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PRIMERS IN GENDER AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE #5

Corruption, Accountability and Gender: Understanding the Connections

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5. CORRUPTION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND GENDER: UNDERSTANDING THE CONNECTIONS

This primer, jointly commissioned by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now part of UN Women) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is one of five produced by the UNDP Bureau for Development Policy on different aspects of gender and democratic governance (see back cover for additional details). The aim of the series is to support UNIFEM and UNDP staff and partners working on democratic governance issues to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through their programme and policy advice to partner governments and institutions.

Understanding corruption's linkages to gender equality issues and how it impacts women's empowerment is part of the broader process of advancing women's rights and understanding the gender dimensions of democratic governance. This is an ongoing process of reflection and learning by the UNDP Democratic Governance Group in collaboration with the Bureau for Development Policy Gender Team and the Governance, Peace and Security Section of UNIFEM. The work of both UNDP and UNIFEM on gender and democratic governance aims to enhance the effectiveness of women and men, particularly those in public office, in advancing a gender equality agenda.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Primers in Gender and Democratic Governance Series

There are four other primers in the *Primers in Gender and Democratic Governance Series*, produced by the Democratic Governance Group, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP:

- No. 1: "Quick Entry Points to Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Democratic Governance Clusters" (written by Nadia Hijab), 2007.

- No. 2: "Gender Equality and Justice Programming: Equitable Access to Justice for Women" (written by Sarah Douglas), 2007.

- No. 3: "Electoral Financing to Advance Women's Political Participation: A Guide for UNDP Support" (written by Gretchen Luchsinger Sidhu and Ruth Meena), 2007.

- No. 4: "Gender Responsive E-Governance: Exploring the Transformative Potential" (written by Nadia Hijab and Raúl Zambrano), 2008.

These resources are framed by the human rights-based approach to development, which now informs the work of the UN development system (see the "Quick Entry Points" primer for a discussion of the approach and how it relates to gender equality and the work of UNDP). UNDP hopes that these primers will contribute to the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality through democratic governance. Colleagues are encouraged to continue to share their experience and ideas through dgp-net@groups.undp.org, the electronic discussion network serving democratic governance practitioners in UNDP.

Acronyms and Definitions

Corruption

Commonly defined as the "misuse of entrusted power for private gain" (UNDP, 2008a).[1]

Gender

Refers to the social attributes associated with being male or female and the relationships among women, men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization. They are context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender is part of the broader sociocultural context. Other important criteria for sociocultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age (UN/OSAGI Web site).[2]

Gender analysis

Encompasses the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated information. Men and women perform different roles in societies and within institutions. These differing roles lead to women and men having different experiences, knowledge, talents and needs. Gender analysis explores these differences so that policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet the differing needs of men and women. Gender analysis also facilitates the strategic use of distinct knowledge and skills possessed by women and men, which can greatly improve interventions' long-term sustainability (UNESCO, 2003).[3]

Gender-based violence

Defined by the UN General Assembly in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private" (United Nations, 1993).[4]

Gender equality

Refers to women, men, girls and boys having equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of people (UN/OSAGI Web site).

Gender mainstreaming

"The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes,

ACRONYMS	
CRC	Citizen report cards
DGTTF	Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEI	Fundación Mujeres en Igualdad, Argentina
PSLINK	Public Services Labour Independent Confederation, the Philippines
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to achieve gender equality" (UN/ECOSOC, 1997).

Grand corruption or 'high-level' corruption

Occurs at the policy-formulation end of politics. It refers more to the level at which it takes place than to the amount of money involved: grand corruption is at the top levels of the public sphere, where policies and rules are initially formulated. Grand corruption is usually, but not always, synonymous with political corruption (U4 Corruption Glossary).[5]

Petty corruption

The everyday corruption that takes place at the implementation end of politics (where public officials meet the public), often taking the form of bribery in connection with carrying out existing laws, rules and regulations. Also called 'low-level', 'street-level', 'small-scale', or 'bureaucratic corruption' or 'retail corruption', it refers to the corruption that people may experience in their daily encounters with public administration officials or with services such as hospitals, schools, licensing authorities, police or taxing authorities. Petty corruption refers to the modest sums of money typically involved (U4 Corruption Glossary).[6]

Sex

Distinguished from 'gender', sex refers to women's and men's biological and physiological characteristics (World Health Organization Web site).[7]

> Gender is defined as the social attributes associated with being male and female and the relationships among women, men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men.

Introduction

Corruption has been 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 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While all of society suffers from corruption's weakening of the efficiency, effectiveness and probity of the public sector, corruption has well-known differential impacts on social groups—with poor people among its greatest victims. Corruption reduces resources for poverty reduction and development and deprives poor people of advancement opportunities.

However, neither research nor policy has paid sufficient attention to corruption's differing impacts on women and men. Unaddressed questions include: Do women suffer more from corruption than men? Do women face different forms of corruption than men? Do women in public office have different propensities to engage in corruption or face different opportunities? Do the answers to these questions support changes in anti-corruption policy or advocacy strategies?

This primer examines the relationship between gender equality and corruption. Section 1 reviews the limited available evidence on how corruption affects women's access to public services and the resulting impacts on their well-being and social status. The data suggests that 'petty' or 'retail' corruption (when basic public services are sold instead of provided by right) affects poor women in particular and that the currency of corruption is frequently sexualized—women and girls are often asked to pay bribes in the form of sexual favours. Women's disempowerment and their dependence on public service delivery mechanisms for access to essential services (e.g., health, water and

education) increases their vulnerability to the consequences of corruption-related service delivery deficits. In addition, women's limited access to public officials and low income levels diminishes their ability to pay bribes, further restricting their access to basic services. Therefore, corruption disproportionately affects poor women because their low levels of economic and political empowerment constrain their ability to change the status quo or to hold states accountable to deliver services that are their right.

> Building public accountability and governance systems that are responsive to women's needs is important to reducing the gendered impacts of corruption.

Section 2 reflects on women's relative propensity to engage in corrupt activities, as expressed in commonly held assumptions that women in public office are less corrupt then men. This section reviews surveys of women's and men's perceptions of corruption, as well as broader social perceptions of the relative corruptibility of women and men. The section concludes that there is very little to be gained from assuming that women's gender generates higher probity. It argues that building public accountability and governance systems that are responsive to women's needs is more important in reducing the gendered impacts of corruption. Although women politicians and public officials are not necessarily any less corrupt than men, increasing the number of women is likely to improve the gender responsiveness of governments, which is critical in order to alleviate the effects of corruption on women.

Section 3 suggests strategic entry points for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now part of UN Women)[8] staff to address gender issues throughout their anti-corruption and governance work.