

GENDER AND CORRUPTION SYMPOSIUM

12 - 14 June 2024 Venue: Stellenbosch Business School,
Bellville Park Campus, Carl Cronje Drive, Bellville

CONCEPT NOTE

SDG Goal 5 aims to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls. Additionally, it calls for reforms to grant women equal economic rights, including land ownership, financial resources, the use of technology to empower women and urges the adoption of effective laws promoting gender equality. At regional level, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development seeks to promote women empowerment through gender-responsive policy, legislation and programmes. SADC Protocol and SDG Goal 5 are threatened by specific risks which among others include geopolitical conflicts, uncertainties surrounding trade and global supply chains, large-scale climate events, and the disruptive effects of emerging technologies. Many of these risks are expected to disproportionately affect women, especially those in vulnerable situations. One critical aspect often overlooked is the gender dimensions of corruption and anti-corruption initiatives. It is therefore imperative to have gender-sensitive approaches to anti-corruption. Corruption disproportionately affects women, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering their full participation in social, economic, and political spheres.

Social norms often play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards corruption and the participation of individuals within corrupt practices (Köbis, Iragorri-Carter & Starke, 2018). Gender stereotypes may perpetuate corruption by reinforcing unequal power dynamics where gender roles assign men as decision-makers, while women face barriers to accessing decision-making positions (Kubbe & Merkle, 2022). This imbalance of power can create opportunities for corruption to thrive, as those in positions of authority and leadership may exploit their power for personal gain without fear of accountability. Moreover, social norms surrounding masculinity and femininity can also influence perceptions of corruption. For example, societal expectations of men as assertive and dominant may lead to the normalisation of aggressive and unethical behaviours in pursuit of success, including engaging in corrupt practices (Debski, Jetter, Möhle & Stadelmann, 2018).

Corruption has a profound impact on women, particularly in entrepreneurship and access to essential services. In developing economies, women entrepreneurs face significant obstacles exacerbated by corrupt practices deeply entrenched within regulatory systems and institutional frameworks. These obstacles range from bribery and nepotism to favouritism, hindering women's efforts to establish or expand their ventures. The challenges become even more daunting when attempting to access crucial resources such as permits, licenses, and financing. Women often find themselves subjected to discriminatory practices in exchange for basic services or business opportunities, further marginalising them within competitive markets.

Corruption in government leads to inadequate service delivery, disproportionately affecting women who heavily rely on these services for healthcare, education, and other necessities. This vicious cycle of corruption forces women to either pay bribes or endure inefficient and unreliable services, exacerbating their marginalisation within society. Women's limited financial resources exacerbate the impact of corruption, as they struggle

to afford bribes demanded by corrupt officials to access essential services like clean water. Women are then forced into difficult choices between meeting basic needs and fulfilling other essential obligations for their families, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and inequality. In explaining the dynamics of gender and corruption, numerous studies have often resorted to conventional stereotypes associated with women (Bjarnegård, 2013; Watson & Moreland, 2014; Jackson, 2020). These studies posit that women are perceived as less inclined to engage in corrupt activities for several reasons, including considerations of ethical standards and moral principles, risk aversion tendencies, and specific personal traits.

Some studies have consistently highlighted a robust link between the representation of women in elected offices and decreased levels of corruption (Bauhr et al., 2019; Dollar et al., 2001; Esarey & Chirillo, 2013; Esarey & Schwindt-Bayer, 2019; Watson & Moreland, 2014). A study by Esarey & Chirillo (2013) specifically concluded that an increase in women's participation in government is instrumental in reducing corruption. Studies indicate that corruption tends to be less severe when a higher percentage of parliamentary or legislative seats and senior government bureaucratic positions are held by women.

This Symposium is timely, topical and contemporary and aligns with two key sustainable development goals namely, gender equality and the fight against corruption. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and core pillar in building a prosperous and sustainable world. In addition, corruption is viewed as the central obstacle and underpins the sustainable development efforts to achieve Agenda 2063 – the Africa we Want! Both gender equality and corruption are cross-cutting focus areas, we all have a role to play to promote the quality of life of women and girls and make robust advancements towards a corrupt free society.

The Symposium brings together institutions, including development partners, experts, policymakers, public servants, practitioners, academia, anti-corruption agencies, legal practitioners, researchers, human rights advocates, scholars and students to meaningfully engage on a wide range of themes pertaining to gender and corruption. There will be a critique of the nexus of corruption with gender realities and poverty, gender-based violence, woman facing ethical dilemmas, the promotion of anti-corruption strategies such as whistleblowing, the need for a values based society (based on trust, ethics, integrity, honesty, accountability, transparency and responsibility), the role of stakeholders as well as the youth, disabled, NGOs and civil society organisations, and specific forms and typologies of corruption relating to women such as sextortion. The legal dimensions and reforms, the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies to address corruption from a gendered lens as well as the courage to challenge corruption will be explored. There will be opportunity to interact, share knowledge, best practices and lessons learnt and the time to address gender perspectives and reflections of corruption cannot be ignored. The time to act is now!

The aspirational thematic thread of “Bold, Beautiful and Brave” imbues the ideals of the Symposium!