Summit for Democracy Cohort on Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Democracy Anti-Corruption

INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

Gender equality is an imperative for thriving democracies. Any effort to build strong democracies and inclusive institutions will be flawed if it excludes or marginalizes half the world's population. Countries where women prosper also tend to be healthier democracies.[1] Hence, empowering women and safeguarding democracy go together; gender equality is a prerequisite for inclusive democracy.

Around the world, gender equality and women's rights to participate in public life are being undermined by the same forces that are pushing back on democracy. For instance, gendered disinformation and online abuse against women in politics are increasingly used to erode the gains on gender equality, women's empowerment and democracy. Efforts towards more inclusive and equitable democracy are taking place but need to be strengthened and accelerated.

The recommendations of the Summit for Democracy's Gender Cohort, co-led by Sweden, Romania, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and International IDEA, provide suggestions to strengthen democracy by striving for gender equality. Considering the close link between gender equality, democracy and anti-corruption, we encourage the Republic of Korea to consider the outlined recommendations when hosting the upcoming regional event on uprooting corruption.

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[1]   "Exploring the Links between Women's Status and Democracy", Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2023. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/exploring-the-links-between-womens-status-anddemocracy/

GENDER & ANTI-CORRUPTION

Corruption undermines democracy and justice because it impedes the ability of the public to benefit fully from government institutions. Combating corruption requires a gender perspective in order to gain a full understanding of its scope and impact.[2] Women have unique (but not uniform) approaches to anti-corruption and are also impacted differently by corruption which drives inequalities and undermines opportunities for healthy democracies. Corruption "exacerbates… power dynamics, limiting women's access to public resources, information and decision-making, thus reinforcing social, cultural, and political discrimination."[3] Women tend to have fewer legal protections when it comes to marriage, custody, and inheritance, and are therefore more vulnerable to petty corruption—all of which can affect their ability to access services and participate in public life.

Corruption within political parties poses one of the most significant challenges to women's political participation and their ability to lead. Some of the ways it can manifest are through sexual bribery, physical and economic violence, and favouritism that helps maintain or bring family members of public officials to office while squeezing out other women candidates. Addressing corruption and a lack of transparency within political parties—the gatekeepers to elected office in most places in the world—is essential to increase accountability and build democratic resilience.

Democratic processes and anti-corruption efforts can be further strengthened by greater inclusion of women in public office who are associated with fighting corruption, particularly in public service delivery of health care or education. While women in politics are more likely to be targeted with sexual and gender-based violence, they are also more likely to address abuses of authority and sex being used as a currency of corruption.[4] While women's propensity to participate in corruption may be debated, it is certain that their public service diversifies voices in government, which can lead to policies and new solutions to persistent challenges. The following recommendations offer concrete actions to uproot corruption, promote gender equality and strengthen democratic resilience.

2   https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-link-between-corruption-and-gender-inequality-heavy-burden-for-development-and
3   https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-link-between-corruption-and-gender-inequality-heavy-burden-for-development-and
4   https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

Identify and address harmful and discriminatory gender norms and practices in political, legal and educational systems and processes.

- **Proposed action:** Develop public advocacy campaigns tailored for women/ girls and boys/men with messages to dismantle harmful stereotypes, elevate democratic ideals, and promote gender equality and shared decision making in both the private and public spheres. This includes campaigns to raise awareness about how corruption leads to abuses of power—including through sexual and gender-based violence—and undermines basic human rights.

Eliminate violence against women in politics (VAWIP) and address the proliferation of technology facilitated gender-based violence and abuse.

- **Proposed action:** Adopt legal standards on zero tolerance for all forms of gender-based violence including online and between/within political parties.
- **Proposed action:** In collaboration with social media companies, address technology facilitated gender-based violence and abuse, including sexual bribery, used to silence and extort women in politics and elected office. Increase coordination between online platforms and law enforcement entities in order to identify and respond to threats and hold perpetrators accountable.

Engage men and boys in transforming discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviours that prevent gender equality and women's political empowerment.

- **Proposed action:** Build the capacity of men and boys to become strategic allies and advocates for gender equality by challenging corruption and discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviors in societies, within organizations and political parties.

Foster conditions that promote women's political empowerment, leadership, and representation in decision-making.

- **Proposed action:** Support strategic networks and access to resources by earmarking funding for women's political empowerment and leadership programs; convene networks of women for mutual support and collaboration across political parties to promote opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and mentorship.
- **Proposed action:** Train elected women at all levels to recognize and address abuses of power and the improper use of resources by government officials to manipulate people, policies, institutions, or rules. Develop reporting and accountability mechanisms and strengthen protections for whistleblowers and women who come forward.
- **Proposed action:** Call upon political parties to adopt inclusive and transparent policies and practices to proactively support gender equality and combat corruption. This includes political parties adopting gender equality and anti-corruption commitments within policy frameworks and candidate lists that alternate men and women candidates to enable women to compete equally.

Implement policies and legal reforms for achieving gender equality in political and public life.

- **Proposed action:** Identify gaps in legislative frameworks to eliminate discriminatory laws and policies that allow for corruption, including addressing conflicts between formal laws and customary laws and practices.

Incorporate gender responsive planning and budgeting in policies and resources allocation.

- **Proposed action:** Create national systems to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data to inform policy decisions of national and local governments.
- **Proposed action:** Adopt gender budgeting to ensure that resources are equitably distributed and promote the empowerment of women and girls.

Leverage UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda to strengthen democratic processes and institutions.

- **Proposed action:** Integrate the WPS Agenda into post-conflict reconstruction and political transition processes to establish and strengthen democratic processes and institutions and good governance structures.

Work collaboratively to develop strategies and tools to mitigate risks to women politicians, human rights defenders, and civil society leaders.

- **Proposed action:** Partner with democratic governments, civil society, law enforcement, and women in politics to develop strategies to identify and respond to risks women face; tools to track and report threats and violent incidents; and rapid response plans.