functioning legal and justice systems are vital mechanisms for any person to achieve their rights. They can shape society by providing accountability, by stopping the abuse of power and by creating new norms. The courts have been a critical site of accountability for individual women to claim rights and to set legal precedents that have benefitted millions of others.

Accountability and judicial integrity are key components of the criminal justice system. Strong judicial integrity ensures fair and objective adjudication of cases and the correct application of the law. Article 11 of UNCAC emphasizes the crucial role of the judiciary in the fight against corruption and recognises that to play this role effectively, the judiciary must be free from corruption and its members must act with integrity.

Women with poor education or whose economic empowerment is limited, are frequently unaware of their rights. While they have the right to file claims with a court, their access to justice remains hampered. Many women will also elude claiming their rights due to legal formalities that are unfavourable to women or the cost of going to court. The need to visit offices that are far away can also be dissuasive for women living in remote areas. Social repercussions such as fear of retaliation, scandal, social exclusion and stigma, distrust of individuals or entities

⁴⁴ OECD (2019) *Fast Forward to Gender Equality, Mainstreaming, implementation and Leadership* Nicola Ehlermann and Serena Romano, *Women Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship: Insights of Policy Reforms from International Experience*, ECES, June 2020.

handling reports, the perception that nothing will be done, and the apprehension of corruption will also limit women's actions.

Effective whistle-blower reporting and protection mechanisms must be gender-sensitive and inclusive to ensure an environment that is safe and secure for all, including women, to report corruption while using a victim-centred approach. This must be accompanied by efforts to ensure that the public knows how to access them and those receiving and investigating claims receive appropriate training.

While research in some countries shows that the overall gender ratio for professional judges reveals gender parity, women are still relatively underrepresented in high-level courts in many countries.⁴⁵ It is, therefore, all the more important to enhance the understanding and responsiveness of all judges to women's concerns. Training should be provided regularly to the educational, practical and cultural sensitivities women face in approaching the judiciary.⁴⁶ In addition, it is key that women have a better understanding of their rights through enhanced outreach, awareness-raising and training the society at large and through adapted legal literacy programmes and legal assistance to women.

⁴⁵ OECD (2019) *Fast Forward to Gender Equality, Mainstreaming, implementation and Leadership* ; Chapter 5 and OECD *Women in the Judiciary: working towards a legal system reflective of society* at <https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/women-in-the-judiciary-working-towards-a-legal-system-reflective-of-society.htm>

⁴⁶ CEDAW (2010a), *General Recommendation on Women's Access to Justice*.

IV. The way forward – programmatic ideas to tackle corruption

A. Where to start?

Overall, it is essential to engage in the analysis of the gender characteristics of each country, as no two countries have the same social and cultural norms – which may even vary within one country. In the same vein, each country has its unique gender narrative. This is why, when creating evidence-based policies to address the differentiated impact of corruption on men and women, quantitative data must be complemented with qualitative data, capturing the specific context in which the policy will be implemented in order to achieve the impact that is intended.

Evidence on the direct and indirect impacts of corruption on women and men needs to be further researched in a more systematic manner both for the WDO as a group, as well as at the individual country level. This may involve examining the different acts of corruption and their respective impact on women's empowerment. It may also involve launching a wider consultative process through the WDO, aimed at identifying linkages and support adequate policy responses for the region.

With more exhaustive data, including the identification of existing good practices and initiatives from across the WDO, a more comprehensive approach for evidence-based and targeted policy responses will be possible. Therefore, by way of the attached questionnaire (see Annex 1), the WDO will seek to identify further evidence and understanding of the causal mechanisms behind the possible relationship between gender and corruption.

B. Proposed programmatic intervention ideas: A toolbox of gender responses to address corruption

Against the above background, below are examples of pragmatic interventions centred on gender mainstreamed anti-corruption programmes for Member States' consideration. These can be implemented as stand-alone initiatives and can naturally be adapted to any national context and requirement.

1. Institutional reform and building integrity

- a) Broaden the focus from anti-corruption and mere compliance to placing an emphasis on gender equality to boost institutional reform by enhancing integrity.
- b) Gender-responsive interventions that may be considered could include: anonymous recruitment processes can be encouraged which will level the playing field and remove gender bias from public service recruitment; gender equality assessments within relevant national anti-corruption institutions with a view to providing recommendations and charting a plan of action may be envisaged.
- c) Gender-responsive budgeting maybe an important way of ensuring a more inclusive and targeted decision process as assessing the impact of government expenditures on women and men can help improve efficiency by ensuring it benefits those who need it most.
- d) Improving monitoring, it is also easier to know when government services reach as well as tracking implementation and reducing corruption.
- e) Enhancing transparency and accountability in an institution can support the accessing to information and helps address discrimination, inefficiency and corruption.

By improving monitoring, it is also easier to know when government services reach as well as tracking implementation and reduce waste and opportunities for corruption. Furthermore, enhancing transparency and accountability in an institution can support access to information while also addressing discrimination and inefficiency.

2. Gender-sensitive public procurement policies and practices

- a) Gender-sensitive public procurement processes can promote gender equality. An example of a good practice could be that companies bidding in a procurement process and that meet a certain threshold (ex. Number of employees, amount of revenue) are required to have a gender equality plan in place. In some countries, a pre-determined percentage of the public procurement is reserved for women-owned businesses.
- b) Transparency and accountability requirements can play a key role in reducing the risk of corruption.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ For more information, please see chapter 4.2 of *The Time is Now – Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption*.

3. Gender-sensitive whistle-blower reporting and protection mechanisms

- a) Effective whistle-blower reporting and protection mechanisms must be gender-sensitive and inclusive in order to ensure an environment that is safe and secure for all, including women, to report corruption while using a victim-centred approach.
- b) Awareness-raising campaigns to educate the public on how to access and use whistle-blower reporting mechanisms are key to fostering trust in government institutions and their responses to reported corruption.
- c) Training for those receiving and investigating claims is an important component to building an effective gender-sensitive anti-corruption pragmatic intervention.
- d) Working with other programmes can be a key entry point to carry out anti-corruption work in this area, such as learning from existing gender-based violence projects to adopt gender-responsive mechanisms for the reporting of corruption. Other innovative approaches include implementing a proxy reporting system for whistle-blowers to prevent the possibility of the identity of a reporting person being disclosed. In one case, that resulted in a group of counselling lawyers providing legal advice and subsequently filing the proxy report on behalf of the whistle-blower at their request. As the group was already funded, it was also free of charge.

4. Education is the key

- a) Anti-corruption education programmes are needed that acknowledge that women are not a homogenous group; due to varying socio-economic and political factors, women are impacted by corruption in diverse ways.
- b) All forms of education - be it formal schooling or a larger public education and awareness campaigns - remain a master key to unlock solutions that can advance both the fight against corruption, gender equality, and women's advancement and empowerment.
- c) Partnerships within the education sector are important to develop innovative tools to tackle corruption. A good practice is the UNODC's Education for Justice (E4J) initiative, developed with academics as a series of multi-disciplinary and easily adaptable to different local and cultural contexts peer-reviewed university modules and other tools

to assist in teaching on some of today's most crucial threats, including corruption.⁴⁸ These Anti-Corruption University Modules, include a gender and corruption module whose focus areas include the impacts of corruption on women and the relationship between gender mainstreaming and corruption mitigation in theory and practice.⁴⁹

5. Strengthening judicial integrity - equality before the law

- a) Strengthening the judicial integrity and the courts by addressing unconscious and conscious gender bias is key to fostering public confidence in state institutions.
- b) Internal knowledge assessments to determine the level of gender bias in the judiciary can serve as a basis for establishing tools to enhance judicial integrity by ensuring decision-making to help address and prevent arguments based on stereotypes and to refute attempts to disregard the right to equality.
- c) Examining the extent to which the targeted countries' frameworks are able to identify gender-related issues in their judiciary systems and how to address them is important. The Global Judicial Integrity Network, supported by UNODC, has launched a paper aiming to examine the ways in which gender-related issues may affect judicial integrity and the adequacy of existing safeguards in promoting appropriate conduct and taking corrective action with respect to inappropriate conduct.⁵⁰ Over half of the OIC's Member States are participating in the Network.

6. Collection of sex-disaggregated data

- a) Data collection tools should go beyond the aim of sex disaggregation to include questions and analysis that explore the intersectional realities lived.
- b) Furthermore, in-depth analysis of the differences in bribe paying between men and women, as well as differences in their attitudes and perceptions, can assist in the improvement of anti-corruption strategies at both the national and local levels.

⁴⁸ For more information, refer to <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/tertiary/index.html>

⁴⁹ For more information, refer to <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/anti-corruption/module-8/index.html>

⁵⁰ The paper on Gender-related Judicial Integrity Issues can be accessed here:
https://www.unodc.org/documents/ji/knowledge_products/Gender_2020.pdf

- c) Background studies on gender and corruption at regional or national levels that could provide primary insight into the various areas where programmatic initiatives could be designed to support countries' efforts to tackle the gender dimensions of corruption.

7. Whole of society approach for an inclusive fight against corruption

- a) Integrating a gender perspective into such a multi-stakeholder approach which involves promoting dialogue and cooperation among relevant stakeholders including women's organizations, civil society, private sector, traditional authorities, faith-based organisations, and governmental institutions is key in preventing and combating corruption.
- b) Mobilizing communities for an inclusive fight against corruption requires the participation of women at all levels. One prominent initiative in South East Asia has focussed on women as active agents for change by mobilizing their communities to fight corruption.⁵¹ Gender-sensitive anti-corruption education includes typical women's social activities, such as social gatherings, school-parent meetings, cooking/knitting courses, and home-based businesses being engaged to spread the anti-corruption discourse.
- c) Outreach to youth groups and youth involvement in the fight against corruption is an important component in a long-term strategy to fight corruption. in a similar vein to education – it is a long-term investment for societal change.
- d) At the local level, some countries have organised so-called social audit clubs where about a dozen citizens are brought together at a time to represent a community. The participants, often identified through a community election, can be trained through workshops on how to monitor the delivery of local public services, and how to tell stories that effectively communicate their findings. Other countries have initiated so-called integrity clubs in their secondary schools.

⁵¹ Ibid.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION



منظمة تنمية المرأة

Women Development Organization

l'Organisation pour le Développement de la Femme



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime