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## Role of women in fighting corruption

By [Rina Jimenez-David](#)  
[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#)

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Since emergence of women as a significant force in politics—how could they not be, being half of the world's population?—two questions have dominated the field of research on women and politics. These are: Are women more or less likely to be corrupt? And how does corruption impact women as a group?

A World Bank study conducted in 150 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia reveals that “there is a link between higher representation of women in government and lower levels of corruption.” In another study, conducted by Transparency International and covering 60,000 households in more than 60 countries, it was found that “women are less likely than men to pay bribes.”

But even as it would seem that women are less likely than men to engage in corruption (whether as bribe-takers or -givers), a United Nations Development Fund for Women (Unifem) study finds that “women are more vulnerable to the impact of corruption than men particularly in public service.” For instance, “as (those holding) primary (responsibility) for child care, women have greater needs in health services (and) are subjected to sexual extortion in lieu of bribes.”

The role of women, particularly women parliamentarians, in the fight against corruption is the focus of a session in the upcoming 5th International Conference of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (Gopac), which takes place here from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2.

Founded in 2002 as a result of a Global Conference in Ottawa, Canada, which brought together over 170 parliamentarians and 400 observers, the Gopac is “envisioned to be an international organization of parliamentarians dedicated to improving parliaments as institutions of oversight” and is represented by 35 countries in all regions of the world.

The Southeast Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption, founded in 2005, is headed by Sen. Edgardo Angara.

\* \* \*

But to return to our original questions: “Two important guiding issues on the linkages between gender and corruption,” say background materials on the Gopac meet, are: Does corruption impact men and women differently? Are women less corrupt than men in fighting corruption?

Although there is no definitive proof that women are less corrupt than men, what studies show is that “corruption can be particularly harsh on women.”

And one reason for this, says a study of the Democratic Governance Group, is that “corruption particularly harms poor sections of the population, (and since) women make up majority of the poor... (they) are likely to be affected more severely.”

Women often face social, cultural, political and institutional discrimination, it was pointed out. “Corruption can easily make it more difficult for women to access public goods and services.”

And so while our political institutions and systems are still dominated by men, cleaning up politics is as much a mission for women as it is for men. For with corruption, the lives of women and girls would be far worse, more difficult, and more unequal than it already is.

\* \* \*

Corruption is likewise a dominant issue—more so than at any other election year—at this time when incumbents and candidates are undergoing scrutiny from voters. One reason is that the Aquino administration has made its anti-corruption drive a centerpiece program, part of a long-term effort to reformat government so that it better serves the populace, with systems geared toward public service with a minimum of politics and favor-giving.

We already see the P-Noy administration going after alleged corruption in local government, including enforcing the suspension of Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia (who has since been replaced by an OIC governor), and launching a probe into the alleged involvement of Pangasinan Gov. Amado Espino Jr. in “jueteng” and drug smuggling.

Maybe the administration, through the Department of the Interior and Local Government, should also look into the situation in Lamitan, capital of the island-province of Basilan. The city’s vice mayor, Arleigh Eisma, has already filed a case with the Ombudsman against Mayor Roderick Furigay who, it is alleged, altered the city budget for 2012 without informing the city council about the changes.

Earlier, a case of technical malversation had been filed against Mayor Furigay, in connection with charges that he had “coerced” City Hall employees into signing papers authorizing the mayor to deduct amounts from their salaries.

Last November, Eisma, through his counsel, requested the Ombudsman to send a “special audit team” to Lamitan because the mayor has supposedly made the necessary records inaccessible to other city officials other than those identified with him. Once the special audit team is dispatched, Eisma promised, a “horde of witnesses” are willing to testify on the anomalies that the mayor is accused of.

\* \* \*

Among the charges being lodged against Mayor Furigay is that he has been “juggling” the amounts appropriated and approved by the council with items designated for such uses as a “sports festival,” for which no formal audit has been conducted.

Another issue raised against the mayor is the misuse of funds accessed through the USAID-funded “Growth with Equity in Mindanao” (GEM) program.

A total of P2.388 million was released for the construction of a boat landing in the barangay of Calugusan. But, says a “concerned citizen,” the public could hardly benefit from the boat landing as “the project was constructed in a privately owned area,” in a lot owned by no less than the mayor.

As the writer of the “special report” points out: “The economic benefits that shall be catalyzed through the (project) would benefit most the Mayor-owner of the land.” Now here’s something for the voters of Lamitan to ponder and weigh as they make their choices.

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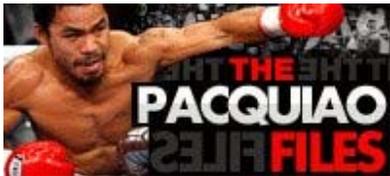
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