



Gender-transformative, effective, and with integrity: Overcoming corruption and gender inequality together!

Background: How corruption and gender inequality are connected

Corruption operates along social hierarchies, informal power relations, and discriminatory gender norms. Particularly toxic are social norms that simultaneously reinforce gender inequality and corruption, for instance, when cultures of loyalty reward silence about abuse of power. To date, these dynamics have generally not been sufficiently taken into account in anti-corruption strategies. In addition, research gaps exist, especially regarding informal practices, normative risks, and intersectional forms of discrimination.

The relevance of gender-transformative anti-corruption

Corruption and gender inequality are often intertwined through social norms that legitimize discrimination and reinforce existing power hierarchies. Conventional anti-corruption strategies tend to focus on formal legal frameworks while largely neglecting underlying social dynamics. Gender-transformative approaches (GTA in short) offer new analytical and practical entry points by making normative risks visible and systematically linking equality objectives with integrity policy.

Rethinking corruption and gender inequality together

To address the identified research gap, the Sector Programme Anti-Corruption and Integrity (SV AkuI) commissioned a study on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The study responds directly to impulses from feminist development policy. It aligns with international commitments including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 5 – Gender Equality, the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Its goal is to harness the synergies between gender equality and anti-corruption efforts in a strategic manner.

This is the first comprehensive study to connect theoretical foundations and empirical insights on gender-transformative anti-corruption systematically. It combines literature and document analysis with 23 qualitative interviews involving experts from government, civil society, academia, and international cooperation. It also includes a global mapping of relevant development cooperation programmes. A particular strength of the study lies in its structured presentation of good practices, programme approaches, and actionable tools — providing direct guidance for practitioners working in international cooperation.

Key findings of the study

The study identifies four interrelated pathways for action that are essential to developing effective gender-transformative anti-corruption strategies. These strategies aim to interrogate and address the social norms and structural conditions that enable and legitimize both corruption and gender inequality. Gender-transformative anti-corruption seeks to make systemic risks visible, address them through institutional change, and establish integrity promotion that is also firmly anchored in gender equality.

a. The four pathways of change: A strategic framework

The study outlines four core areas of intervention that shape its theory of change for gender-transformative anti-corruption. These pathways address distinct but complementary dimensions of change. The first pathway focuses on transforming normative frameworks that legitimize corruption and inequality. The second promotes more equitable access to resources, institutions, and decision-making processes. The third emphasizes the development of knowledge, awareness of rights, and individual agency as foundations for meaningful

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participation. The fourth centres on embedding equality and accountability into laws, public institutions, and organizational practices. Together, these pathways form a systemically oriented and context-sensitive framework for sustainable transformation. They are operationalized through sectoral analysis in chapter 2 of the study.

b. The GTA-NormCheck-Matrix: A new tool for analysis and planning

The GTA-NormCheck-Matrix was developed within the framework of this study as an instrument for analysing social norms that foster both corruption and gender inequality. It provides a structured way to link normative risk areas with strategic change objectives aligned with the four pathways of change. In both its methodological structure and its conceptual focus, the matrix represents an innovative approach that complements and extends existing tools in the fields of gender and anti-corruption. A set of indicators for impact measurement and a cross-sectoral overview of relevant social norms accompany the matrix.

c. Sectoral insights: Unlocking gender-transformative potential

The study applies the four pathways of change to four sectors that are particularly relevant in development cooperation: sexualized corruption, political participation, social protection, and economic inclusion. A close interconnection between corruption risks and gendered patterns of discrimination characterizes each of these sectors. The sectoral analysis demonstrates how gender-transformative approaches can be applied across diverse institutional settings—for example, by shifting normative expectations, creating inclusive participation formats, or reforming access and distribution mechanisms.

interplay between normative change, structural access, knowledge development, and institutional anchoring. Successful interventions are based on meaningful participation, address patterns of social discrimination, and link empowerment to institutional safeguards. Qualitative and collective forms of monitoring, as well as the strategic inclusion of norm-shaping actors, enhance legitimacy and accountability. In addition, programmes must incorporate intersectional perspectives and prioritize trust-building and protection mechanisms.

Conclusion: The case for integrated strategies

The study demonstrates: Systemic, context-specific and multi-level gender-transformative anti-corruption is possible and effective. It brings together social justice, institutional integrity, and gender equality within a coherent strategic framework.

Corruption is deeply embedded in social norms and mechanisms of discrimination. Addressing these interdependencies requires integrated strategies—normative, structural, institutional, and collective. Impact emerges where participatory processes, protection mechanisms, gender budgeting, and monitoring are aligned.

The GTA-NormCheck-Matrix supports these efforts as a practical tool that renders normative risks analysable and strategically actionable. It can contribute to the institutional anchoring of gender-transformative integrity policies. The study provides a solid conceptual and methodological foundation and highlights the importance of norm-focused analysis as a crucial component of governance, monitoring, and reform processes.

What works? Key lessons from research and practice

Gender-transformative approaches are most effective when they are systemically designed, context-sensitive, and implemented across multiple levels. Impact depends on the

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