

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE 2024

Vilnius, Lithuania

18-21 June 2024

SESSION REPORT

*Please know you may design the structure of this report to better suit the session.
It's important to capture the key outcomes and solutions proposed for the future.*

Session Title: Empowering Women, Youth and People with Disabilities through Gender Sensitive and Inclusive Reporting

Date: 21 June 2024

Time: 08:30 AM - 10:00 AM (GMT +3)

Report prepared by:

Ivan Kantardjiski
Adviser
GIZ

Moderated by:

Monica Kirya
Deputy Director
U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre

Panellists:

- Esma Gumberidze
Human Rights Defender, Disabled Activist, Georgia's Youth Representative to the United Nations in 2019-2021, UNODC YouthLed Integrity Advisory Board
- Louise Portas
Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer
UNODC
- Dr. Ketakandriana Rafitoson
Vice-chair
Transparency International
- Dr. Anna-Maija Mertens
Member of the Management Board
German Institute on Compliance - DICO

Opening remarks:

- Claudia Sanen
Regional Manager for Latin America, Alliance for Integrity
GIZ

Share the thematic focus of the session, its purpose and corruption risks?

Global research shows that women, girls and marginalised groups, such as young people and people with disabilities, are disproportionately affected by the impact of corruption. Yet, although women tend to condemn corrupt behaviour more than men, they are less likely than men to challenge corrupt practices, report corruption and access justice. Whilst there are differences in the unique experiences of the various marginalised groups, this workshop will test the assumption that the considerations applicable to the experiences of women and girls can be applied to other marginalised groups, such as youth and people with disabilities, meanwhile highlighting the differences.

The main barriers for women, girls and marginalised groups to report corruption are due to structural disadvantages because reporting mechanisms are not designed to tailor to their needs, which means that in general, women, girls and marginalised groups, such as young people and people with disabilities have (a) less access to information about their rights and available reporting channels; and (b) less access to safe and suitable reporting mechanisms. Gender-sensitive and inclusive corruption reporting mechanisms are important not only to enable victims and witnesses to safely report corruption and seek redress, but also play an important role in detecting, identifying and preventing corruption and other malpractice.

This session will highlight barriers to reporting corruption faced by women, youth and people with disabilities, as well as share good-practice examples and innovative approaches to make corruption reporting mechanisms gender-sensitive, inclusive of young people and accessible to people with disabilities. The panellists will bring lived experiences and diverse examples from across the public sector, private sector and civil society.

Summary of panellists' contributions & discussion points (please be as detailed as possible)

Claudia Sanen, the Regional Manager for Latin America at the Alliance for Integrity (GIZ), began her opening address for the panel by expressing gratitude to Transparency International (TI) for inviting and co-organizing the program. She also extended her thanks to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), TI Madagascar, the German Institute on Compliance (DICO), and U4 for their contributions and moderation.

She emphasized the importance of the panel's topic, "Empowering Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities through Gender Sensitive and Inclusive Reporting," highlighting that closing the existing gaps in corruption cases is a crucial task. The fight against corruption is integral to promoting equality and justice.

Referring to significant policy milestones, she noted the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) feminist development policy published in March 2023, which aims to eliminate discriminatory practices globally. Additionally, BMZ published quality standards in March 2022 that mainstream anti-corruption measures in all projects, underscoring a commitment to integrating gender and anti-corruption efforts across all initiatives.

At the Conference of the States Parties (COSP) to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2023, a landmark resolution on gender was adopted, acknowledging that corruption affects women and girls differently. Examples of sextortion were cited, where sexual violence is combined with corruption, disproportionately affecting women.

She addressed the impact of corruption on other marginalized groups, noting that these groups, despite being strongly affected by corruption, often serve as change drivers in their societies. Advocating for a broader perspective on diversity, she referenced Alliance for Integrity's practical Guide to Promoting Business Integrity with a Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Perspective as well as practical integrity trainings tailored for women-led small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In conclusion, Claudia Sanen mentioned that new projects entering the GIZ portfolio from this perspective will be implemented with a commitment to sharing all experiences. This approach aims to ensure that the lessons learned from these projects contribute to the broader fight against corruption and the empowerment of marginalized groups.

Monica Kirya posed a question to the audience, inquiring about their personal experiences with corruption and whether they had ever reported it. She emphasized the challenges faced by individuals in distant places, marginalized communities, or those with disabilities in reporting corruption. Highlighting the significant gender gaps and societal norms, she pointed out that these norms often pressure women and other marginalized individuals to remain silent, making it even more difficult to report injustices.

Esma Gumberidze stressed the critical importance of making reporting mechanisms accessible. She highlighted how services that people with disabilities depend on are particularly vulnerable to corruption. In small communities, maintaining secrecy is challenging, and there is a widespread perception that disabled individuals cannot be involved in corrupt activities. This misconception not only discourages reporting but also adds to the stigma faced by people with disabilities.

From the perspective of state officials, Esma Gumberidze pointed out that very little funding is allocated to disability services which then becomes low priority for state mechanisms to do proper monitoring. She emphasized the significant barriers disabled individuals encounter online, with many websites being inaccessible for screen readers. Investigative centers often lack the knowledge on how to procure sign readers, make their resources more accessible, question blind individuals, or certify their testimonies.

Esma Gumberidze urged that discussions about corruption and reporting mechanisms must not leave people with disabilities behind. She called for a more inclusive approach to ensure that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can safely and effectively report corruption.

Dr. Anna-Maija Mertens from the German Institute on Compliance highlighted the challenges in reporting corruption within organizations, noting that current processes are often designed by and for older men, excluding other groups. She questioned whether reporting is seen as a duty or an obligation, emphasizing the need for a cultural shift.

She pointed to an upcoming law in Germany as an opportunity to change organizational culture and practices. Emphasizing the need for information from all levels of an organization, she argued that this input is essential for learning, innovation, and addressing challenges more effectively.

Dr. Mertens mentioned that DICO, with its 1,000 members, including both large and small companies, advocates for collective action to demonstrate the feasibility and necessity of these changes. She cited a new study from Transparency International Germany, which

found that current reporting mechanisms for youth and other groups are inadequate, and shared that new standards have been created to help organizations adopt the new law.

She stressed the importance of a holistic approach, where the entire company is aware of and values the reporting mechanism. All staff members should be informed about it and feel protected when using it.

Louise Portas from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) confirmed the issues discussed through their research findings. She referred to the report "The Time is Now," which shows that women, youth, and people with disabilities report corruption less frequently than others. Statistics indicate that women tend to report corruption later, often hesitating due to fear. This hesitation is justified, as the data reveals that retaliation against women after reporting is notably stronger compared to others.

Dr. Ketakandriana Rafitoson, Vice-chair of Transparency International, highlighted that the first barrier to reporting corruption is the lack of knowledge about relevant laws and processes, as well as the right to report. In patriarchal societies, there is often hesitation about whether individuals are allowed or in a position to report corruption.

She emphasized the stigma faced by victims, particularly in cases of sexual-based violence, such as sexual corruption. Fear of social stigma, even from their own families, makes it extremely difficult for victims to come forward and report these incidents.

The moderator opened the second question to everyone, on which initiatives are already in place to fight such issues as above.

In response to the moderator's question about existing initiatives to combat the issues discussed, Louise Portas from UNODC shared the organization's efforts. She highlighted their work with various countries to strengthen legal frameworks by incorporating a gender element. However, she emphasized that beyond legislation, it is crucial for both state and private organizations to develop internal mechanisms, policies, and procedures that integrate gender considerations at all stages.

She outlined several elements that could benefit from a gender-sensitive approach:

- **Defining Scope:** When defining the scope of individuals and reportable actions, it should be as broad as possible, including gender and other relevant actions.
- **Inclusive Reporting Channels:** Reporting channels should be inclusive and accessible, particularly online, to facilitate reporting by marginalized groups.
- **Protection Measures:** Many organizations treat gender-related complaints as personal grievances, but they should be taken seriously with robust protection measures against retaliation.
- **Retaliation:** The definition of retaliatory acts should not be closed or exhaustive. It should be indicative, allowing flexibility based on cultural and contextual nuances.

Esma Gumberidze highlighted the unique gravity of retaliation for disabled individuals, using the example of a blind person potentially being excluded from the union of blind people. Such exclusion could prevent them from accessing essential services like a sighted guide, severely impacting their ability to live normally or even perform basic tasks like getting groceries.

She stressed the need for multiple reporting alternatives to facilitate easier reporting, including websites, phone calls, in-person options, and other channels. Esma Gumberidze also called for training law enforcement on how to handle disability-related corruption cases and raising awareness that people with disabilities are as vulnerable to corruption as anyone else.

Esma Gumberidze noted that her ability to speak out is due to her independent work, not tied to her disability. She acknowledged that many do not have this privilege and emphasized the importance of having diverse sources of validation and livelihood, which can empower individuals to report corruption.

She advocated for the de-monopolization of services, suggesting that donors could play a role by demanding greater transparency and clarity from their beneficiaries. Welcoming whistleblowers and providing them with support is also essential in this effort.

Dr. Anna-Maija Mertens emphasized that meaningful change is driven by individuals rather than systems. She highlighted the importance of identifying and supporting the people who handle reports of corruption, ensuring they are equipped to manage these sensitive cases effectively. Also, that it is not only about physical barriers, but also about psychological barriers. The culture and environment are very important to ensure people feel safe to speak up. Therefore, diverse perspectives must be included from the development to the testing of reporting mechanisms.

She also stressed the need to engage men in conversations about the importance of inclusivity. By discussing the added value of including all people in all processes, a more comprehensive and supportive environment for reporting corruption can be fostered.

Dr. Ketakandriana Rafitoson built on Dr. Anna-Maija Mertens's last point by mentioning the concept of positive masculinity. She emphasized the importance of involving men who are sensitive to these issues within patriarchal systems, using them as role models to inspire others.

She highlighted the need to focus on social norms and the limited research on corruption and discrimination influenced by these norms. Understanding the effects of social norms on women, youth, and marginalized groups is crucial in addressing the challenges they face in reporting corruption and ensuring a more inclusive approach to combating these issues.

During the fishbowl format, a participant from UNODC raised concerns about sexual corruption in education and the unique barriers faced by marginalized groups. The brief exchange highlighted several key issues:

- Feeling of Shame and Fear: Victims often experience a deep sense of shame and fear of social stigma, which deters them from reporting. Fear of retaliation and the potential consequences of reporting further complicate the situation.
- Safe Reporting Centers: Examples were provided of some centers within Transparency International Chapters that have received over 350,000 complaints over the years. These centers offer safe shelters for whistleblowers and act as educational hubs for reporting such matters.
- Trust in Government: The discussion referenced Afrobarometer findings that show a very low level of trust in government. Alternative channels like Advocacy and Legal

Advice Centers (ALACs) are crucial as they provide trusted avenues for complaints, bypassing untrusted official channels.

- Sextortion as a Crime: There was a discussion about the fact that extortion, including sextortion, is not considered a crime in many countries. This highlighted the need for legal reforms at a global level to classify sextortion as a crime against humanity.
- A representative from Transparency International Kenya shared their experiences with reporting corruption in Kenya. They and the following exchange with the panellists highlighted the following points:
 - Bribery Index: Women and young people often need to secure services on behalf of their families, such as education and healthcare, making them more likely to face bribery demands. Despite this, they report less frequently to the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centers (ALACs).
 - Whistleblower Protection Reform: It's important to incorporate considerations of disability and gender norms into whistleblower protection reforms.
 - ALACs Locations: Locating ALACs near hospitals or other places frequently visited by women can increase accessibility and reporting rates.
 - Psychological Support: There is a need for psychologists to be available to support individuals dealing with these matters, providing necessary emotional and psychological assistance.

A brief follow-up from the UNODC participant underscored the necessity of having multiple alternatives for reporting corruption. This is crucial to reduce the risks of retaliation and ensure that individuals can report safely and effectively.

A Transparency International colleague highlighted the importance of cross-partnerships and collaborations with organizations representing various groups. By involving more target groups, Advocacy and Legal Advice Centers (ALACs) can expand their reach and effectiveness in addressing corruption issues for a broader audience.

A participant from Transparency International Brazil noted that women often fear reporting corruption because they risk being cut off from crucial services. Also, as primary caregivers, they frequently lack the time and resources to report, making the process particularly challenging for them.

In the closing remarks, the speakers emphasized the following:

- Louise Portas: Stressed the importance of effective communication to remove barriers and biases at the start of the reporting process.
- Dr. Anna-Maija Mertens: Encouraged not only advocating for changes but also focusing on implementation together.
- Dr. Ketakandriana Rafitoson: Urged the continued effort to build an environment where people are aware of their rights and motivated to defend them.
- Esma Gumberidze: Warned against working in silos and emphasized the importance of including disability as a critical part of the anti-corruption portfolio.

Main outcomes of the session (include quotes/highlights and interesting questions from the floor)

1. Enhanced Accessibility and Inclusivity in Reporting Mechanisms:

- Emphasis was placed on making reporting mechanisms more accessible and inclusive for women, youth, and people with disabilities. This includes implementing multiple

reporting channels, ensuring websites are accessible for people with disabilities, and providing psychological support for those who report corruption.

One quote that cut to the core of the matter was from Esma Gumberidze:

"Disabled people are also exposed to corruption, and the organizations that represent and support them can be perpetrators of corruption. This must be kept in check not only by state and non-state actors but also by donors. Ensuring transparency and accountability within these organizations is crucial to protect the rights and well-being of people with disabilities."

2. Importance of Legal and Policy Reforms:

- There is a need for comprehensive legal and policy reforms to address corruption more effectively. This includes incorporating gender-sensitive elements into laws, recognizing sextortion as a crime, and ensuring whistleblower protection laws consider gender and disability norms.

3. Collective Action and Collaboration:

- The session highlighted the importance of working together across different sectors and organizations. Cross-partnerships, collaboration with various groups, and engaging men as role models are crucial for creating a supportive environment where everyone is aware of and motivated to defend their rights. It was also emphasized that working in silos is detrimental and that disability must be included in anti-corruption efforts.

Key recommendations for the future and concrete follow-up actions

Recommendation arising from the discussion: Anti-corruption efforts must be inclusive and avoid working in silos. It's essential to integrate disability considerations into the anti-corruption portfolio, ensuring that people with disabilities are not overlooked. Both state and non-state actors, including donors, need to ensure transparency and accountability within organizations that support disabled individuals to protect their rights effectively.

Recommendation no. 2: Continue to build an environment where individuals are not only aware of their rights but are also motivated to defend them. This involves educating the public about their entitlements and fostering a culture where reporting corruption is encouraged and supported. Advocacy should go hand-in-hand with practical implementation to create a robust system that supports and protects whistleblowers and marginalized groups.

What can be done to create opportunities for scaling up the solutions discussed in the session? And by whom?

These are tentative opportunities for strengthening and amplifying these solutions, divided by stakeholder group which could be engaged:

1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks:

- By Governments: Implement comprehensive legal reforms that include gender-sensitive elements and recognize sextortion as a crime that is both a form of gender-based violence and corruption. Enforce these laws rigorously to protect marginalized groups.
- By International Organizations: Require more Transparency, include the perspective and provide technical assistance and support to countries in developing and implementing these legal frameworks.

2. Improving Reporting Mechanisms:

- By Organizations and Institutions: Develop accessible, inclusive reporting channels, such as websites, phone hotlines, and in-person reporting options. Ensure these mechanisms are well-publicized and easy to use.
- By Donors: Fund the development and maintenance of these reporting mechanisms and support training programs for law enforcement and investigative bodies on handling diverse corruption cases.

3. Building Cross-Sector Partnerships:

- By CSOs: Foster partnerships with other groups representing women, youth, and people with disabilities to create a united front against corruption.

4. Fostering Positive Masculinity and Inclusive Cultures:

- By Community Leaders and organizations dealing on this matter: Promote positive masculinity and the inclusion of all genders in anti-corruption efforts. Use role models to inspire cultural shifts in perceptions and behaviors related to corruption.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- By Academia and Research Institutions: Conduct research to continuously assess the impact of implemented solutions and the general issue of how corruption impacts disadvantaged groups of citizens.

6. Accountability for Disability Organizations:

- By Donors: Ensure that organizations handling funds to assist individuals with disabilities are held accountable as they are also prone to corruption, as noted by the activist in the panel. Discourage monopolies of providing services and support to disabled individuals.

Rapporteur's name

Ivan Kantardjiski
Advisor
GIZ

Date submitted

21 June 2024

Action! This report needs to be emailed to iacc-av@transparency.org within 24 hours of the session. If you wish to update the report, please do so by 21 July. Thank you.