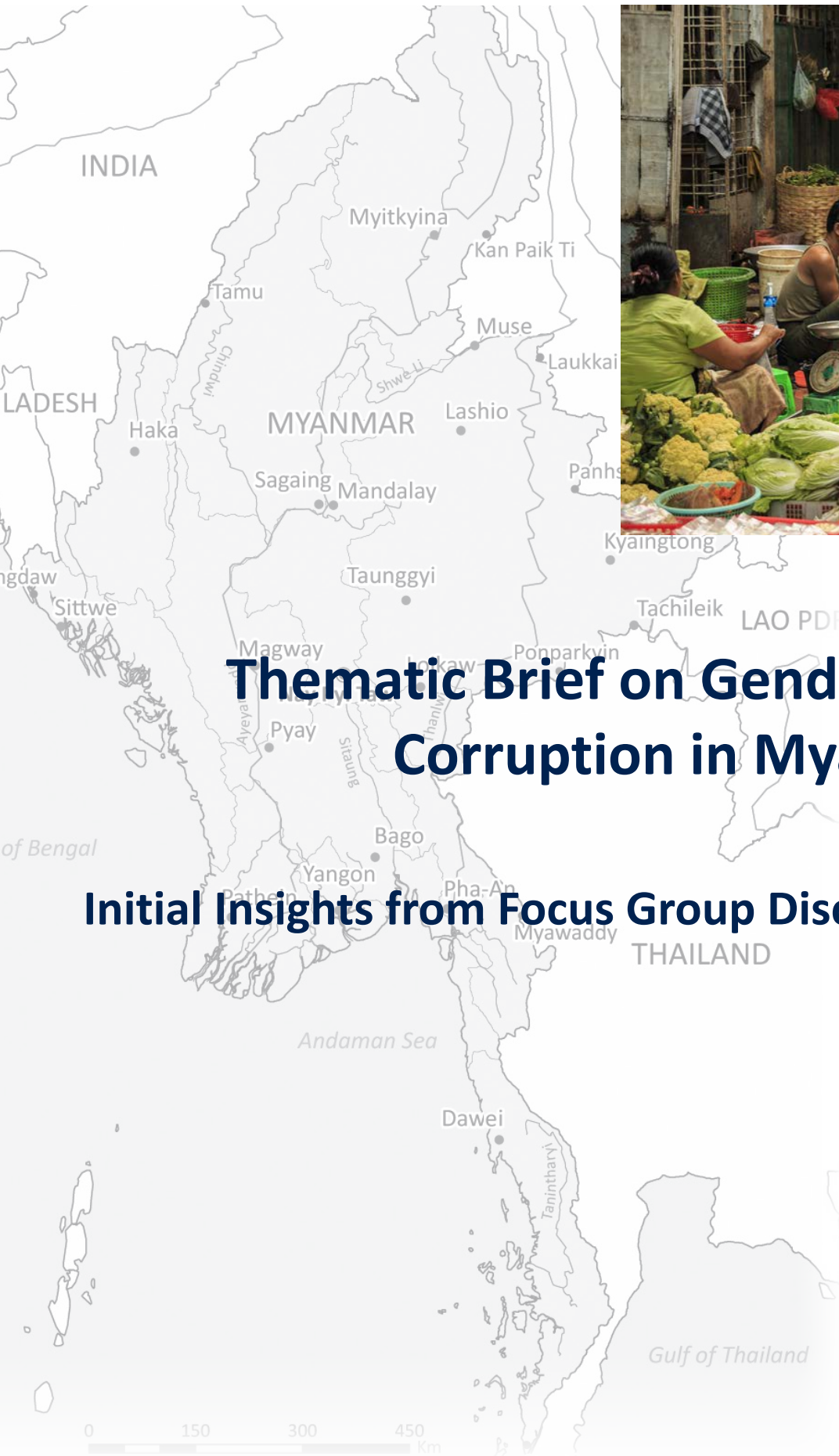




**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



# Thematic Brief on Gender and Corruption in Myanmar

## Initial Insights from Focus Group Discussions

October 2020



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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This report is part of ongoing research undertaken by UNODC Myanmar to inform the development and management of its programme of assistance. The aim is to identify needs and offer strategic solutions to support the region in areas related to UNODC mandates including: controlling the demand and supply for illicit drugs and precursors, criminal justice, preventing crime and terrorism and related security sector issues.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNODC concerning the legal status of any country, territory or city, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. This document has not been formally edited and its findings require further research to be confirmed.

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The UNODC team responsible for developing this report consisted of:

- Marie Pegie-Cauchois, Anti-Corruption Programme Manager
- Alma Sedlar, Anti-Corruption Consultant
- Seint Sandar Hlaing, National Programme Coordinator
- Ryan Winch, Programme Coordinator
- Naw Nay Zar Htwe, Sexual Abuse Focal Point (FGD Facilitator)
- Grace Hkawn Nan, Administrative Assistant (FGD Facilitator)
- Minhao Chen, Research and Monitoring and Evaluation Intern
- Ilian Mrabet, Programme Analyst Intern
- Alexandra Giorgis-Audrain, Gender-Based Violence Intern
- Deanna Cook, Communications & Policy Intern
- Akara Umapornsakula, Graphic Designer

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## Introduction



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The Government of Myanmar has shown a dedication to moving forward on a range of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Despite the efforts and progress that have been made towards some indicators, many challenges remain. Amongst these challenges are gender inequality, which remains a significant barrier to the realisation of human rights in Myanmar, as well as corruption, which continues to raise the cost of public services, diminish public trust in government institutions and negatively impact Myanmar's most vulnerable in an outsized manner.

The hurdles to addressing these challenges are supported by statistics and survey data. According to one survey conducted by Myanmar's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in May 2019, 90% of respondents claimed to have paid bribes at some point when interacting with government officials.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, gender equality, while mainstreamed through much of the international development agenda and the work of the United Nations, has yet to be fully mainstreamed in Myanmar's national policy processes—emphasised by Myanmar's 106<sup>th</sup> place ranking on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index in 2018 (out of 162 countries).<sup>2</sup>

**90% of respondents claimed to have paid bribes at some point when interacting with government officials.**

**Myanmar ranked 106<sup>th</sup> on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index in 2018 (out of 162 countries).**

Solutions to the challenges of gender inequality and corruption should not be viewed in isolation. There are clear interplays between gender and corruption, as demonstrated through the remainder of this brief, and these interplays offer opportunities to address both challenges in parallel, while doing so in a more holistic and sustainable manner. Corruption and gender are both crosscutting issues, impacting diverse policy areas including economic development, environmental

sustainability and security. Accordingly, through finding means to address the negative impacts of gender and corruption, and through mainstreaming these insights across a range of policies and programmes, a deeper understanding of the gender-corruption nexus in Myanmar has the potential to lead to substantial and meaningful progress towards economic and social development broadly speaking, as well as to the realisation of the SDGs.

To explore the nexus between gender and corruption, UNODC organised a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with participants from across Myanmar. The FGDs gathered information about participants' perceptions of the links between gender and corruption, as well as their experience of the gendered impacts of corruption in everyday life. These FGDs were able to draw out meaningful insights, many of which were expected by facilitators, but some of which have proven to be novel and therefore deeply insightful.

<sup>1</sup> Nanda. (2019). Systemic corruption bugs govt, hurts development: survey. Retrieved from: <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/systemic-corruption-bugs-govt-hurts-development-survey.html> - Survey results published in the 2018 ACC Annual Report

<sup>2</sup> UNDP. (2019). Human Development Report 2019 - Myanmar. Retrieved from: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/MMR.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MMR.pdf)

High- and low-income individuals are impacted differently, as are the old and young, but in particular, it became clear there is a gendered nature of corruption.

Setting the stage for the analysis of gender and corruption in Myanmar, the brief begins with a concise review of previous research on the relationship between gender and corruption before looking more deeply at the findings of the FGDs coordinated by UNODC, and finally, offering a set of recommendations for both following up and acting on these findings.

A clear consensus emerged during the FGDs that corruption impacts different groups in different manners. High- and low-income individuals are impacted differently, as are the old and young, but in particular, it became clear there is a gendered nature of corruption. While the way participants framed this varied, significantly, each focus group was able to identify specifically how men and women were impacted by corruption in different ways. Beyond this, and while not necessarily points of consensus, three clear themes emerged about how women are impacted by corruption differently than men. Each theme highlights that for women, corruption can be more severe in terms of the frequency, the size of payment and the type of bribe. Specifically, these themes were:

- 1) **Women are more likely to be the ones to access the services that often require bribe payments.**  
Most frequently mentioned were situations concerning healthcare and education; for example, women tend to visit schools to pay fees for students, so more regularly face uncomfortable situations related to bribery, and therefore, are asked to pay bribes more often than men.
- 2) **Women are paying bribes more often as a result of gender stereotypes, gendered roles and gendered division of labour in Myanmar society.**  
Participants reported that women are seen by many as more likely to be passive and willing to pay a bribe without resisting, making it more likely that those in positions of power would ask them for a bribe.
- 3) **Sextortion is occurring and generally targets women more than men.**  
Accordingly, women are likely at risk of severe and sexual forms of corruption more frequently compared to men.

These findings, while, to an extent, consistent between different focus groups, require further research to be confirmed and to more clearly identify how the gendered impacts of corruption can be overcome. Some immediate steps are recommended though (as elaborated on in the recommendations section), such as raising public awareness about the gendered impacts of corruption, collecting more data about the linkages between gender and corruption and increasingly mainstreaming gender into the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

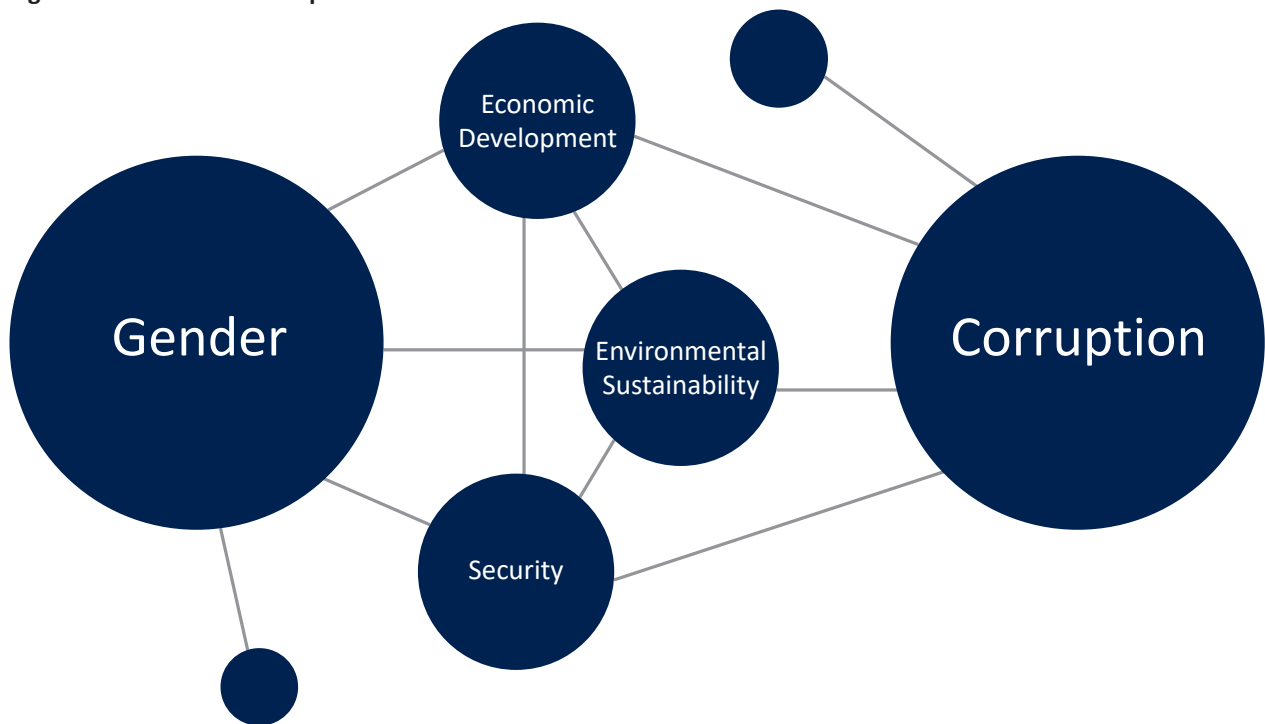
## The Gender-Corruption Nexus

International development actors such as UNODC have only in the last decade started mainstreaming gender—which is the process of evaluating the impacts on men and women of any planned action—in their efforts to address corruption and towards achieving SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Since this nexus began to be explored further, various

Women are disproportionately experiencing the negative effects of corruption due to gender inequality.



Figure 1: The Gender-Corruption Nexus



researchers have highlighted the growing body of evidence that there are significant and important linkages between gender and corruption.<sup>3</sup> On the broadest level, the research has found that women are disproportionately experiencing the negative effects of corruption due to gender inequality, particularly when accessing essential public services and when participating in public decision-making processes. The research has found that this is the case for several reasons, many of which tie to education and income levels. For example, globally, women have lower rates of literacy and education, making women, on average, less aware of corruption-related laws and how the rule of law is applied, therefore becoming more vulnerable to bribes. Gender inequality has also meant that in many cases, women lack the political and economic resources to report abuses of power and file complaints.<sup>4</sup>

In many of Myanmar's cultural contexts, the gendered division of labour is another aspect of gender inequality within households that can add a layer of vulnerability for women, as they are the primary caregivers for children, elderly and disabled family members. As a result, women are more frequently in contact with public services, such as education and healthcare, due to this gendered division of labour. Through being those most often accessing these services, they are more vulnerable to becoming victims of corruption at these points of service delivery.<sup>5</sup> In addition, sextortion—where victims are forced to perform sexual favours in exchange for access to services—is a specific type of corruption that has been found to disproportionately affect women.<sup>6</sup> Sextortion is of particular concern due to the significant harm it causes victims, as well as the high risk of underreporting.

3 See UNDP & UNIFEM. (2015). *Corruption, Accountability and Gender: Understanding the Connection*. Retrieved from: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/corruption-accountability-and-gender-understanding-the-connection.html>; SIDA. (2015). *Gender and Corruption*. Retrieved from: <https://www.sida.se/contentassets/165672c0e28845f79c8a803382e32270/gender-and-corruption.pdf>

4 Branisa, B., Ziegler, M. (2011). *Reexamining the link between gender and corruption: The role of social institutions*. Retrieved from: [https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/48324/1/15\\_branisa.pdf](https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/48324/1/15_branisa.pdf)

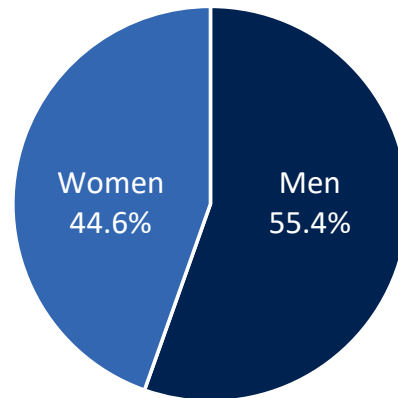
5 SIDA. (2015). *Gender and Corruption*. Retrieved from: <https://www.sida.se/contentassets/165672c0e28845f79c8a803382e32270/gender-and-corruption.pdf>; Rheinbay, J. & Chêne, M. (2016). *Women as Part of the Solution: A Gendered Approach to Anti-corruption*. Retrieved from: <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/guide/guide-3/4438>

6 Rheinbay, J. & Chêne, M. (2016). *Women as Part of the Solution: A Gendered Approach to Anti-corruption*. Retrieved from: <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/guide/guide-3/4438>

## Methodology

To explore the gender-corruption nexus in Myanmar, UNODC organised 15 FGDs in Mandalay (3), Nyaung Shwe (2), Taunggyi (4) and Yangon (6), locations which were selected to approximately reflect the country’s regional, ethnic and socioeconomic composition. Nationally, a total of 166 participants (92 men and 74 women) attended the discussions, each of which included groups of 6-19 randomly selected participants. Unless otherwise noted, the principal analysis put forward by this report is based on views that were commonly and repeatedly cited by participants, and which can be seen as the most insightful consensuses, or points of contention, which emerged during the FGDs, as well as the connections which were made by facilitators and UNODC analysts as a result.

Figure 2: Gender of Participants



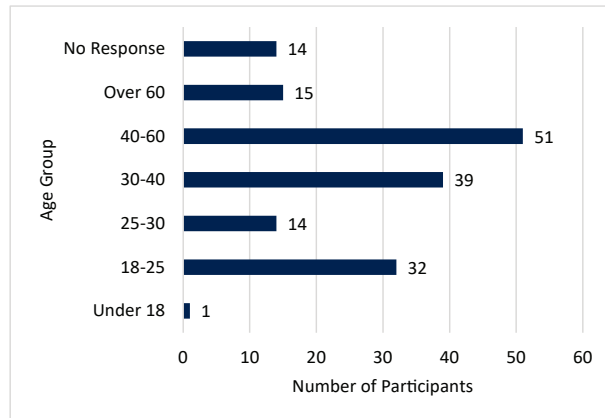
To create a safe space for participants to speak freely, particularly considering the sensitivity of the topics under discussion, the FGDs were held separately for females and males, and each group consisted of participants from the same religious affiliation, socioeconomic background or ethnic group. With this, it is important to recognise that these discussions may not reveal everything that was thought or felt by FGD participants due to social pressures that may have exerted influence on parts of the discussions.

Map 1: Locations of FGDs

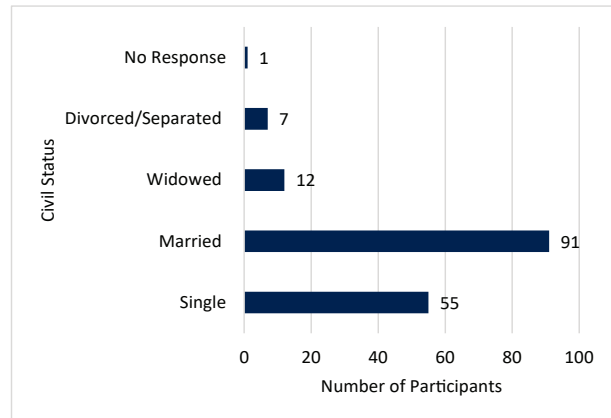


In another effort to attain a diverse and representative set of opinions, UNODC selected participants from a range of age groups (see Figure 3) and civil statuses (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Age of Participants**



**Figure 4: Civil Status of Participants**



The focus groups were moderated in Myanmar language, while Myanmar to English interpretation was available. Interpretation to the Shan and Pa'o languages was provided when Myanmar language was not understood, and as a result, on two occasions, interpretation was provided on an ad hoc basis.

It should be noted that any public opinion research, including FGDs, is only a snapshot of opinion at the moment it is undertaken. Public opinion is dynamic and constantly evolving, and therefore, the research developed as a result of these FGDs should be perceived as an accurate depiction of opinions from 30 July to 5 September 2019. Although conducting focus group discussions is a valuable research method for gaining greater understanding of the commonly held attitudes and perceptions in the underlying context, the total number of participants in focus group research is relatively small and not statistically representative of a larger population. This research thus focuses on understanding participants' attitudes and perceptions by delving into the nuances of their opinions, rather than precisely measuring them.

## Gender and Corruption in Myanmar

According to the data collected from the 15 FGDs, it was found that corruption definitively has a gendered impact in Myanmar, but the reported extent of the connection and the nuances of it varied between groups. The majority of the discussion groups reported that corruption in Myanmar perpetuates gender inequality, and that it extends across ethnic groups and geographic regions. More specifically, apart from hindering women's access to public services, several female participants pointed out that corruption can go beyond monetary payments, and in some cases, takes the form of sextortion, where corrupt officials or service providers demand sexual favours in exchange for access to services or for their delivery in a timely manner. This direct link between corruption and gender-based violence is particularly alarming and requires further research and discussion so it can be meaningfully addressed in the near term.

**Cultural norms have a deep influence on both corruption and gender inequality in Myanmar.**

Moreover, all answers implicitly or explicitly highlighted the fact that cultural norms have a deep influence on both corruption and gender inequality in Myanmar, as well as the interplay between the two topics. Both female and male participants emphasised that corruption is common, and that oftentimes paying bribes becomes habitual, ingraining itself as a standard part of accessing services, such as education and healthcare.



*“Nowadays, even if government officials don’t directly demand bribes, people give them money—the amount depending on their position—because if they don’t, the process will be slower.”*

*Male Participant – 9 August*

Participants also stressed that societal expectations and social roles were strongly influenced by gender. While some connections between gender and corruption were independently brought forward by FGD participants, probing by the facilitator allowed these linkages to be further explored. Through discussions guided by the FGD facilitator, the links between gender and corruption

were brought to the forefront, and while the connection between the two issues had not previously been apparent for many participants, nearly all participants agreed that they were present and that the gendered impacts of corruption impacted women more often and more negatively than men.

### **Corruption as a hindrance to service delivery for women**

In Myanmar, accessing schools or hospitals, receiving a construction permit, or obtaining an ID card were all services reported to be systematically subject to bribes. These services were seen by FGD participants to be demonstrative of a wider phenomenon, whereby public servants and service providers habitually expected payments beyond what was seen to be fair or what was seen to be the true value of the service.

*“The biggest [corruption-related] problems are with the doctors and with the Immigration Office.”*

*Female Participant – 2 September*

A gendered division of labour, embedded in many national, regional and local traditions, prevails inside the majority of Myanmar households. As a result, women are more often responsible for domestic tasks and tasks related to caregiving, including some of those most at risk of bribery, such as enrolling children in school and taking care of family members in the hospital.

*“Household work is for women only, but they can also participate in other work, such as working in the fields. Female staff are more prominent in some areas, such as in the health sector and in the education sector as teachers.”*

*Female Participant – 9 September*

*“Gender inequality is part of the tradition, as a tradition where women are always standing behind men. They cannot do any decision making; men should make these decisions.”*

*Female Participant – 2 September*

As a result of these roles, women are more frequently exposed to corruption in certain sectors, with participants suggesting that women most often face pressure to pay bribes in the education and healthcare sectors.

### **Education**

The presence of corruption in educational services is one of the most significant barriers to the universal right to education,<sup>7</sup> as well as one of the most frequently mentioned examples of the gendered impacts of corruption discussed during the FGDs. FGD participants repeatedly and independently noted that it was a common expectation that teachers would ask for extra tuition fees for their child. Primary school in

<sup>7</sup> Transparency International. (2013). Global Corruption Report: Education. Retrieved from: <https://web.edu.hku.hk/f/acadstaff/376/Global%20Corruption%20Report%3A%20Education.pdf>



Photo credit: Peggy und Marco Lachmann-Anke from Pixabay

Myanmar is free in principle, but it often becomes costly due to the payment of bribes, tuition fees and uniforms. Despite the knowledge that bribes are illegal, the payments are reportedly common and expected by those sending children to many, if not most, schools.

***“Corruption is common in schools. Parents are essentially paying for tuition multiple times—if you do not give the expected money for tuition, your child’s marks will be very low.”***

***Female Participant – 31 July***

***“It is more often the women who attend parent-teacher meetings at school. Teachers can discuss freely and ask for bribes more easily if only women attend. If men were going, too, teachers would be less likely to ask for a bribe.”***

***Female Participant – 5 September***

Notably, corruption was seen to have more negative impacts on women when accessing schools and related educational services. Women, because of their gendered roles, are largely responsible for the enrolment of their children, and thus, have a higher possibility of facing corruption in their interactions with teachers and school authorities.

## Healthcare

Concerning healthcare, corruption can directly influence matters of life and death, as it can influence the access to and quality of healthcare services, placing potentially dire constraints on those seeking services, especially for low-income individuals.<sup>8</sup> In the FGDs, the majority of participants highlighted that they had experienced paying bribes to receive proper healthcare.

***“In the health sector, we need to pay money in advance; otherwise, we can’t enter the hospital. We also need to pay the guards and cleaning ladies and nurses so we can have food. The more we pay at the hospital, the better the service. If we do not pay, then the service is bad, the doctors and nurses do not take care of us and they treat our kids in a bad way.”***

***Female Participant – 5 September***

Gender also has an impact on the manner in which individuals engage with the health sector. Women, commonly being the primary caregivers for children and elderly family members, were seen to be those most likely to be asked for a bribe by healthcare providers. The expectation of being asked for bribes was seen as a significant stressor for those entering into healthcare facilities, thereby becoming an unfair burden on women’s mental health, as well as deterring women from bringing their family members to a doctor or healthcare provider. The stress was seen to be a result of financial strains, particularly from uncertainty about the size of the bribes, as well as the uncomfortable situations resulting from the process of being asked to pay a bribe.

Particularly for non-essential healthcare services, such as check-ups and vaccinations, corruption can be seen as a deterrent, and one that has potentially significant public health implications. The scepticism towards doctors and medical professionals heard during the FGDs should be a particular cause for concern, as it undercuts the trust in the integrity of their healthcare providers. This may potentially affect patients’ perception of the quality of the services that they receive and the accuracy of some of their diagnoses.

<sup>8</sup> Hussmann, K. (2011). Addressing Corruption in the Health Sector. Retrieved from: <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/3934-addressing-corruption-in-the-health-sector.pdf>



*“There is no transparency regarding the differences in prices. When it comes to medical check-ups for a kid, the price of the medicine seems to be really high—and I have no trust in hospitals for that.”*  
**Female Participant – 2 September**

Female participants further emphasised that during childbirth, corruption compromised the provision of medical services both to the newborn and the mother. For instance, giving birth in clean and appropriate conditions was sometimes subject to bribes, which could, at times, be prohibitively large. Bribes could extend into relatively small details of childbirth experiences as well, with reports that bribes for “optional” services, such as having family in the delivery room during birth, are also relatively common.



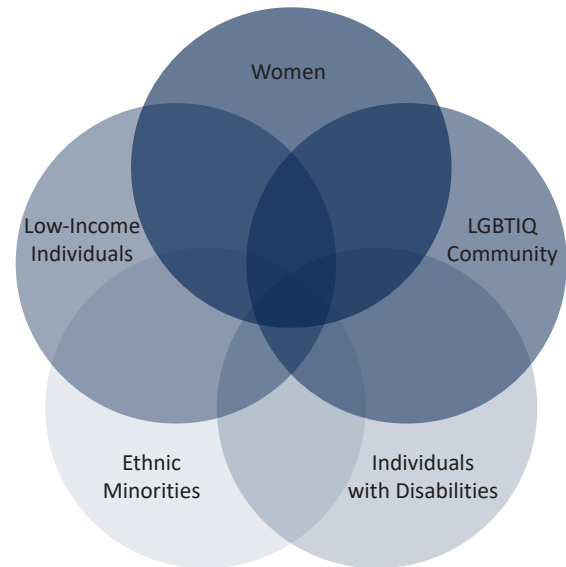
Photo credit: Niels Steeman from Pixabay

*“For the delivery of the baby, the staff asked us for 10,000 kyats. They were saying that it was fine if we didn’t want to give them money. But no one else except the staff would be allowed to go in the delivery room. If no one was there, who would take care of the mother and the baby?”*  
**Female Participant – 8 September**

Additionally, intersectionality is important to consider in the access to health services. Women are already heavily impacted by corruption, and low-income women, particularly those from marginalised ethnic groups, are likely to be at even greater risk. When unable to pay bribes, women were reported to be denied access to medical treatment or given an inferior standard of care—even if they could afford the actual pre-bribe price of the service.

Further, within the healthcare system, FGD participants saw few mechanisms for reporting corruption, and therefore, felt compelled to pay bribes or accept a refusal of service. Few participants reported they were able to file complaints, either due to a lack of knowledge how or because of scepticism of the reporting mechanism’s efficacy.

**Figure 5: Intersectionality of Multiple Vulnerabilities**



**Corruption as a perpetuation of gender stereotypes**

The FGDs further highlighted that pre-existing gender stereotypes resulted in women being asked for bribes more often. Generally speaking, the overriding narrative was that women were seen as more submissive and willing to accept requests for bribes, compared to men, who were reported to be more confident and willing to challenge or reject requests for bribes. The prevalence of this stereotype leads to women more frequently being asked for bribes than men, although the

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validity of this stereotype was not confirmed, as the FGDs did not rigorously explore how often bribes are paid by each gender when requested.

***“Women are givers since they are afraid; men would question more before giving a bribe.”***  
***Male Participant – 5 September***

This narrative was repeatedly confirmed by participants, emphasising that corruption and gender stereotypes in Myanmar are closely intertwined. Beyond the frequency of bribes, the fact that women are perceived as “weaker” was also reported to lead to requests for larger bribes, highlighting the potential scope of the impact that these stereotypes may have.

***“If you are asked to pay a bribe, both men and women would tend to pay, but women are afraid so they would pay for sure. Women will also be requested to pay more because they are considered weaker.”***  
***Female Participant – 4 September***

Additionally, participants broadly agreed that bribe-seekers are most often men, while women are most often bribe-payers. This relationship is tied to economic and social inequality that continues in many spheres of life in Myanmar, and which leads to men more often being employed outside the home, being put in positions of power and being the ones in control of the accessibility of certain public services.

**Participants broadly agreed that bribe-seekers are most often men, while women are most often bribe-payers.**

***“Considering that most men are working, they are more ‘takers.’ Women are mostly working as cashiers, and in these cases, need to pay bribes. In many cases, we have to pay the men.”***  
***Female Participant – 2 September***

The FGDs did find that women are involved in corruption at times, especially women in specific roles—particularly teachers—and so, while men may be seen as bribe-seeking more often than women, it is clearly not a behaviour restricted to a specific gender.

In addition to this, the bribe-seeker/bribe-payer dichotomy is not always clear-cut, and women were often also reported to serve in an “intermediary” role as a person through which bribes or gifts could be circulated or passed along.

***“In some other cases, you do not have to go directly to the officer; you can go to his wife, ask for what you want and pay the wife directly.”***  
***Female Participant – 31 July***

Through this process, while they may not be the one benefitting from receipt of the bribe, they are clearly involved in the act of bribery. It is uncertain whether women who take on the role as an intermediary receive remuneration, or what their role is in initiating the bribe, but exploring this in more depth seems to be a potential gap for future research and could be of interest when designing future anti-corruption interventions.

## Corruption as physical danger to women

A number of FGD participants noted that bribe-seeking can go beyond monetary payments and take the form of sextortion—demanding sexual favours in exchange for services, more rapid service delivery or workplace promotions—which indicates the alarming linkage between corruption and gender-based violence. This form of sexual exploitation, as well as the potential threat of it, has numerous negative repercussions, including threats to the physical and mental health of victims and potential victims, as it acts as a deterrent to seeking services in the first place.

**Bribe-seeking can go beyond monetary payments and take the form of sextortion.**

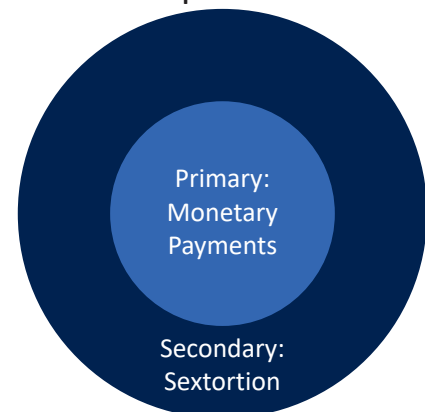
*“Women are suffering more from corruption. For instance, to get a promotion as a civil servant, women might be asked for sexual favours.”*  
**Female Participant – 5 September**

This form of corruption was only raised in female groups during the FGDs, suggesting that women in Myanmar are most likely to be prepositioned. To be clear, sextortion was not one of the most commonly mentioned forms of corruption discussed by participants during the FGDs, but given its severity, as well as the likelihood for underreporting in a group setting, it should be—at minimum—researched in a more comprehensive manner moving forward so its extent can be accurately determined.

Furthermore, while stigma surrounding LGBTIQ issues in Myanmar may have reduced reporting of same-sex sextortion, and traditional gender roles may have reduced reporting of bribe-seeking behaviour by women, these forms of sextortion are also likely to be present, although the frequency of such forms of corruption is unclear. The FGD format enabled discussions of broad trends to be identified, confirming that sextortion does occur in Myanmar, but research conducted in a less public manner (e.g. not in a group setting) will be needed to clarify the extent of sextortion, particularly the most stigmatised forms.

Sextortion further poses a significant threat to low-income individuals, as sextortion is most likely to be requested in cases when monetary payment is not possible. In this light, it seems that sextortion may frequently be a secondary form of corruption, being proposed only after it is clear that monetary payments are not possible. The lens suggests that sextortion, while being a potential form of bribery for all, likely often targets the most vulnerable women. Therefore, efforts to reduce corruption should look at how to alleviate the threat of sextortion to this group most urgently.

**Figure 6: Primary and Secondary Forms of Corruption**



Meanwhile, due to the potential of corruption in the criminal justice system, victims may find themselves without means to prosecute perpetrators, which indirectly constitutes the tacit tolerance of such behaviours and creates a greater danger of gender-based violence for women. Stronger steps need to be taken to improve criminal justice responses to gender-based violence and to reduce corruption in the criminal justice system if sextortion is going to be successfully addressed.

*“The rule of law is very weak in Myanmar. In Yangon, there are cases of rape that might happen in the middle of the road. Yet, if offenders give money to the police, they will not investigate them, and the case will be dismissed. If the victim is poor, the case can be dismissed even sooner (without prosecuting the offender).”*  
**Female Participant – 30 July**



In addition to the direct physical harm caused by sextortion, the threat of sextortion also poses significant hurdles to accessing services, as those who believe sex acts may be requested are less likely to attempt to access the services at all. Even allowing sextortion to continue at a low level can cause stress and anxiety for those seeking to access services, deterring access to government services. This not only makes government spending and programming less effective, broadly speaking, but it also targets the most vulnerable individuals in need of the services. Through this, sextortion can be perceived as further exacerbating economic and social inequalities and preventing substantive progress towards economic and social progress in Myanmar.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the FGDs convened by UNODC, it has become clear not only that steps should be taken to address the gendered impacts of corruption, but that efforts towards this will need to take a broad and crosscutting approach. The relationship between gender and corruption in Myanmar will not change in a substantive way unless broader social changes take place, including the empowerment of women, steps towards gender equality and a dehabitualisation of bribery when accessing public services. The findings of this brief will allow those implementing a range of policies and programmes to increasingly nuance their interventions by more deeply considering the gender-corruption nexus, thereby allowing them to be more effective and holistic than they may be otherwise. Beyond this, this brief's findings emphasise the urgent need to address both corruption and gender inequality in Myanmar, and the fact that they need to be addressed in parallel rather than as separate policy areas if meaningful and sustained improvement is to be seen.

**The relationship between gender and corruption in Myanmar will not change in a substantive way unless broader social changes take place, including the empowerment of women, steps towards gender equality and a dehabitualisation of bribery when accessing public services.**

More specifically—while further research is still needed to gain a comprehensive view of the links between gender and corruption in Myanmar—based on the completed FGDs, there are a number of actions which can be taken to directly mitigate the gendered impacts of corruption in Myanmar.

More specifically—while further research is still needed to gain a comprehensive view of the links between gender and corruption in Myanmar—based on the completed FGDs, there are a number of actions which can be taken to directly mitigate the gendered impacts of corruption in Myanmar.

In the short-term, these actions are:

- Distributing materials and organising training sessions to raise awareness of the gendered impacts of corruption for public servants and their family members, such as doctors, police, teachers, civil servants, etc.;
- Continuing tailored gender equality and anti-corruption campaigns to raise citizens' awareness of their right to access public and social services, with a focus on the most vulnerable populations; and
- Actively seeking to identify specific forms of corruption that particularly affect women and mainstreaming policies to address these in anti-corruption programming.

In the medium-term, these actions are:

- Advocating and providing technical support for collecting gender-disaggregated data into all corruption surveys and research;
- Providing technical support to integrate a gender lens into corruption risk assessments, especially in sectors such as education, health and law enforcement;
- Identifying civil society organisations (CSOs) working at the gender-corruption nexus in Myanmar and strategies for supporting and scaling up their work;

- Supporting the establishment of gender-sensitive reporting mechanisms for corruption, with a focus on ensuring physical and psychological safety for whistleblowers; and
- Conducting further research into the impacts of corruption on the LGBTIQ community, as well as bribe-seeking behaviour against women by those in positions of power, particularly as it relates to sextortion.

In the long-term, these actions are:

- Mainstreaming a gender perspective into the strategic framework of the Anti-Corruption Commission and other institutions involved in anti-corruption efforts; and
- Amending legal frameworks to better prevent and respond to the gendered impacts of corruption.

In summary, these recommendations represent a first attempt at developing a strategy to mitigate the gendered impacts of corruption. Adding additional nuance, as well as developing a broader framework for action, should be a primary focus, and therefore, in addition to the actions mentioned above, continued research into the gender-corruption nexus should be seen as a top priority. By developing more specific and actionable recommendations, resource mobilisation will become more realistic, as will communicating the significance of the interplay between gender and corruption to key stakeholders. Moving forward, gender must be a core part of discussions of corruption, and, while it may take some time, should be mainstreamed across anti-corruption activities and policies being implemented in Myanmar.

## Conclusion

A strong correlation between corruption and gender inequality has been shown through the findings of the FGDs, as women were reported, in both female and male focus groups, to be, on average, more regularly and more negatively affected by corruption than men. Specifically, three significant links between corruption and gender became apparent from this initial analysis:

- Women are more frequently exposed to corruption because of the gendered division of labour embedded in Myanmar culture. In particular, as education and healthcare are two sectors most often subject to corruption, and as women more frequently engage with these sectors as a result of their common role as caregivers, they are more often subjected to pressure to pay bribes and the consequences of this;
- Corruption reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes. Being considered by some as “weaker” and “submissive,” women are more likely to be extorted for bribes, or to be asked for larger payments compared to men; and
- Corruption can further take the form of sextortion, particularly for those who lack the funds to pay monetary bribes. While this form of corruption can impact anyone in Myanmar, it most regularly is directed towards women.

Also of note was the fact that high-level political dynamics and power relations were not emphasised by participants during the FGDs. Hence, further research will be valuable to explore whether this lack of discussion was a result of the demographics of the FGD, or other factors.

Furthermore, the FGDs made clear that as the result of intersectionality, corruption has more severe impacts, or is likely to have more severe impacts, on groups with multiple vulnerabilities, such as low-income women, the



LGBTIQ community, ethnic minorities and women with disabilities. Efforts to counteract corruption and to overcome gender inequality should therefore look to mitigate their impacts on these groups first to lessen corruption's most severe impacts. To this end, a number of concrete recommendations and areas for improvement have been identified as a result of the FGD process. The short-term recommendations in particular aim to address the most pressing concerns and the most severe impacts of corruption while further research is carried out.

Above all, this brief is a call to further and continued exploration of the gender-corruption nexus. By synthesising the preliminary findings of the links between corruption and gender, based on the 15 FGDs which were facilitated by UNODC through 2019, it has become apparent that the links between gender and corruption are significant. They also have multiple negative impacts on Myanmar, particularly through hindering its economic and social development. Additionally, these FGDs and this report have highlighted the importance of working towards reducing gender inequality and corruption in efforts to achieve SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. This brief should therefore serve as an inception point for continued thematic research at the nexus of gender and corruption in the future, rather than just a reference document. Through continued research and exploration of this topic, not only will more effective interventions and policies be formulated, but better and clearer tools will emerge, allowing the Government of Myanmar, civil society organisations and United Nations agencies to work more effectively, more efficiently and in a more crosscutting manner in the future.

**Above all, this brief is a call to further and continued exploration of the gender-corruption nexus.**

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**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific**

United Nations Building, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor B Block, Secretariat Building, Raj Damnern Nok Avenue, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Tel. (66-2) 288-2100 Fax. (66-2) 281-2129 E-mail: [unodc-thailandfieldoffice@un.org](mailto:unodc-thailandfieldoffice@un.org)

Website: <http://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific>

 Twitter: @UNODC\_SEAP