

Reducing corruption's impact on natural resources – How does a gender lens help?

Rachel Kramer and Elizabeth Hart, *Targeting Natural Resource Corruption*, WWF
Nathalie Simoneau, *Gender and Social Inclusion*, WWF

Key takeaways

- » Corruption undermines legal and sustainable natural resource management and conservation, gives power to parties with money and influence, and is often used as strategy for maintaining that power. **Corruption can further marginalize women and other groups who already face power inequity and who rely on environmental resources for livelihoods and well-being.**
- » Evidence shows that women and men can have different interests in and relationships to natural resources. It also suggests that **women and men experience, participate in, profit and lose from corruption differently.**
- » **Anti-corruption strategies aimed at improving natural resource management and conservation outcomes should be informed by a strong understanding of these differences;** otherwise, they may miss critical opportunities and constraints.
- » Gender-informed anti-corruption strategies are still relatively new, so **collecting data to further inform this work is especially important.**

The challenge

Corruption is a significant facilitator of global wildlife, forest and marine crimes ([WWF and TRAFFIC 2015](#)) and drives other negative environmental outcomes ([Williams and Dupuy 2016](#)), undermining the future of biodiversity and communities. Corruption risks exist all along the [global supply chains](#) for fish, forests and wildlife, ranging from petty bribery for forged export permits and back-door access for poachers, to highly-organized collusion to avoid labor regulations on fishing fleets, and political payoffs for new timber concessions.

Evidence shows that women and other groups that face power inequity have an essential role to play in achieving natural resource management (NRM) and conservation results ([Leisher et al. 2016](#)). Many corrupt actions are only feasible for those with money and power, and corruption often perpetuates and deepens power networks. When programs and reforms are developed to prevent and address the corruption behind negative environmental and social outcomes, how can a gender lens help?

Reducing the threats that corruption poses to natural resources involves reducing opportunities for corrupt actions, increasing the likelihood of detecting them, and strengthening accountability when they are detected. Better understanding the relationships among gender, corruption, NRM and conservation adds important depth and definition to the “who, what, how and why” of reforms and programs to address these threats. Asking the right questions at the program or policy design stage and following the basic principles outlined in this paper can help to achieve these objectives.

Gender, natural resource management, and corruption: What does the evidence tell us?

Corruption thrives on and perpetuates weaknesses in governance and accountability mechanisms. Reducing corruption in natural resource governance involves enhancing accountability, integrity and transparency throughout the system. At the same time, a central lesson of anti-corruption work is that the same reforms are rarely likely to work in every context, so carefully assessing the context and conditions necessary for those reforms to be successful is essential ([USAID 2015](#), [DFID 2015](#)). Equal treatment and non-discrimination are part of good governance, and they also create conditions that can encourage greater accountability.

Gender and natural resource management

Gender plays a significant role in how people use, manage and conserve wildlife, forests and fisheries. In many parts of the world, women are primary users of natural resources: they gather fuel and food from forests and grasslands, tend agricultural plots, and collect water for drinking, cooking, and bathing, for example. But they may not have a seat at the table when decisions are made about how those resources are governed. Addressing gender inequalities where they exist can be as important to achieving sustainability objectives as it is to advancing equal rights ([FAO 2016](#)).

Although evidence is still limited, a recent review of several thousand studies and program documents

Key concepts

Gender: Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, including class, race, poverty level, ethnic group, sexual orientation, and age. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as opportunities for decision-making.

Gender Mainstreaming: Mainstreaming gender is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs. Gender should not be viewed in isolation. It is a way to make women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension at every stage of the programming cycle so that women and men equally benefit from opportunities and resources and inequality is not perpetuated.

Gender Analysis: Gender analysis is a critical examination of how differences in gender norms, roles, power structures, activities, needs, opportunities and rights affect men, women, girls and boys in a certain situation or context. It includes collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data and gender information to understand gender differences and gaps, determine gender differentiated impacts and risks, to identify measures to avoid adverse gender impacts, and to uncover and act on opportunities to address gender gaps and inequalities relevant to the activity.

For more information on these concepts, see this [IUCN glossary](#).

The [U4 corruption glossary](#) defines other important concepts related to corruption and anti-corruption approaches.

confirms a linkage between the participation of women in forestry and fisheries management groups and better resource governance and conservation outcomes ([Leisher et al. 2016](#)). India and Nepal offer the strongest evidence of these benefits. Experience there suggests that involving women can enlarge the pool of citizens committed to forest conservation, increase representation of landless community members in decision making, and may ultimately support better compliance with resource management rules ([Agarwal 2009](#)).

Gender and corruption

We know that the ability of women to claim their rights is often hindered by corruption, particularly in conflict-

affected settings and other settings where corruption is high (OECD 2017). The 2019 [Global Corruption Barometer](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, found that women are more likely to pay bribes for public services than men—and that one in five experiences sexual extortion or knows someone who has when accessing government services.

Some research draws a link between low levels of corruption and greater female participation in government (see, for example, [Bauhr et al. 2018](#)). A common idea is that women are less corrupt than men—but it's not that simple ([Nawaz 2009](#)). Part of the explanation lies in inequitable access and opportunity, not just intrinsic characteristics. Corruption often takes place in insider networks, and research suggests that women's historically limited access to these networks may account for lower levels of corruption among women in public office ([UNDP and UNIFEM 2010](#)). Another angle is that an infusion of women may disrupt embedded networks of predominantly male patronage relationships and political ties. Research in Mexico ([Grimes and Wängnerud 2012](#)) and Brazil ([Brollo and Troiano 2016](#)) supports this conclusion. Similar dynamics can be found in studies of the judiciary ([Ruiz 2019](#)) and law enforcement ([Americas Quarterly 2011](#)).

Part of the reason may also be that women and men hold different attitudes toward corruption. There's some support for the conclusion that women are more risk-sensitive than men ([Boehm 2015](#)), so they may not want to participate in potentially punishable activities. Interviews with members of Peru's mostly-female traffic police, a force thought to be less corrupt than the rest of Peruvian law enforcement, suggested that some women were particularly proud of their less-corrupt reputation and equated taking money with a type of prostitution ([Americas Quarterly 2011](#)).

Ultimately, a gender lens helps us to understand corruption's impacts and dynamics for both men and women. Here are a few examples:

- » Men may suffer more economic impacts, while women may experience more non-economic impacts, such as gender-based violence, as well as economic impacts.

- » [Data indicate](#) that overall, men pay more bribes than women. This difference may be accounted for by the fact that in most parts of the world, men interact with police and seek documents and permits more often than women.
- » Women are more vulnerable to certain types of bribery (as primary caretakers for their families, women are often dependent on public services such as health and education, for which bribes may be solicited) ([UNDP 2012](#)).
- » Sexual extortion is a form of corruption experienced more often by women than men ([Boehm and Sierra 2015](#)).
- » Politics and economic power—and therefore high-level grand corruption—are still predominantly the province of men. While there are certainly examples of corrupt actions by women in positions of power and of political dynasties where corrupt practices and illicit wealth extraction is a family affair, the balance in this regard is heavily weighted toward men.

How can a gender lens support better anti-corruption, conservation and NRM outcomes?

Where corruption is undermining conservation outcomes, gender considerations can contribute to the design and assessment of natural resource management initiatives that *prevent corruption*, and environmental enforcement efforts that *address corruption* (within ranger patrols, police forces and judiciaries). Understanding the role of gender in peoples' experiences of and participation in corrupt activity clarifies who should be targeted for activities and reforms and what types of changes might be necessary. **Figure 1** offers four examples of what applying a gender lens can look like in practice. Given that gender-informed anti-corruption strategies are still relatively new, collecting data and sharing learning on outcomes of gender mainstreaming efforts is especially important to further inform this work.

Figure 1. What does applying a gender lens look like in practice?



Asking good questions to understand why people resist corruption

Recent research in Uganda and DRC found that women in the justice sector were more often cited as having integrity than men ([Barnard-Webster 2017](#)). The analysis also found that women typically experience weaker demands for financial support from their families as compared to men. Along with gender stereotypes such as viewing women as guardians of family values, these factors may give women in the judiciary greater latitude to deviate from the norm of demanding bribes for legal decisions. Asking good questions about perceptions can be critical for understanding the context in which anti-corruption and natural resource management programs are operating.



Increasing women's participation and leadership in wildlife management and enforcement

A recent survey of 4,686 wildlife rangers in 17 countries found that women have limited representation in wildlife protection and management, globally (accounting for just 5.9% of respondents) ([WWF 2018](#)). In Zimbabwe, the Akashinga community-driven conservation model employs all-female anti-poaching units and trains female biodiversity managers ([IAPF 2019](#); [BBC 2018](#)). To date, that model has reportedly found “no hints of corruption.” Further gender integration efforts to stop wildlife poaching and trafficking (that are attentive to heightened risks, such as gender-based violence) will support firm conclusions on anti-corruption outcomes.



Gender mainstreaming in the design of a community-based conservation program

The USAID-funded Hariyo Ban Program aims to increase ecological and community resilience in two large landscapes in Nepal, focusing on biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation ([WWF 2016](#)). Hariyo Ban is working with community and public institutions to address structural barriers to community participation by enforcing affirmative policies and reviewing discriminatory ones. For example, the program guideline for affirmative actions in Community Forestry User Groups (CFUG) includes guaranteed membership in community forests for all resident community members, 50% female representation on the Executive Committee of the CFUG, representation of marginalized groups (Dalits and Janjatis), a transparency mechanism of public hearings, and an annual financial audit. This approach is in line with studies that have found that CFUGs in Nepal and India have higher numbers of women in decision making roles and evidence of significant increases in forest quality and better conservation results for the area.



Using disaggregated data to understand and develop campaigns toward behavior change

Understanding the cultural and gendered nuances that influence consumption is important to designing effective campaigns to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products. Viet Nam is a major consumer market and transit hub for illegal rhino horn. Consumer research has found gendered differences among buyers and consumers. These insights were used to shape the Chi Initiative, a “Strength of Will” social marketing campaign that is using targeted behavior change communications to address demand ([TRAFFIC 2018](#)). Gender-disaggregated data is being collected in 2019 to learn how factors such as increased profile of the illegality of rhino horn use may be shifting consumption patterns for those able to buy rhino horn. This data will inform future behavior change campaigns that address demand for rhino horn while enforcement efforts continue to work to address supply.

Core questions and principles

When it comes to incorporating gender, don't just "add women and stir." Find out what roles, interests, pressures and opportunities women possess vis-à-vis the resource and the corruption problem at hand. This includes limits on women's power and influence, and ways that it might be strengthened. At the same time, accountability mechanisms need to be just as strong when women are in influential roles as when men are. In other words, when applying a gender lens to corruption and NRM problems, look beneath the generalizations to the specifics.

Practitioners should ask these questions at the program or policy design stage:

- » Who is involved in managing or exploiting a specific resource?
- » What types of corrupt actions are happening in that process, and who is involved in them?
- » What are the drivers of or motivations for corruption, and who is profiting and losing?
- » Who has interests in protecting the resource more effectively, and what power do they have vis-à-vis those who are exploiting resources?
- » How do women and men figure differently in these answers?

With the answers in mind, practitioners should follow these basic principles:

- 1. Consult available guidance on gender integration and mainstreaming.** This guidance note on gender mainstreaming for UNODC staff is one model: [UNODC 2013](#). This OECD toolkit on mainstreaming and implementing gender equality provides specific good practice examples that are helpful: [OECD 2015](#).
- 2. Conduct a context analysis or socio-economic assessment that is gender-sensitive** to gather gendered information on roles, power dynamics,

Mainstreaming gender involves men and women

In the Hariyo Ban II program region (see **Figure 1**), as elsewhere, gender-based violence (GBV) is a prevalent problem. Women were identified as particularly vulnerable during conservation work, when patrolling forests, participating in meetings, speaking out about local leaders and holding positions that were assumed to be outside of their "qualifications." Project managers realized that addressing GBV was necessary to enable women to participate and benefit from the project while avoiding putting them at increased risks. They also understood that working with men would be essential to bringing about transformation. The project developed a cadre of men champions to fight discrimination and GBV and also worked to raise awareness on GBV and gender equality and social inclusion issues and to promote their mainstreaming into national policies. For more information, visit the [Hariyo Ban](#) website.

access to resources and benefits. This report on gender in political economy analysis is a helpful resource: [Browne 2014](#). Frameworks like the Governance Assessment for Protected and Conserved Areas (GAPA) tool can also help: [Franks and Booker 2018](#).

- 3. Collect gender-disaggregated data** (data collected and tabulated separately for women and men) to add to the evidence base and strengthen further anti-corruption and natural resource management work. This resource on approaches for collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data may help: [FAO 2019](#).

Learn More

- » Transparency International has consolidated a [list of resources](#) on good practices for addressing the gender aspects of corruption, including this [Gender and Corruption Topic Guide](#).
- » U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center has a range of resources on [Gender – Targeting anti-corruption efforts towards improving womens' lives](#).

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About Targeting Natural Resource Corruption

The Targeting Natural Resource Corruption (TNRC) project is working to improve biodiversity outcomes by helping practitioners to address the threats posed by corruption to wildlife, fisheries and forests. TNRC harnesses existing knowledge, generates new evidence, and supports innovative policy and practice for more effective anti-corruption programming. Learn more at tnrcproject.org.

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