Are men more corrupt than women?

Manila will host the 5th International Conference of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), from Jan. 30-Feb. 2, 2013 at the PICC. GOPAC is an international network of lawmakers dedicated to fighting corruption and championing good governance.

The biennial conference brings together leaders, member-parliamentarians, prospective members, stakeholders and funders to inspire, educate and equip GOPAC Chapters in their fight against corruption. The 3-day event will be filled with workshops and talks from noted global speakers.

One of the most anticipated topics is “The Role of Women Parliamentarians in Fighting Corruption”. Speaking on the subject are Huguette Labelle, former Deputy Minister of various Canadian Government departments and current president of the Board of Transparency International and vice chair of the Senior Advisory Board of the International Anti-Corruption Academy; and Nurhayati Ali Assegaf, vice-chair of the Committee of Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation of the House of Representatives in Indonesia and an advocate of women’s empowerment and gender issues.

As we know very well, corruption knows no gender. Men and women alike are vulnerable to corruption. However in 2008, a UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) study observed that women are more intolerant of corruption. They are also more affected by venality in public service, particularly in developed regions and established democracies.

The UNDP/UNIFEM primer, "Corruption, Accountability and Gender: Understanding the connections" demonstrated that corruption is not gender-neutral in its workings or its effects: While individual women may not be less corrupt than individual men, when there is a critical mass of women (approximately 30 percent) in decision-making positions — policy, budget decisions and priorities often change in ways that benefit not just women, but communities as a whole.

World Bank’s 2001 report, “Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice”, also suggested that women were more likely than men to condemn bribery and express altruistic values in attitudinal surveys. It called for having more women in politics and labor, since they could be an effective force for good government and business trust.

From psychological and other analyses of gender differences in selfishness, research found a correlation between low levels of corruption and more women in government (Dollar et al, 1999). Swamy et al (2000) also concluded that in the short-to-medium-term, more women in public life would lower the level of tolerance for corruption. Torgler and Valev (2006) also determined that more women in public administration might help reduce the level of corruption.

Referenced data analysis showed that businesses owned or managed by men were more likely to give bribes than those by women. Likewise, cross-national comparisons showed that having more women in parliament or private management was correlated to lower levels or corruption.

But researcher Hung-en Sung (Fairer Sex or Fairer System? 2003) has challenged the idea that women inherently possess greater integrity than men. He posited an alternate hypothesis that a “fairer system” characterized by better governance and equal rights for women, explains why corruption is lower when more women are in government.

The study compared indicators of the “fair sex” hypothesis (i.e., women in parliament, ministerial and sub-ministerial positions) against measures of liberal democracy (i.e., rule of law, press freedom, and elections) for a sample of 99 countries.

Results showed that women in government and liberal democracy were significantly and inversely related to corruption when they were isolated from each other. But together, the effects of women’s political presence on corruption became insignificant, whereas liberal institutions remained very powerful predictors of low corruption.

Freedom of the press showed the strongest influence on corruption, followed by the rule of law. This underscores the urgency of the passage of the FOI bill. The gender-corruption link was refuted, while the liberal democracy hypothesis received strong empirical support.

A UNDP Asia-Pacific report (2008) on corruption also found no discernible reduction in corruption levels in countries that have been run by female presidents or prime ministers. Nine years under Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo attest to this.

Typically, corrupt activities may run in all-male networks due to patronage relationships or long-established political ties. As newcomers, women may be excluded from opportunities to benefit from unethical activities. Cultural limitations against interacting with non-kin men and having less access to organized corrupt dealings are also deterrents. The influx of new, outside non-participants may also have corruption-disrupting effects.
But evidence is mounting that when a significant portion of public office holders are women, gender equality issues that often include anti-corruption agendas, are brought into public deliberations. This is the result of achieving a critical mass of about one-third of an institution’s composition. A group no longer in the minority can begin taking action in their interests. (Dahlerup, 1988)

Another study of public-sector institutions in six developing and transition countries determined that when women make up less than 30 percent of public organizations, increasing the percentage reduces the severity of corruption. (Gokcekus and Mukherjee, 2002)

On its own, enhancing women’s political participation is an important goal. This implies that a policy to increase women front-liners in public service, while simultaneously addressing other determinants of good governance (e.g., transparency, political accountability, separation of powers and rule of law) — might help reduce corruption and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Throughout history, women have had fewer legal rights and career opportunities than men, including the right to vote and run for office. This was eventually given to women as early as 1776 in New Jersey, and as late as 2005 in Kuwait.

In South Africa, the proportion of women parliamentarians increased by 8 percent from 1998-2008, an increase of just 1 percent in the two decades after 1975, compared to the current global average of 18.4 percent.

Presently, there are 64 (22%) women out of 287 in the 15th Congress and 3 (12.5%) out of 24 in the Senate. Will corruption significantly decrease if women legislators increase to the crucial level of 30 percent? To prove this assumption, let’s elect the most deserving women candidates in 2013.

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