



THE WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

THE GENDER, CORRUPTION AND WHISTLEBLOWING NEXUS

Stakeholders are calling for the inclusion of women in the anti-corruption struggle, a section of society traditionally excluded primarily due to patriarchal forces. With a view to mapping ways to creating spaces for meaningful women's participation in anti-corruption discourse, particularly whistleblowing (reporting corruption), we assert the following:

- Women face a disproportionate impact as a result of corruption especially seen in service delivery inefficiencies. For women to access basic services such as education, sanitation, documentation, law enforcement, they may be asked not only for bribes but forced into sextortion.
- Furthermore, corruption, especially in public offices, shrinks the public purse. In Zimbabwe, it is reported that Zimbabwe loses about \$1.8 Billion to corruption annually.¹ This loss has a heavier impact on women and children who rely more on public services.

However, even where women could be witnesses to graft and desire to report, there are barriers to doing so. Barriers identified include:

- **Insufficient Whistleblowing Legislation:** While Zimbabwe is party to regional instruments such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) we lack a dedicated local Act of law that speaks to the intricacies of corruption in Zimbabwe. Our Judiciary primarily uses the Revenue Authority Act, Public Entities & Corporate Governance Act, Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act and Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act.
- **Unsafe Reporting Spaces:** Human Capital or Human Resources departments where reports of whistleblowing are usually received are dominated by men. As a result, women are discouraged from reporting cases or whistleblowing especially when the cases involve sexual harassment.
- **Victimization:** Female participants present narrated personal experiences of victimization in their professional spaces when whistleblowing or reporting cases of abuse of office. Due to the objectification of women, many report that when they reported their male counterparts in professional spaces on cases of sextortion or sexual harassment they would be threatened or have their employment terminated.
- **Lack of Whistleblower protection policies:** The lack of dedicated laws for whistleblower protection extends to the corporate world as there are no protection policies and where they exist, they are for compliance purposes. As a result, whistleblowers are exposed and discouraged.
- **Patriarchy:** Due to patriarchal expectations and gender norms, women are restricted from reporting corruption without the approval of their husbands as they may be exposing their families. However, the same is not expected of their male partners.

¹<https://www.herald.co.zw/zimbabwe-losing-us18-billion-to-corruption-annually/amp/>

Recommendations

Women are a key population in whistleblowing and reporting of corruption that should not be left out. To ensure their meaningful inclusion, the below could assist.

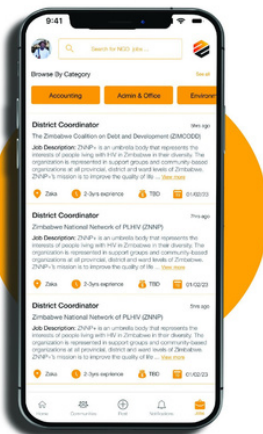
- **Establishing comprehensive local legislation:** The principal solution is to localize instruments on Anti-Corruption and protection of whistleblowers, where necessary, paying particular attention to women's needs. Government recently reported that principles on a whistleblowing Act had been approved, however, they are still to be released into the public domain. This process must be fast tracked with the urgency it demands.
- **Political Will:** Whistleblower protection policies exist in some organizations but are not implemented. There's a need for political will and sincerity to implement these policies. Localization of regional instruments also demands political will. Insincere affirmative action will not lead to social change.
- **Capacity Building:** Patriarchy remains a barrier to women's participation in whistleblowing and education from primary institutions such as churches, schools and the corporate world can change social norms around women's participation. Further, objectification of women which leads to sextortion can also be reduced through education campaigns.
- **Gender Mainstreaming:** Budgeting should be Gender responsive to ensure financing is more responsive to the needs of women. Further, there should be support for gender research and collection of sex-aggregated data on corruption. This will help inform advocacy responses and resultant policy/law measures.

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