Gender and Corruption

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The almost two decade long debate on gender and corruption started in the early 2000s, when the publication of two articles launched an intense discussion about the alleged causality between the two phenomena. "Are women really the 'fairer' sex? Corruption and women in government" by David Dollar, Raymon Fishman, and Roberta Gatti (2001) and "Gender and Corruption" by Anand Swamy, Stephen Knack, Young Lee, and Omar Azfar (2001) both defended the use of women as an anti-corruption tool whose effectiveness would be based on their 'scientifically proven' incorruptibility.

The main idea there was that women, by nature, are a "fairer sex": they are less corrupt than men, and should therefore be employed by governments as a strategy for reducing the corruption in public institutions and private organizations. The assumptions made by these articles lead to policy decisions around the world, where governments increased women's participation in public bodies and created women-only task forces in an effort to decrease corruption (Washington Post, 1999; Swamy et al., 2001).

However, when now we examine again the main arguments defended by Dollar and Swamy in the two papers, it is easy to notice how they were incomplete in multiple ways. By looking at women all around the world as one homogeneous group, mixing concepts of gender and sex, ignoring the political, cultural and social contexts where these women are inserted, and using data from indexes that focus on grand corruption rather than on the everyday corruption that affects women's lives the most (Goetz, 2007), these articles encouraged the adoption of policies that instrumentalise women as an anti corruption instrument instead of recognizing their right to be included in the public space.

In the years following the publication of those articles, the scientific community started to withdraw from this "fairer sex" approach and began to employ a "fairer system" explanation. Sung and other authors that followed him would then identify not a causality but a correlation between women and corruption. Instead of arguing that women are intrinsically less corrupt than men, the fairer system approach defended that governments seeking to increase female participation in politics typically tend to be more democratic and transparent, hence the lower levels of corruption (Sung, 2003). In other words, it is not because there are more women in power that there is less corruption, but because these policies, mindsets and political choices that led to a higher female participation in politics also caused an improvement in transparency and democracy levels that a reduction in corruption levels could be observed.

Although this shift has represented an important step forward for the research on gender and corruption, it continued not to answer the most important question that should be asked on

this matter. There remains very little debate about the effects of corruption on women's lives and on the most effective ways to combat it.

Researchers on gender and corruption presently agree that corruption impacts individuals differently and affects women the most (Transparency International, 2009). The fact that women constitute the majority of the world's poor is one but not the only factor that explains this reality (UNDP, 2009). As women tend to be more reliant on public services, they are also more directly impacted when corruption reduces the amount of the available resources and hampers their access to them (Hossain, Musembi, and Hughes, 2010).

Moreover, as women usually represent the main caretakers of the family, they most often experience the consequences of corruption when demanding access to governmental programs,trying to enrol their kids in school or seeking medical treatments for the children or for

themselves (Nawaz and Chêne, 2009). A WHO study from 2007 indicated that 50% of the women who delivered in maternity hospitals in South India were asked to pay an extra amount to have a doctor present during the proceeding. Another study, showed that 67% of the girls interviewed in Botswana had suffered some kind of sexual harassment by their school teachers and some of them considered dropping out of school because of that (U4 Anti-Corruption Research Network, 2010).

More than a simple ask for a bribe, these girls from Botswana experienced a form of sexual extortion. Sexual extortion, commonly referred to as "sextortion" is defined as the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit of advantage (International Association of Women Judges, 2012). It is a global phenomenon spread around the world, that affects women and girls in all societies but especially in remote areas and low and middle-income countries. Despite its frequency, sextortion is rarely included in definitions of corruption. It is also rarely reported, as women fear the shame and the stigmatisation that often comes with reporting, besides the difficulties of doing so in channels dominated by men (Transparency International, 2016). Despite the abundant data showing corruption's significant impact on women, there is currently insufficient research investigating ways to reduce this gendered impact. The consequence is that researchers and policy makers continue to employ indexes that are completely inadequate for measuring the phenomenon (Provost, 2013). That results in incomplete and unrepresentative measurement and reporting of the problem that leads to inefficient and uninformed public policies.

Although research in this field has greatly evolved during the last sixteen years, plenty is still to be done. Only through understanding better how corruption affects poor women around the world will it be possible to design more appropriate measuring tools, capable of correctly measuring corruption's occurrence, to adopt more suited legislation, that include the forms of corruption most harmful to women and to implement better tailored public policies.

It is only if policy makers have access to reliable data on the effects of corruption on women in poverty will they be able to develop adequate strategies to address the problem. Improved corruption indices that are inclusive, gender-sensitive and aware of the social, economic and

cultural contexts of the regions they report on are necessary. This will not only encourage more research on the topic but also lead to the formulation of better adapted public policies.

In order for indexes to survey less "traditional" forms of corruption such as petty corruption and sextortion, it is important to have these concepts clearly defined by law. It is therefore necessary to have domestic legislation as well as international anti-corruption agreements that take into consideration the differentiated impact corruption has on women. Anti-corruption legislation must define petty corruption and sextortion as forms of corruption and as serious criminal offenses, and must include provisions specifically addressing corruption in the health and educational system, as these are the areas where women are most often denied access to public services due to corruption (Chêne, 2009).

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