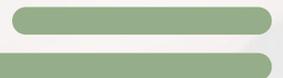




**WOMEN'S AWARENESS OF
ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES
IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE
IN LEBANON**



Women's Awareness of Anti-Corruption Measures in Local Governance in Lebanon

Authors:

Nada Anid

Founder, Executive Director

Rodolph Zgheib

Researcher, Project Coordinator

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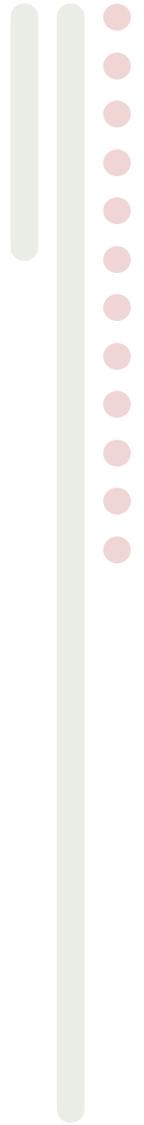


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Abstract

This study investigates women's awareness of anti-corruption measures in Lebanon's local governance structures, with a focus on their knowledge, perceptions, and challenges in combating corruption. The study stems from the recognition that systemic corruption in Lebanon undermines public trust, weakens governance, and disproportionately affects women, who are already marginalized in political and administrative roles. While Lebanon has adopted significant anti-corruption laws such as the Public Procurement Law (2021), the Access to Information Law (2017), and the Whistleblower Protection Law (2018), their impact has been hindered by limited awareness, insufficient enforcement, and structural barriers within municipal councils. These challenges are compounded by the ongoing political and economic crisis, lack of funding, the effects of the latest war on Lebanon, and the frequent postponement of elections, all of which have weakened the capacity of municipal councils to effectively implement these reforms and foster transparency.

Through a mixed-methods approach that includes a desk review, quantitative surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs), this study explores the current landscape of women's participation in municipal governance and their ability to leverage accountability measures. Key findings from the desk review reveal that although women's representation in municipal councils has slightly improved, their roles remain confined to supportive functions rather than leadership positions. Institutional gaps, cultural stereotypes, and a lack of gender-sensitive capacity-building programs further constrain their ability to address corruption effectively.

Survey data will provide insights into women's familiarity with anti-corruption laws and their usage of reporting mechanisms, while FGDs and KIIs will delve deeper into women's perceptions of corruption, challenges in reporting it, and the resources they require to play a more active role in governance. This report also highlights the importance of community engagement, targeted awareness programs, and legal literacy to enhance women's participation in municipal accountability.

By identifying critical knowledge gaps and proposing actionable recommendations, this study aims to strengthen women's roles in promoting transparency and accountability in local governance.

It underscores the need for gender-sensitive anti-corruption strategies that empower women in leadership positions, advance equitable governance practices, and ensure that anti-corruption frameworks are implemented effectively within Lebanon's municipal system, especially in preparation for the municipal elections in May 2025.



The intersection of gender, governance, and anti-corruption efforts is a growing area of concern in Lebanon, where systemic corruption and patriarchal social norms combine to marginalize women in decision-making roles. Women in Lebanon's local governance structures face unique challenges, including limited representation in municipal councils, lack of institutional support, and deeply entrenched cultural stereotypes.¹ Despite recent improvements, women's participation in municipal governance remains largely symbolic, confined to supportive roles rather than decision-making positions. In the 2016 municipal elections, women accounted for only 5.6% of the elected officials. This imbalance perpetuates a system where corruption thrives, accountability is undermined, and women are excluded from meaningful contributions to governance.²

Since 2016, Lebanon has not held municipal elections, with successive postponements worsening the state of local governance. Originally scheduled for 2022, municipal elections have been delayed for two consecutive years, exacerbating administrative stagnation and further weakening public trust in local institutions. This prolonged extension has left many municipalities in a state of dysfunction, hindering service delivery and deepening governance challenges.³

Corruption within municipal councils is a pervasive issue that erodes trust in public institutions and impedes sustainable development. Reports by Transparency International and the Lebanese Transparency Association (2020) highlight the prevalence of corruption in local governance, particularly in the mismanagement of public funds, opaque procurement practices, and weak enforcement of accountability measures.⁴ Recognizing these challenges, Lebanon has enacted several anti-corruption laws, including the Public Procurement Law (2021), which seeks to standardize procurement procedures, the Access to Information Law (2017), which promotes transparency by granting citizens access to public records, and the Whistleblower Protection Law (2018), which offers safeguards for individuals reporting corruption. However, these legal frameworks remain underutilized due to inadequate implementation and limited awareness, especially among women in municipal roles.⁵

Gendered perceptions of corruption further complicate the issue. Research suggests that women in governance roles often have lower tolerance for corruption and advocate for stronger accountability measures, yet they encounter unique barriers, such as societal stigma, restricted access to resources, and limited political backing (IFES, 2020). Women's awareness of and access to legal anti-corruption mechanisms is critical to fostering equitable governance and promoting accountability.⁶

This study builds on existing literature to assess women's knowledge of anti-corruption measures and their capacity to address corruption within municipal councils across Lebanon. It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, quantitative surveys, FGDs, and KIIs, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities for women in local governance. The findings aim to inform targeted capacity-building programs, enhance gender-sensitive anti-corruption practices, and advance women's leadership roles in municipal governance. By addressing the gaps in awareness and implementation of anti-corruption measures, this report contributes to broader efforts to promote transparency, equity, and good governance in Lebanon.

1. UN Women. *Women's Representation in Local Governance: Challenges and Opportunities in Lebanon* (2022).

2. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Women in municipal elections 2016: Key results*. United Nations Development Programme (2016).

3. Lebanon Postpones Local Elections by a Year to Avoid More Paralysis," *Reuters*, (2023).

4. Transparency International & Lebanese Transparency Association. *Building integrity and national accountability in Lebanon* (2020).

5. Transparency International Association. *Lebanon: Overview of corruption and anti corruption* (2022).

6. IFES. *Identity and Politics in Lebanon: Barriers to Women's Participation in Governance* (2020).



The intersection of gender, governance, and anti-corruption efforts has become a focal point for various studies, highlighting women's roles and the barriers they face in addressing corruption in local governance. This desk review provides an overview of existing literature on Lebanese municipal governance, anti-corruption measures, and the impact of gender in this sector. The findings from this review will serve as a foundation for developing activities and refining approaches in the project.

a. Key themes and findings

1. Women in local governance

Several studies have addressed women's limited yet evolving participation in Lebanon's local governance. Research indicates that although women's representation in municipal councils has improved over recent years, their roles remain predominantly supportive rather than decision-making. Important reports:

- **UN Women (2021):** This report analyzes women's representation in local councils and highlights obstacles, such as cultural stereotypes and lack of institutional support, that hinder women's participation in governance.⁷
- **IFES Identity and Politics in Lebanon (2020):** Focuses on barriers to women's effective participation in decision-making within municipalities and suggests capacity-building efforts to increase gender-inclusive practices in local governance.⁸

2. Anti-corruption measures in Lebanon

Relevant laws:

- **Municipal law (Decree-Law No. 118/1977):** Governs the roles and powers of municipal councils. The law does not explicitly address corruption but includes provisions for local governance responsibilities.⁹
- **Public procurement law (Law No. 244/2021):** Enacted to standardize procurement procedures and reduce corruption, particularly at the municipal level, ensuring fair and transparent access to public contracts.¹⁰
- **Access to information law (Law No. 28/2017):** A milestone in promoting transparency, allowing citizens, including municipal employees, to request information from public institutions. However, implementation has been slow and inconsistent across municipalities.¹¹
- **Whistleblower protection law (Law No. 83/2018):** Offers protection to individuals reporting corruption, yet awareness remains limited, especially at the municipal level, due to insufficient training and knowledge.¹²

3. Gender and corruption perception

Gender-specific studies on corruption suggest that women and men often perceive corruption differently, affecting their engagement and strategies for tackling it. Studies have shown that women in governance roles often advocate for stronger anti-corruption measures, although they face unique challenges such as societal stigma and limited political support.¹³

7. UN Women. *Women's Representation in Local Governance: Challenges and Opportunities in Lebanon* (2022).

8. IFES. *Identity and Politics in Lebanon: Barriers to Women's Participation in Governance* (2020).

9. Ministry of Interior and Municipalities. *Municipal act (English)* (n.d).

10. Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan. *Public procurement law in Lebanon: Presentation* (2021).

11. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS). *Access to information in Lebanon: The law and its implementation* (n.d).

12. National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC). *Access to Information Law No. 28/2017* (2023).

13. UN Women Lebanon. *Women at the table: Report* (2022).

4. Accountability mechanisms in Lebanese municipalities

Effective accountability in Lebanese municipalities is undermined by low institutional capacity, unclear reporting channels, and weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Reports by Transparency International and the Lebanese Transparency Association emphasize the need for targeted awareness programs and training for municipal officials, especially women, to better utilize anti-corruption measures.¹⁴ These challenges are further compounded by the postponement of municipal elections, which, according to a 2024 Carnegie Endowment analysis, have stalled political renewal and reform due to mistrust among the political elite.¹⁵ Additionally, intensified hostilities since October 2023 have disrupted women's livelihoods and increased their vulnerabilities, as highlighted by a Gender Alert from UN Women. This dual crisis has particularly impacted women activists, hindering their ability to lead and engage effectively in local governance.¹⁶

b. Gaps and Areas for Focus

- **Awareness of legal frameworks:** While laws exist, their implementation is hindered by limited awareness, particularly among women in local governance.
- **Capacity building for female municipal leaders:** Providing training for women on utilizing legal mechanisms and reporting tools could foster greater accountability, while ensuring their active engagement in all commissions (such as procurement, planning, and budgeting) to prevent the relegation of women to stereotypical roles.
- **Community engagement:** Public awareness of municipal accountability and anti-corruption practices can reinforce institutional efforts, especially in areas where cultural barriers exist.

c. Recommendations for the project

- **Targeted capacity building:** Based on the desk review findings, focus group discussions (FGDs) and awareness sessions should emphasize the practical application of relevant laws, particularly for women in municipal roles and to encourage potential candidates to run.
- **Inclusive data collection:** Ensuring balanced participation across the selected districts can provide a nuanced understanding of how women perceive and approach accountability.
- **Knowledge gaps and training needs:** The survey should aim to identify specific knowledge gaps regarding anti-corruption laws, guiding future training sessions.
- **Dissemination of findings:** Ensure that final reports highlight region-specific recommendations to promote stakeholder engagement.

The reviewed literature underscores the importance of equipping women in local governance roles with the knowledge and tools necessary to address corruption effectively. This desk review will guide the subsequent activities, informing a framework to promote gender-sensitive anti-corruption measures and reinforce accountability within Lebanon's local governance structures.

14. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP). *Local governance in Lebanon: The great mirage* (2023).

15. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *Delaying Lebanon's municipal elections again* (2024).

16. UN Women. *Women share stories of crisis and displacement in Lebanon* (2024).



The methodology aims to assess women's awareness of anti-corruption measures in local governance across seven districts in Lebanon. The study will combine qualitative and quantitative research methods, including a survey, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs), to gather comprehensive data from women in municipal roles and other key stakeholders. This mixed-methods approach will ensure a thorough understanding of current knowledge levels, perceptions, and challenges regarding anti-corruption.

a. Quantitative Survey

- **Purpose:** To measure the knowledge of men and women involved in local governance roles on anti-corruption laws and mechanisms. The survey will also help identify awareness gaps between genders, enhancing the depth of gender-based analysis.
- **Sample Size:** 200 respondents, with equal representation of men and women where possible.
- **Distribution method:** The survey was distributed online, with a web link shared via emails, WhatsApp, or local networks to facilitate accessibility.
- **Survey content:**
 - **Demographics:** Age, gender, role in municipal governance, years of experience.
 - **Regions:** Akkar, Minieh-Danniyeh, Tripoli, Zgharta, Bsharri, Batroun, Koura, Baabda, Aley, Metn, Keserwan, Chouf, Jbeil, Beirut, Zahle, West Bekaa, Rachaya, Baalbek, Hermel, Sidon, Jezzine, Tyre, Nabatieh, Marjeyoun, Bint Jbeil, Hasbaya
 - **Knowledge and awareness:** Familiarity with laws such as the Public Procurement Law, Access to Information Law, and Whistleblower Protection Law.
 - **Perceptions of corruption:** Understanding of what constitutes corruption, its prevalence, and perceived barriers to reporting.
 - **Use of accountability channels:** Awareness of reporting mechanisms and any previous usage or experiences.
- **Data analysis:** Responses have been analyzed statistically, comparing knowledge levels and experiences across demographics, particularly gender differences.

b. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

- **Purpose:** To gain expert perspectives on anti-corruption practices within local governance and barriers to implementing accountability measures.
- **Participants:** 6 KIIs with local governance decision-makers, municipal and former council members, and experts in anti-corruption and governance.
- **Interview content:**
 - **Effectiveness of anti-Corruption laws:** Participants' views on the efficacy of existing laws and measures within municipal structures.
 - **Barriers to transparency:** Insights on institutional challenges and resource limitations that hinder accountability.
 - **Recommendations for improvement:** Suggestions on capacity-building efforts and policy changes needed to empower women in governance roles.
- **Data analysis:** Transcripts will be coded to extract themes and insights related to existing accountability practices and barriers within the municipal system.

c. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

- **Purpose:** To explore in-depth perceptions, challenges, and recommendations related to women's awareness of anti-corruption measures.
- **Participants:** Four FGDs, each with up to 10 women who are actively engaged in municipal councils across the target districts.
- **Topics covered:**
 - **Awareness of anti-corruption laws:** Participants' understanding of specific laws (e.g., Public Procurement Law, Access to Information Law).
 - **Challenges in reporting corruption:** Discussion on institutional, social, or cultural challenges they face in utilizing anti-corruption measures.
 - **Suggestions for capacity building:** Areas where women feel additional training or support is needed to enhance their role in promoting transparency.
- **Data collection:** FGDs will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, and key insights will be categorized by themes.
- **Analysis:** Thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, unique challenges, and specific regional or role-based differences.

IV. RESULTS



The results of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of men and women involved in local governance in Lebanon regarding anti-corruption measures. By employing a multi-method approach, quantitative surveys, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the study examines awareness gaps, barriers, and capacity-building needs. These findings shed light on regional and gender-based variations, uncovering critical insights to inform strategies for empowering local governance actors, particularly women, to enhance transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption efforts across Lebanon.

a. Survey

This study incorporates a quantitative survey designed to measure the knowledge of men and women involved in local governance roles regarding anti-corruption laws and mechanisms. The survey aims to uncover awareness gaps between genders, providing critical insights to enhance gender-based analysis and inform future capacity-building initiatives.

A total of 200 respondents participated in the survey, with efforts made to achieve equal representation of men and women. The survey was distributed online, ensuring accessibility through emails, WhatsApp, and local networks. Participants were drawn from various regions across Lebanon, including Akkar, Minieh-Danniyeh, Tripoli, Zgharta, Bsharri, Batroun, Koura, Baabda, Aley, Metn, Keserwan, Chouf, Jbeil, Beirut, Zahle, West Bekaa, Rachaya, Baalbek, Hermel, Sidon, Jezzine, Tyre, Nabatieh, Marjeyoun, Bint Jbeil, and Hasbaya.

The collected data has been analyzed statistically, with a focus on identifying trends, regional variations, and gender differences in knowledge and experiences. These findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how to address gaps in awareness and empower local governance actors to combat corruption more effectively.

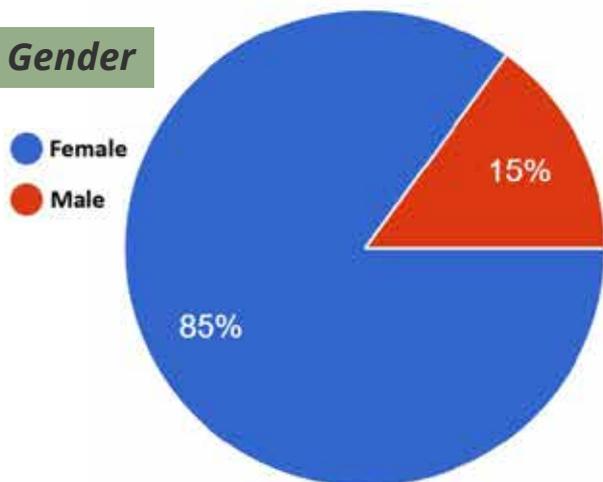
Section 1: Demographic information

The participants were geographically distributed across all districts of Lebanon, ensuring nationwide representation and a mix of rural and urban perspectives, representing a broad age range, with diverse educational levels and years of experience in municipal work.

The majority identified specific tasks related to their roles, such as Vice Presidents of municipalities, Municipal Council members, potential candidates, administrative staff, engineers, financial officers, and police officers. Others were members or leaders of committees focused on environment, women empowerment, youth, culture, and social development. Many respondents were active in community service, volunteering in crises, organizing social and cultural events, and leading developmental and environmental projects. Additionally, some served in oversight roles, ensuring transparency in municipal operations, while others facilitated communication with NGOs and supported public awareness and training initiatives.

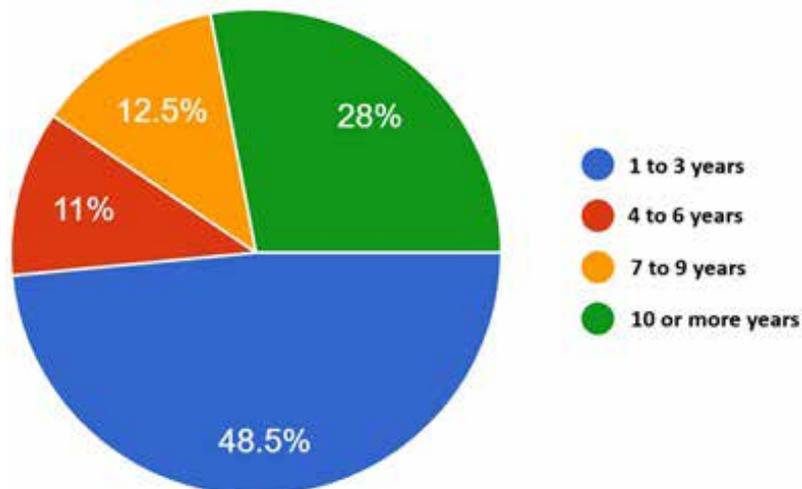
The roles reflect a broad spectrum of responsibilities, demonstrating the participants' active contributions to local governance and community development.

Gender



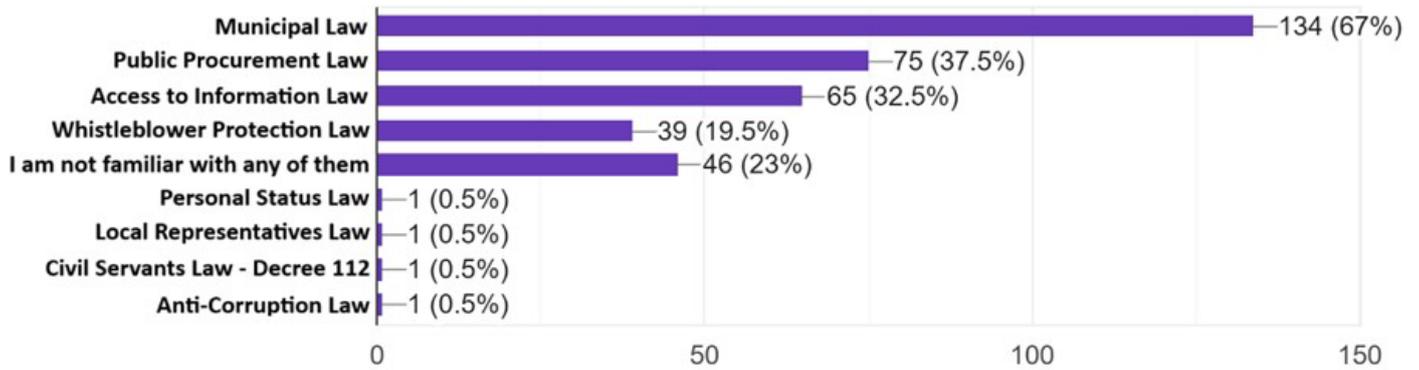
Despite efforts to ensure broad participation, only **15%** of respondents were **male**, while **85%** were **female**. This significant gender imbalance was primarily attributed to a lack of interest among male stakeholders, particularly in engaging with questions that explored the roles and contributions of women in anti-corruption efforts and the importance of inclusive governance practices. This resistance to participate in these specific areas of inquiry raises concerns about potential gender biases and a limited understanding of the importance of diverse perspectives in addressing these critical issues.

Years of experience in this role



48.5% of municipal workers have only 1 to 3 years of experience, reflecting a predominantly early-career workforce. This trend is largely due to the prolonged postponement of municipal elections since 2016, which has hindered institutional continuity and the accumulation of mid-level experience. As a result, a significant portion of experienced professionals, **28%** have 10 or more years of experience, having entered the sector before the electoral delays. Meanwhile, smaller groups have 7 to 9 years (**12.5%**) and 4 to 6 years (**11%**) of experience, further illustrating the gap in mid-career professionals caused by the ongoing electoral stagnation.

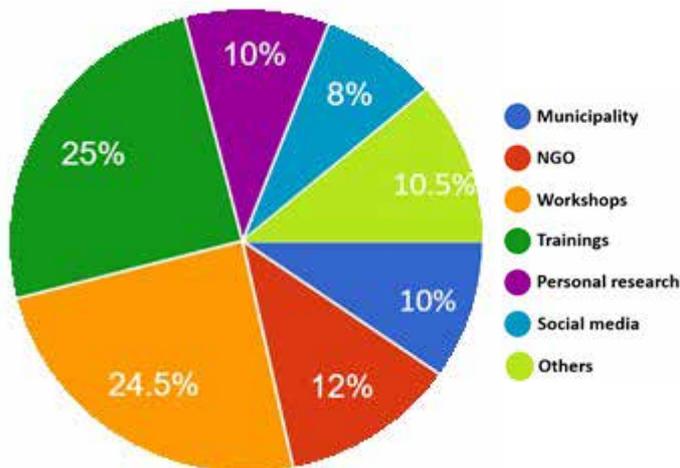
Laws that participants are familiar with



67% of participants are familiar with the Municipal Law, making it the most recognized. This is followed by the Public Procurement Law (37.5%) and Access to Information Law (32.5%), showing moderate awareness. Familiarity drops significantly for the Whistleblower Protection Law (19.5%), while 23% are not familiar with any of the listed laws. Other laws, including the Personal Status Law, Local Representatives Law, Civil Servants Law (Decree 112), and Anti-Corruption Law, show minimal recognition at just 0.5% each. These findings highlight a need for increased legal awareness, particularly in areas related to transparency and anti-corruption.

Section 2: Awareness of laws and practices

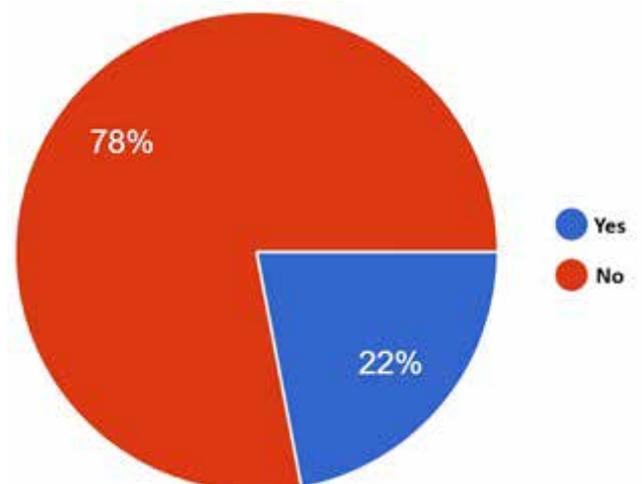
Ways of learning about these laws



Training (25%) and workshops (24.5%) were the primary sources of knowledge. Other notable sources include personal research (10%), municipalities (10%), and social media (8%). Additionally, NGOs contributed to 12% of awareness, while other sources, such as university studies, accounted for 10.5%. These results highlight the importance of structured learning opportunities, like workshops and training, in building participants' legal awareness. It is important to note that many of these trainings and workshops are offered by NGOs, emphasizing their critical role in fostering legal and civic education within communities.

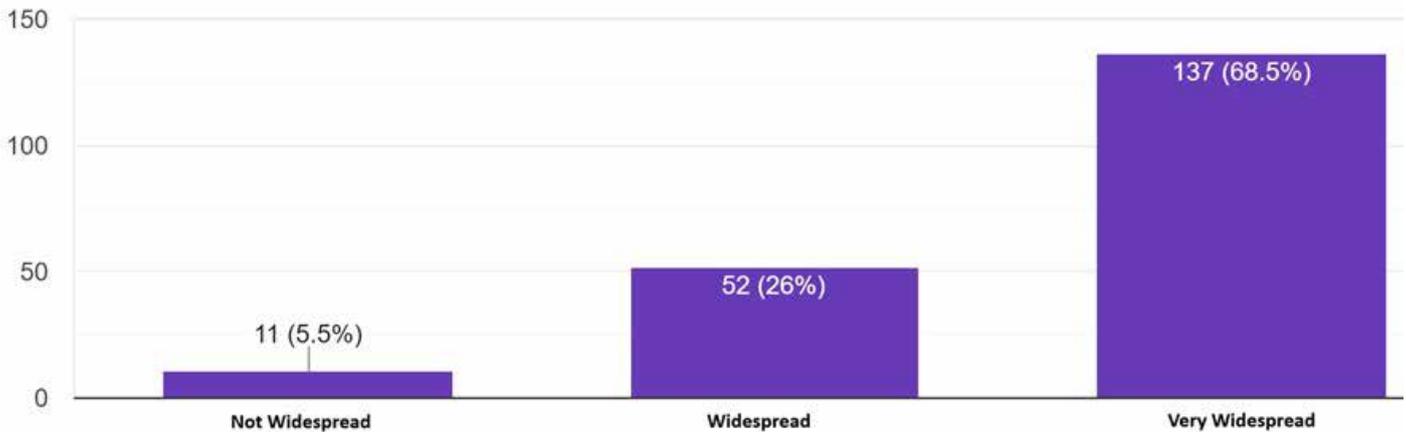
Awareness of anti-corruption measures in the municipal council

78% of participants are unaware of any specific anti-corruption measures being implemented in their municipal councils. Only 22% reported being aware of such measures, highlighting a considerable gap in communication or implementation of anti-corruption initiatives at the municipal level. This underscores the need for greater transparency and awareness regarding anti-corruption efforts within local governance.



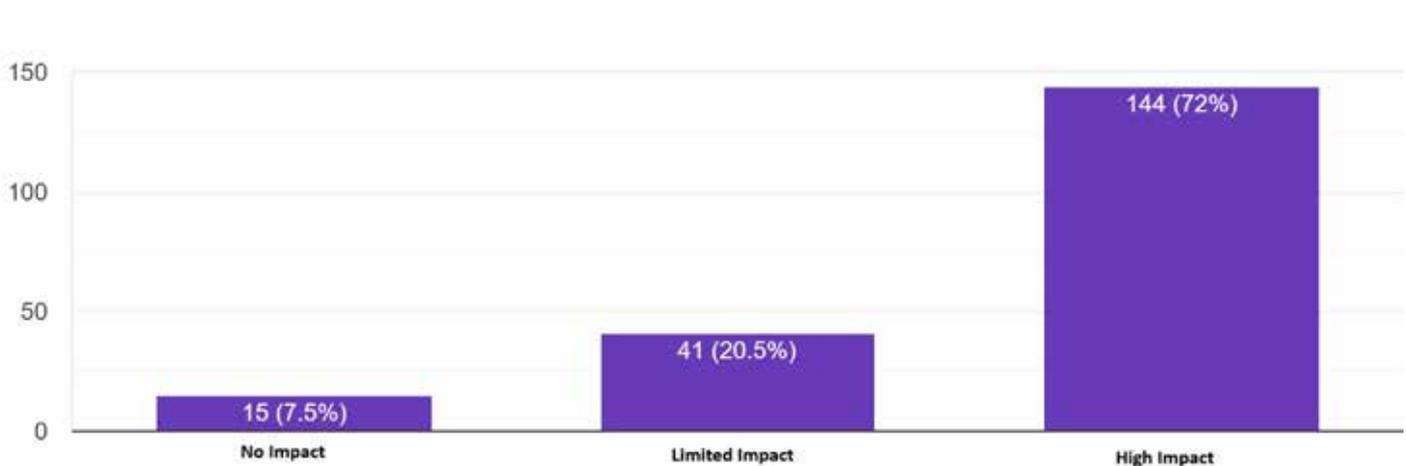
Section 3: Forms and impact of corruption

The prevalence of corruption in local governance



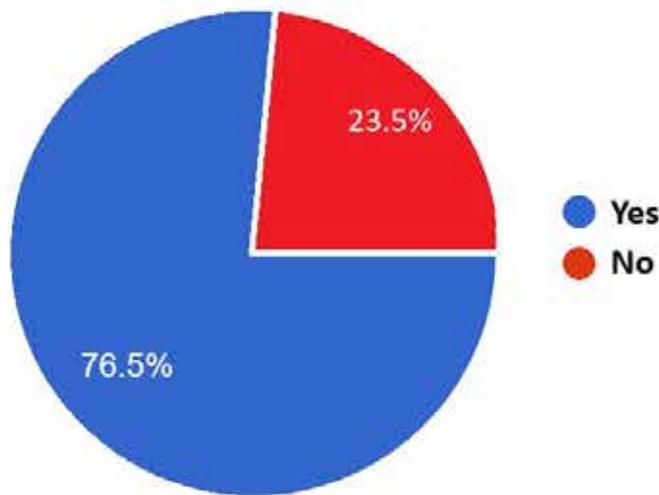
A significant majority of respondents, **68.5%**, believe that corruption is very widespread, while **26%** consider it widespread. Only a small percentage, **5.5%**, feel that corruption is not widespread. This suggests that most participants view corruption as a pervasive issue at the local governance level, which could point to concerns about transparency, accountability, and the overall effectiveness of governance in the surveyed area. The high percentage of respondents who see corruption as a major problem highlights the need for potential reforms and actions to address these concerns.

The impact of corruption on decision-making in the municipal council



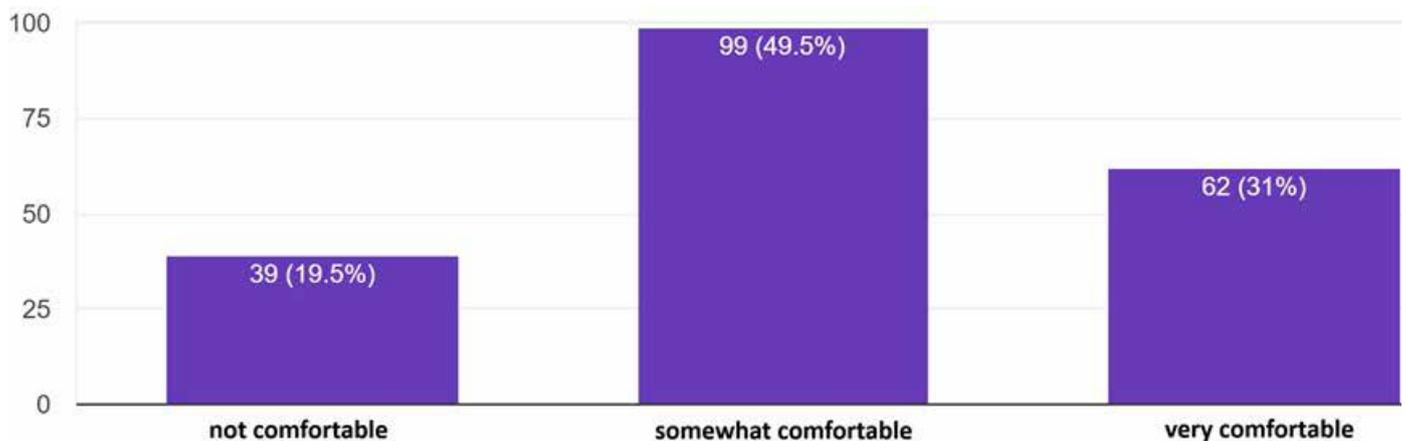
72%, believe that corruption has a significant impact on decision-making in their council, highlighting the extent to which it is perceived as influencing governance. **20.5%** of respondents feel that the impact is limited, while only **7.5%** think that corruption has **no impact** at all. This indicates that corruption is widely seen as a serious obstacle to effective decision-making, further reinforcing concerns about governance transparency and integrity.

Women's role in addressing and recognizing corruption



76.5%, believe that women play a role in addressing or recognizing corruption, suggesting a strong perception of women's potential influence in tackling this issue. Meanwhile, **23.5%** do not share this belief, possibly reflecting differing views on the societal or institutional roles of women in combating corruption, or not seeing it from a gender equality perspective; meaning it should not be solely women's responsibility. The results highlight the importance of considering gender-specific perspectives and contributions when developing anti-corruption strategies.

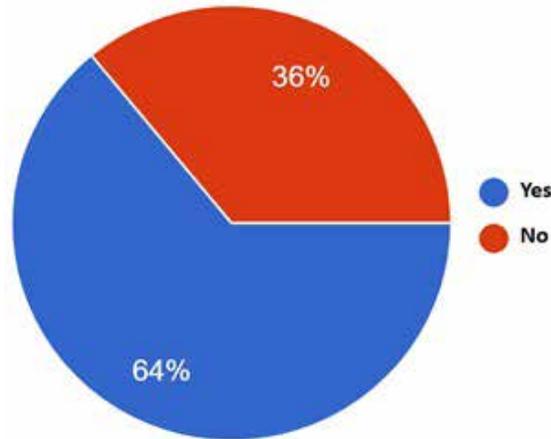
Comfort level in discussing corruption issues with colleagues or supervisors



49.5%, feel somewhat comfortable discussing corruption-related issues, indicating a moderate level of openness in addressing this sensitive topic. Meanwhile, **31%** feel very comfortable, showing a smaller but significant group that perceives a safe environment for such discussions. However, **19.5%** of respondents are not comfortable addressing these issues, highlighting potential barriers such as fear of reprisal, lack of trust, cultural stigmas around discussing corruption, or the perception that corruption is pervasive and reporting it could lead to retaliation or "snitching".

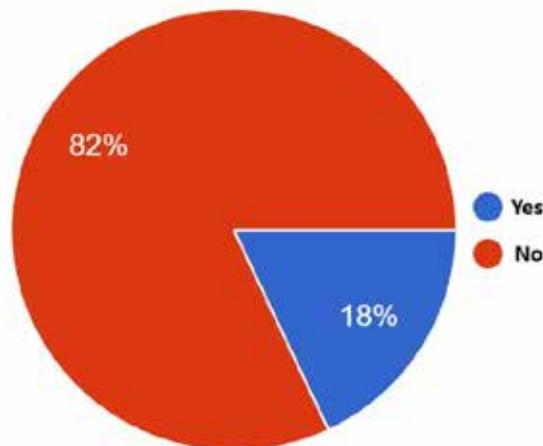
Section 4: Use of anti-corruption channels

Witnessing or suspecting corruption in the municipal workplace



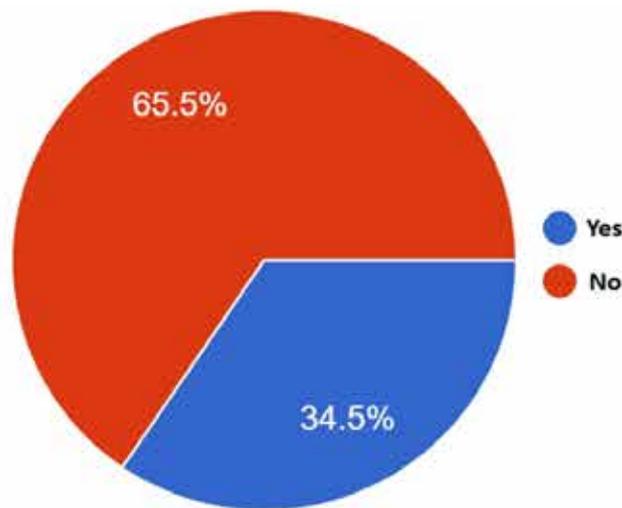
64%, reported having either witnessed or suspected corruption in their municipal workplace, indicating that corruption is a perceived or observed issue for many respondents. Conversely, 36% stated that they have not encountered or suspected corruption, suggesting that their perception of corruption may not be clear or well-defined. This could indicate a lack of awareness about what constitutes corrupt practices or a limited ability to recognize them. These findings emphasize the need for stronger transparency and accountability measures within municipal workplaces, coupled with efforts to improve understanding of corruption and its various forms.

Effectiveness of current channels for combating corruption



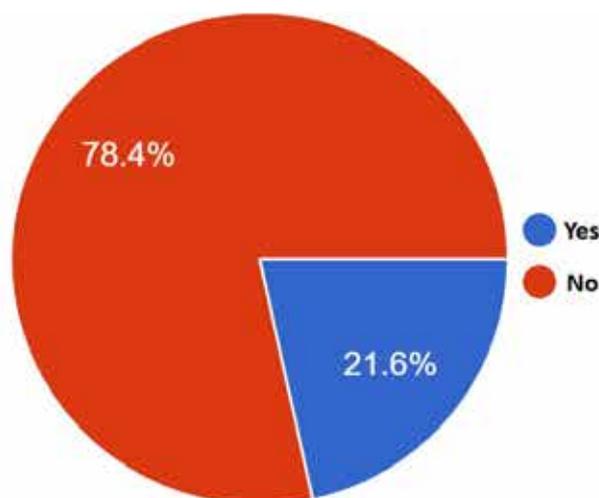
82%, believe that the current channels for combating corruption are **not effective**, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with existing mechanisms. Only 18% view these channels as effective, indicating a lack of confidence in their ability to address corruption issues. This suggests the need for significant reforms, enhanced transparency, and more robust anti-corruption frameworks to restore trust in these systems.

Awareness of mechanisms for reporting corruption in the municipal council



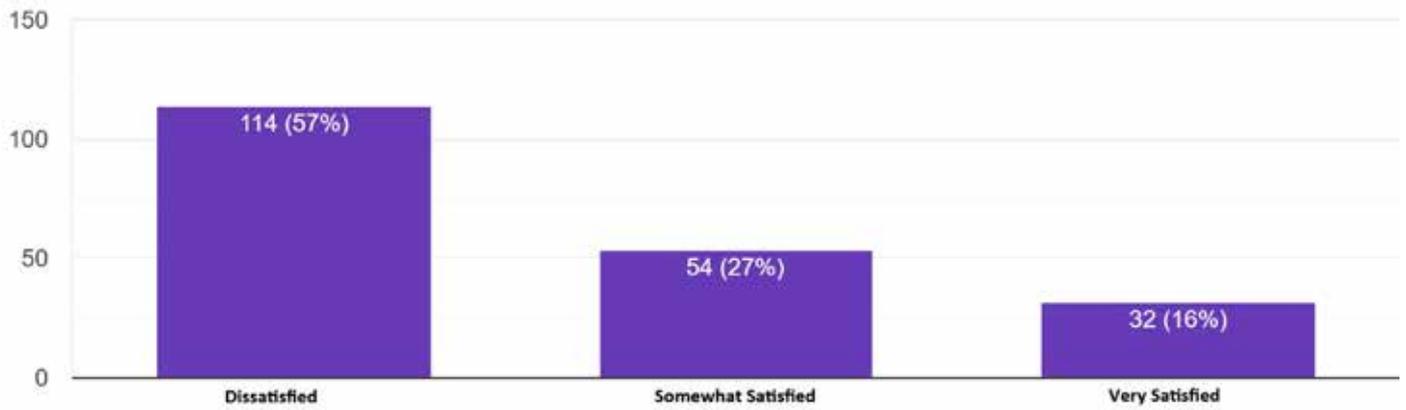
65.5%, are unaware of any mechanisms for reporting corruption in their municipal council, indicating a significant gap in communication and accessibility of such systems. Only **34.5%** are aware of reporting mechanisms, which suggests that even when mechanisms exist, they may not be effectively promoted or accessible to all. This highlights the need for increased awareness campaigns and improved transparency to ensure that reporting systems are known, trusted, and utilized.

Utilization of anti-corruption measures by aware individuals



78.4% who are aware of the mechanisms for reporting corruption have not used them, suggesting that despite awareness, these mechanisms are not being actively utilized. On the other hand, **21.6%** of those aware of the mechanisms have used them, which could indicate a lack of confidence, fear of retaliation, or belief that the system is ineffective. This highlights the importance of strengthening trust in the reporting systems to encourage greater participation and effectiveness.

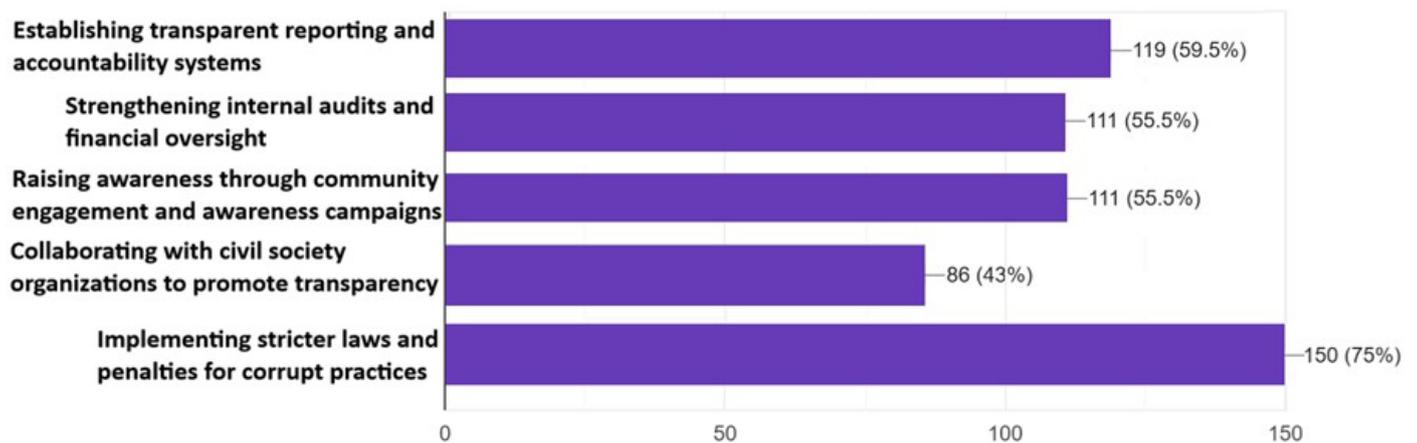
Satisfaction with the outcome of reporting corruption



57%, are **dissatisfied** with the outcome of their corruption reports, indicating a significant lack of effectiveness or follow-through on reported cases. A smaller group, **27%**, are **somewhat satisfied**, while only **16%** are **very satisfied**. These results point to the need for improvements in the responsiveness, transparency, and effectiveness of corruption reporting systems to ensure that individuals feel their reports lead to meaningful action.

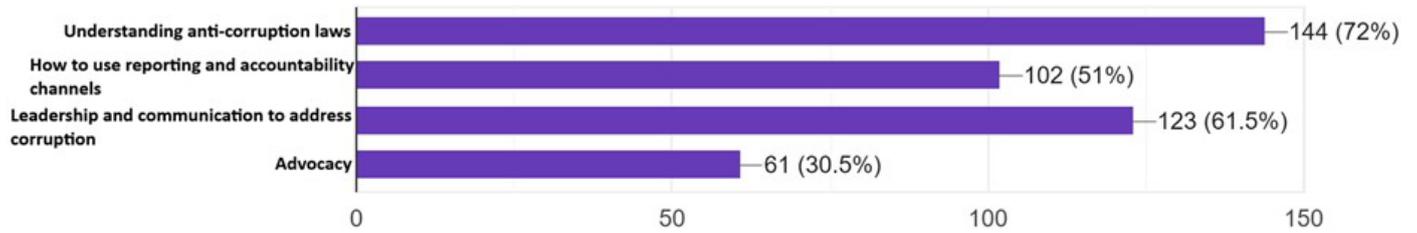
Section 5: Capacity-building needs

Most effective tools or strategies for addressing corruption



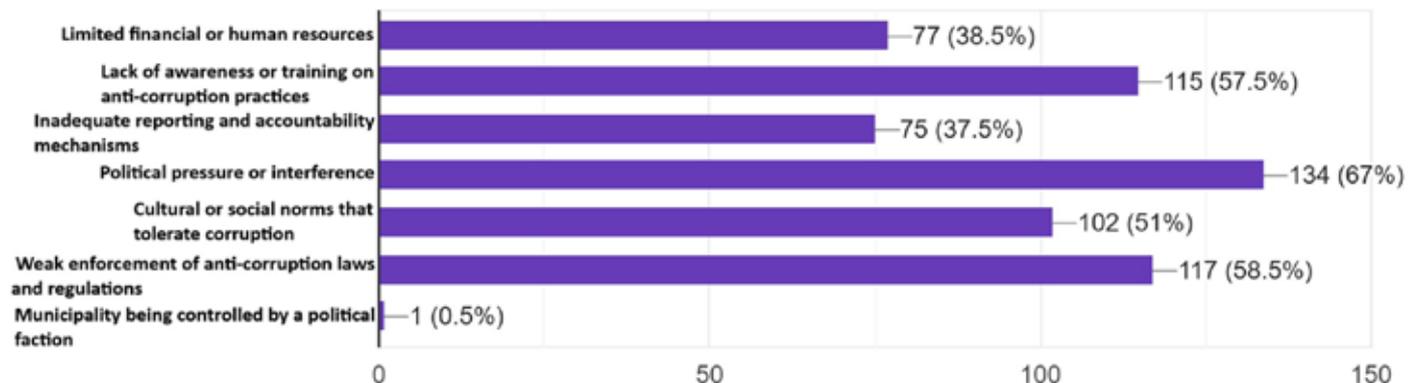
75%, is the implementation of stricter laws and penalties for corrupt practices, highlighting a desire for more severe consequences to deter corruption. Other prominent strategies include establishing transparent reporting systems (**59.5%**) and strengthening audits and financial oversight (**55.5%**), both of which focus on improving accountability and transparency. Raising awareness through community engagement also receives significant support (**55.5%**), alongside collaboration with civil society organizations (**43%**), which underscores the importance of collective efforts in addressing corruption. These findings suggest that respondents prioritize both legal measures and structural reforms to combat corruption effectively.

Key areas for training to address corruption



72% highlighted the importance of understanding anti-corruption laws, reflecting the need for a strong legal foundation to empower municipal members and activists alike to identify and address corruption effectively. Leadership and communication skills were emphasized by **61.5%**, underscoring the value of equipping both groups to lead and facilitate discussions on combating corruption. Training on using reporting and accountability channels (**51%**) also ranked highly, showcasing the necessity of practical knowledge for municipal members and activists to utilize existing mechanisms efficiently. Finally, advocacy (**30.5%**) was considered less critical but still relevant, as it focuses on influencing broader systemic change. These findings highlight the need for tailored capacity-building programs that combine legal, practical, and soft skills training for municipal members and activists to promote transparency and accountability in local governance.

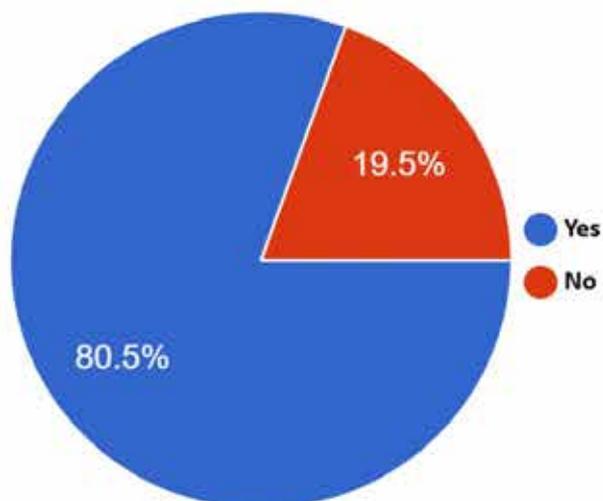
Challenges in implementing anti-corruption measures in municipalities



67%, is **political pressure or interference**, reflecting the pervasive influence of politics on municipal operations. **Weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws (58.5%)** and **lack of awareness or training (57.5%)** are also major obstacles, highlighting gaps in both implementation and capacity-building. Cultural or social norms that tolerate corruption (**51%**) further complicate efforts to address the issue. Other notable barriers include **limited resources (38.5%)** and **inadequate mechanisms for reporting and accountability (37.5%)**. Interestingly, only **0.5%** identified municipal control by a political faction as a challenge, possibly indicating that respondents view broader systemic issues as more pressing.

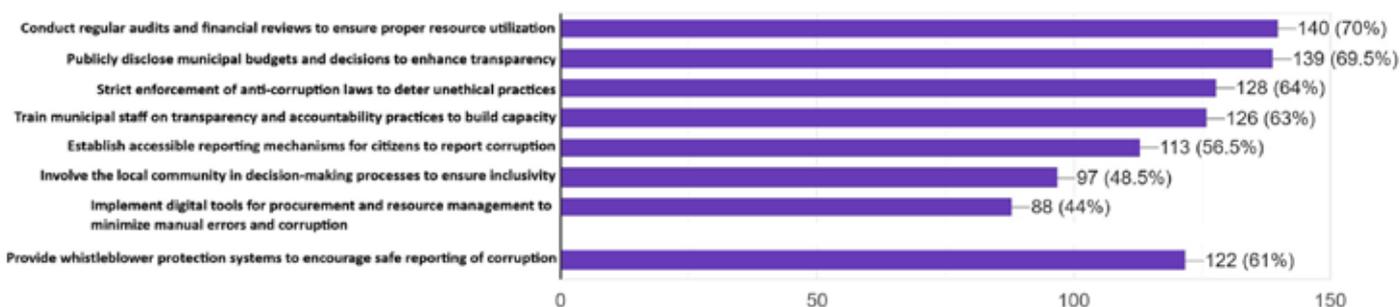
Section 6: Suggestions and recommendations

Impact of inclusive decision-making on reducing corruption



80.5% believe that **increasing inclusivity in decision-making positions** can contribute to reducing corruption. This indicates a widespread perception that diversifying decision-making structures whether through greater representation, transparency, or checks and balances can curb corrupt practices. However, a minority **19.5%** are skeptical, possibly due to concerns about the potential for new decision-makers to perpetuate existing systems or the challenges of effectively implementing such changes.

Measures to improve anti-corruption efforts in local governance

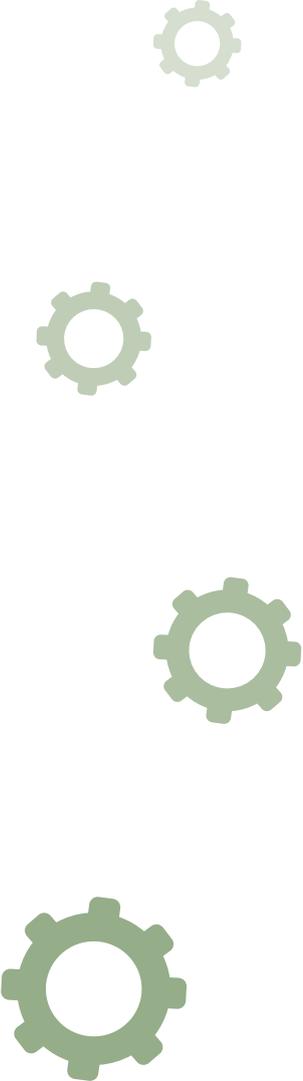


70%, is the **implementation of regular audits and financial reviews**, underscoring the importance of consistent oversight. Close behind, **public disclosure of municipal budgets and decisions (69.5%)** reflects a clear demand for transparency. The **strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws (64%)** and **training for municipal staff (63%)** highlight a dual focus on legal measures and capacity building. Other noteworthy suggestions include **whistleblower protection (61%)** and **accessible reporting mechanisms (56.5%)**, which emphasize empowering individuals to safely report corruption. Digital tools and community involvement, while slightly less prioritized, still reflect the need for modernization and inclusivity in governance practices.

Enhancing municipal support for women in combating corruption

Participants emphasized the need to empower women to play a stronger role in municipal governance and combat corruption. Many suggested providing training and workshops to improve women's knowledge of governance systems, laws, and leadership (e.g., **"We need training on the legal frameworks and how local governance works"**). Increasing women's representation in decision-making roles was a recurring theme, with some proposing quotas or inclusive policies to support this (e.g., **"We should have quotas to ensure women are present in decision-making committees"**). Others highlighted the importance of forming women's committees and encouraging cooperation between women and men to promote fairness and transparency (e.g., **"Women's committees can help ensure that all voices are heard, and men should be part of the conversation too"**). Awareness campaigns were also recommended to address societal stereotypes and gain community support for women's participation (e.g., **"We need campaigns to break the stereotypes about women's roles in politics"**). Overall, the responses reflect a collective desire to enhance women's involvement in local governance and ensure fairer systems.

Summary:



The survey captured insights from municipal professionals across Lebanon, including Municipal Council Members, administrative staff, youth committee members, and candidates, with diverse levels of education and experience. A significant proportion (**48.5%**) of municipal workers are early-career professionals due to Lebanon's prolonged municipal election delays since 2016. This stagnation has disrupted institutional continuity and limited the growth of mid-level experience. As a result, a significant portion (**28%**) of professionals with over 10 years of experience entered the sector before the electoral delays, while mid-career professionals (4 to 9 years of experience) remain underrepresented. Most participants (**67%**) were familiar with the Municipal Law, followed by the Public Procurement Law (**37.5%**) and the Access to Information Law (**32.5%**), highlighting a moderate awareness of relevant laws. However, a considerable number (**23%**) were unaware of any listed laws, underscoring a need for improved legal education.

Regarding anti-corruption efforts, **78%** of participants were unaware of any measures in their councils, with a majority (**68.5%**) perceiving corruption as widespread. Most respondents (**72%**) believed corruption significantly impacted decision-making, while **76.5%** saw women as playing a role in addressing corruption. **82%** of individuals felt that current anti-corruption channels were ineffective, and as a result, **78.4%** of those aware of corruption reporting mechanisms had not used them. This underscores significant issues with accessibility and trust, highlighting a substantial gap in the effectiveness of anti-corruption systems and the urgent need for reforms.

Participants suggested stricter laws, transparent reporting systems, and improved audits as crucial measures to address corruption.

A substantial majority (**75%**) supported stricter penalties for corruption, while others prioritized community engagement and partnerships with civil society. A large number (**80.5%**) believed inclusivity in decision-making could help reduce corruption, with suggestions for increased women's participation in governance. Training on legal frameworks, leadership, and anti-corruption laws emerged as essential for empowering individuals to combat corruption effectively. Barriers identified included political pressure (**67%**), weak enforcement (**58.5%**), and social norms that tolerate corruption (**51%**), reflecting significant systemic challenges.

In sum, the survey highlights widespread concerns over corruption in municipal governance, along with a call for stronger legal frameworks, improved reporting systems, greater inclusivity, and enhanced training. The findings suggest that while awareness of corruption and its impacts is prevalent, significant barriers remain in addressing the issue effectively, requiring comprehensive reforms and more robust anti-corruption strategies.



b. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) guide for women's awareness of anti-corruption measures in local governance

This study presents the findings of Key Informant Interviews (KII) conducted to explore women's awareness of anti-corruption measures in local governance in Lebanon. The interviews targeted experts in governance, anti-corruption, and community influence, aiming to gather insights on institutional frameworks, existing policies, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing transparency and accountability.

The discussion focused on several key areas, including perceptions of corruption in local governance, awareness and application of anti-corruption measures, barriers faced by women, the effectiveness of reporting and accountability mechanisms, capacity-building needs, and the impact of increasing women's participation in combating corruption.

The interviews included contributions from notable individuals, each bringing expertise from their respective fields: **Dr. Josephine Zgheib**, a member of the Municipality of Kfardebian; **Mrs. Najwa Bassil**, a former member of Byblos Municipality; **MP. Razi El Hajj**; **Mr. Jean Hanna**, a trainer and municipal expert; **Mrs. Lara Saade**, a legal and gender expert; and **Mrs. Vicky Zwein**, a resigned member of Sin El Fil Municipality, political consultant, and trainer. To ensure the confidentiality of participants, this study analyzes their collective observations and experiences, offering evidence-based recommendations to advance women's role in fostering anti-corruption practices within local governance structures.

1. Perception of corruption in local governance

Corruption within municipal administrations is widely recognized as a pervasive issue, manifesting in various forms that hinder transparency and accountability. Experts provided concrete examples of corruption, with frequent instances including inflated or falsified invoices and opaque procurement processes. One expert highlighted the manipulation of tenders, where contracts are awarded to politically aligned entities or tailored to specific interests. Similarly, another expert pointed out that committees often make big decisions without transparency, further reinforcing corrupt practices. The misuse of municipal seals and official documents was also identified, signaling systemic weaknesses in oversight and governance.

Several key factors contribute to the persistence of corruption within local governance. The lack of effective oversight, at both centralized and decentralized levels, plays a critical role in enabling corruption to thrive. Although laws exist to combat corruption, experts emphasized that enforcement is often inadequate. As one expert pointed out, the absence of accountability allows corruption to flourish despite the presence of legal frameworks. The centralization of power within municipal councils coupled with weak monitoring mechanisms exacerbates the issue by allowing public officials to act with impunity. Political pressures and clientelism were also cited as significant drivers of corruption, with municipal officials frequently prioritizing partisan or personal interests over public service.

On the topic of gender and corruption, the responses were mixed but provided valuable insights. Three experts pointed out that corruption in municipal administrations is more common among men, primarily due to their dominant role in local governance. One expert referenced a study suggesting men are more prone to corruption due to the networks they form and their dominant positions in decision-making processes. However, it was also noted that while women are less involved in local governance, they tend to be more diligent and less inclined to engage in corrupt practices. One expert remarked that women, due to their limited presence in municipal councils, may find it harder to participate in corrupt practices. Additionally, another expert mentioned that, in general, studies indicate women are less likely to engage in corruption compared to men.

An alternative perspective challenged the idea of linking corruption directly to gender. As one expert argued:

"I do not agree with this statement. As Lebanese citizens, we have seen both men and women engaging in corruption within municipalities and public affairs. Conversely, there are also men and women who are trustworthy. The issue, both locally and globally, lies in the fact that men dominate public and municipal affairs due to their larger numbers. This dominance creates the perception that men are more corrupt. With women representing only %5.6 of municipal officials, it is evident that not all women in positions of authority are honest, just as not all men are corrupt. Therefore, we cannot generalize that men are inherently more corrupt than women. Furthermore, since most municipal leaders and senior officials are men, they naturally have more opportunities to engage in corruption."

This perspective emphasizes that corruption is not inherently tied to gender, but rather to structural and systemic factors, such as power imbalances and male dominance in leadership positions. The expert highlighted that both men and women have exhibited corrupt behavior, while others have shown integrity, cautioning against generalizations.

Experts' responses reflect the entrenched nature of corruption within municipal administrations, exacerbated by weak oversight, political pressures, and the persistence of clientelism. Gender dynamics also influence patterns of corruption, but systemic issues, including the concentration of power and limited female representation in leadership roles, play a critical role in shaping opportunities for corrupt practices.

2. Awareness and implementation of anti-corruption measures

Awareness and implementation of anti-corruption measures in municipal work highlight a complex set of challenges and opportunities. While there is recognition of laws such as the Public Procurement Law, Public Accounting Law, Access to Information Law, and Whistleblower Protection Law, gaps in training and understanding persist. Experts emphasized the lack of institutional knowledge and preparedness among municipal officials, who often assume their roles without adequate training in governance, laws, and protocols. This lack of awareness undermines the effective application of anti-corruption laws and allows systemic corruption to thrive. Examples include demands for public funds without justification, bypassing tender processes, and resistance to institutionalizing municipal operations through measures like financial tracking and transparent workflows.

Anti-corruption laws are seen as crucial but insufficient without proper implementation and monitoring. Experts noted that while legal frameworks exist to curb corruption, the absence of accountability and enforcement mechanisms significantly weakens their impact. Suggestions for improving implementation include the establishment of internal and external financial controllers, the installation of surveillance cameras, and the creation of hotlines for reporting corruption. Additionally, all the experts highlighted the need for women to take on more active roles in municipal committees, especially those with oversight responsibilities, as their limited involvement has hindered efforts to foster greater accountability.

Political interference and socio-economic pressures were identified as significant obstacles to reducing corruption. Municipal councils often face political divisions, with partisan interests undermining governance priorities. Low salaries for municipal employees further incentivize bribery and other forms of misconduct. Moreover, certain structural reforms, such as instituting transparency through physical and procedural changes, face resistance from entrenched interests within municipal administrations.

The outdated nature of some laws was another point of concern. For instance, the Public Accounting Law was singled out as needing reform to align with current challenges. Experts stressed that both municipal officials and citizens need to be better educated on existing legal frameworks. Accountability, they argued, must become a societal norm to drive meaningful change, particularly in a context where the absence of public oversight has allowed corruption to become deeply entrenched.

Additional challenges include administrative bureaucracy, political pressures from central authorities, and external influences in regions affected by conflict or military presence. Furthermore, some municipal heads are vulnerable to blackmail by political entities, given their prior involvement in corrupt practices. These dynamics weaken the overall integrity of municipal governance and hinder anti-corruption efforts.

Despite these challenges, there is recognition that anti-corruption measures can be effective if accompanied by strong oversight, regular training, and institutional reforms. Proposals include updating outdated laws, empowering municipal councils with clearer mandates, and establishing collaborative mechanisms with oversight bodies to ensure accountability. Enhanced training initiatives in partnership with central authorities, such as the Ministry of Interior, were also highlighted as critical to equipping municipal employees with the tools and knowledge needed to combat corruption effectively.

The insights reveal that while legal frameworks provide a foundation for addressing corruption, their success depends on robust enforcement, political will, and a cultural shift toward transparency and accountability. Structural and institutional reforms, combined with greater citizen engagement, are essential for reducing corruption and fostering trust in municipal governance.

3. Barriers faced by women in combating corruption

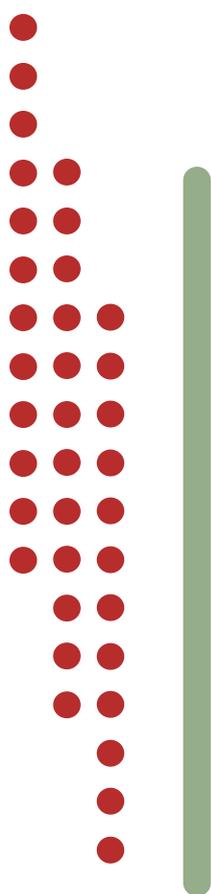
The underrepresentation of women in municipal committees with significant decision-making power, such as the Tender, Procurement, Delivery, and Evaluation Committees, is pervasive across many municipalities. Instead, women are often relegated to social and cultural committees, which, while important, are typically perceived as less influential in financial oversight and resource allocation. This division of responsibilities limits women's ability to confront corruption directly, as corrupt practices often emerge within financial and procurement-related committees. Moreover, excluding women from these critical roles restricts their opportunities to gain valuable experience and expertise in financial oversight, further hindering their ability to advocate for transparency and integrity in corruption-prone sectors.

A significant challenge faced by female municipal council members is the lack of recognition and acceptance of their leadership potential, especially in areas like procurement and evaluation. This cultural bias was starkly illustrated by an incident in which a qualified woman candidate was rejected when running for mayor or deputy mayor. Despite her strong credentials, the rejection was framed not as a question of her competence but rather as a perceived risk to maintaining transparency under her leadership. Such incidents highlight deep-rooted institutional and cultural biases that undermine women's authority and curtail their capacity to implement anti-corruption measures. Even when women overcome these barriers, they are often assigned roles with less influence over financial decision-making, marginalizing their impact on combating corruption.

Social and cultural perceptions significantly affect women's ability to address or report corruption. Women in municipal councils are often not taken seriously or seen as having the expertise to lead crucial anti-corruption initiatives, especially those involving public finances and procurement. This cultural bias discourages women from fully participating in decision-making processes, further marginalizing their influence in areas most susceptible to corrupt practices. Moreover, the societal expectation that women should occupy roles confined to social or cultural spheres diminishes their visibility in more critical, corruption-prone domains. These cultural perceptions create an environment where women may feel unsupported, less empowered, or even discouraged from acting against corruption, particularly when they are not seen as equals in decision-making processes.

Experts also note distinct differences in how men and women approach combating corruption. Women tend to be more detail-oriented, meticulously following processes and identifying discrepancies or wasteful practices. However, systemic barriers and the gendered roles assigned to women often limit their involvement. In contrast, men generally have greater

access to influential committees and leadership positions where corruption is more likely to occur, allowing them to influence and potentially perpetuate corrupt systems. While women may possess the skills and resolve needed to combat corruption effectively, their exclusion from key decision-making positions significantly restricts their ability to drive meaningful change.



4. Effectiveness of reporting and accountability mechanisms

Experts highlighted a significant gap between the existing channels for reporting corruption and their effectiveness. They identified that while there are legal frameworks and mechanisms meant to tackle corruption, their implementation, monitoring, and enforcement remain weak. For example, in a joint project between a municipality and an NGO, an overpayment of \$2000 occurred. Instead of returning the excess funds to the municipality's budget as required, the project supervisors faced resistance from those involved, revealing a mentality of exploiting public funds rather than adhering to proper financial accountability. Similar challenges arise when individuals demand positions in the municipality or seek to bypass proper processes, such as bypassing the tendering system.

A key challenge municipal councils face in tackling corruption is the influence of families and political parties, whose interests often conflict with the public good. The internal administration of municipalities also suffers from a lack of resources, with low salaries and widespread bribery among municipal employees. As one expert pointed out, institutionalizing the work of municipalities through clear roles, tasks, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms was met with resistance. Even initiatives, such as installing glass partitions in municipal offices, were rejected by influential departments, like planning and engineering, which hold significant power in municipal operations.

This resistance underscores the broader challenge of combating corruption. Experts agree that addressing this issue requires a mayor with strong leadership who can enforce transparency at all levels of municipal governance. The persistence of bribery, where citizens pay employees to expedite their transactions, further complicates efforts to reduce corruption.

Experts also discussed the importance of effective accountability mechanisms and the challenges in implementing them. One expert shared an example from their experience in the procurement process for snow removal equipment. Despite plans to install monitoring devices on snowplows in remote areas, the devices were removed, and inflated invoices with excessive working hours were submitted. This example highlights how the absence of proper oversight and accountability mechanisms facilitates corruption and waste. When monitoring and accountability mechanisms are rejected or bypassed, corruption flourishes, and efforts to prevent waste and misuse of funds become increasingly ineffective.

The importance of reporting mechanisms was emphasized by several experts, who believe that while the available channels for reporting corruption might not always be effective, they are crucial to initiating change. Trust in these mechanisms, though not universal, remains present for some individuals. As one expert explained, even if the formal reporting processes are not efficient, civil society actors, activists, and the media can play a crucial role in holding the government accountable. By building pressure and forming advocacy networks, they can force action on corruption cases, despite the challenges of bureaucratic resistance.

Furthermore, the implementation of effective accountability mechanisms requires dedicated effort and persistence. As one expert noted, accountability is not achieved through one-off actions but through continuous advocacy, media attention, and legal action.

Another expert echoed this sentiment, stressing that creating pressure points within the system and mobilizing media and citizens are essential strategies to ensure corruption is confronted.

While reporting mechanisms for corruption exist, their effectiveness is limited by institutional resistance, cultural biases, and the entrenched political and social dynamics within municipalities. Experts agree that improving these mechanisms requires stronger political will, institutional reforms, and greater engagement from civil society to apply sustained pressure on the system and ensure that accountability is pursued relentlessly.

5. Capacity-building needs and suggestions

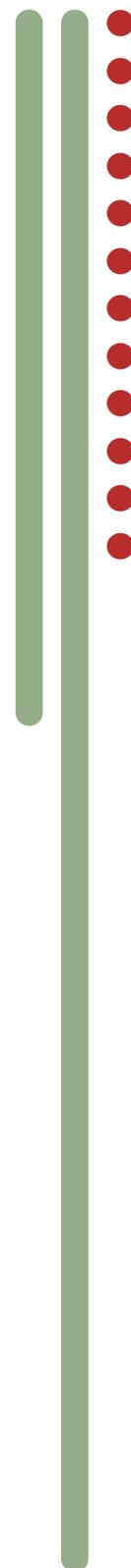
The responses emphasize the urgent need for capacity-building programs to strengthen the ability of elected women within municipal councils to effectively combat corruption. Experts agree that such programs should not be limited to women alone but should extend to all municipal council members, both male and female, as it is crucial for everyone to grasp the principles of good governance, democracy, and financial management. However, the specific challenges faced by women within municipal councils require targeted initiatives that address their unique needs and barriers.

One expert highlighted that, while women excel in executing social projects and securing funding, they often encounter institutional obstacles due to gendered decision-making processes. Women are frequently assigned to social or cultural committees, which are considered less influential. This marginalization is further compounded by male-dominated decision-making structures, where the formation of committees and the allocation of roles are shaped by male perspectives. The introduction of the concept of a gender quota was identified as a key step toward ensuring a more equitable representation of women in municipal councils. Without such quotas, achieving meaningful representation such as having 6 out of 12 council members be women would remain a challenge.

Furthermore, experts stress that training programs for both men and women should focus on understanding financial procedures, transparency in procurement, and the legal frameworks governing municipal governance. As one expert pointed out, financial literacy, particularly understanding invoices, budgeting, and procurement procedures is fundamental to preventing corruption. These skills are fundamental for all public servants, not just women, to ensure they are equipped to recognize and address corruption within municipal processes effectively.

In addition to basic financial literacy, experts advocate for training on governance, democracy, and role exchange. It was noted that municipal governance is often shaped by patriarchal mindsets, which can hinder progress and transparency. Therefore, training on how to navigate these institutional structures and develop strategies for asserting influence in key decision-making committees is vital for women who seek to play a more prominent role in combating corruption.

The need for ongoing capacity-building is further underscored by the fact that many women in municipal councils remain excluded from the most influential and financially impactful committees. This exclusion limits their ability to address issues of corruption directly. Experts suggest that women interested in public office should proactively seek positions on these influential committees and assert in their candidacy to bring about meaningful change.



Finally, the responses highlight that it is not only women but all municipal council members who require training on anti-corruption measures. Understanding financial laws, procurement mechanisms, and administrative procedures is vital to preventing corruption. Municipal governance institutions must ensure the implementation of capacity-building initiatives for all members, while specially addressing the need to empower women. This approach will contribute to creating a more transparent and effective municipal system.

To effectively combat corruption, Capacity-building for elected women in municipal councils should focus on a wide range of skills, including financial management and procurement procedures to governance and legal frameworks. Moreover, municipal governance institutions must provide the necessary support and infrastructure to ensure that women can fully participate in decision-making processes, especially in areas vulnerable to corruption.

6. Impact of increased female participation on anti-corruption efforts

More women in leadership positions within local governance is widely believed to have a positive impact on reducing corruption, improving transparency, and enhancing accountability. The rationale behind this belief is that women tend to focus on achieving results rather than personal gains, particularly in social projects. This results-oriented mindset is seen as a key factor in mitigating corrupt practices. One expert emphasized that women's success in social work and their goal-oriented approach can reduce corruption, especially when their participation is increased. This highlights the importance of ensuring that women are included in municipal governance, starting from early education through to leadership roles. The implementation of gender quotas remains crucial for ensuring more women are actively involved in municipal governance. One expert noted that the presence of women in preparatory and foundational roles, such as those in schools or community organizations, is necessary for them to develop the skills and awareness needed for roles in municipal administration. Without such preparation, women may not be adequately equipped to step into leadership roles. Gender quotas, therefore, act as an important mechanism to ensure women's involvement in municipal councils.

From a practical perspective, increasing female participation in leadership positions can improve transparency and reduce corruption. Experts pointed out, women's attention to detail, especially in administrative and organizational matters, makes them effective in roles that require meticulous oversight and governance. For instance, a case was shared where a female leader's training in monitoring and auditing helped uncover corruption within the municipality. This example demonstrated how women's leadership can lead to internal investigations and bring about accountability when malpractices, like fraudulent invoicing, are detected.

To encourage more women to assume leadership roles in municipal governance, experts emphasized the importance of awareness and protection. Training programs, gender-sensitive policies, and legal reforms should focus on creating a supportive environment where women can thrive in leadership positions. Key actions include raising public awareness, ensuring women are equipped for leadership through education, and providing protections for women who take on leadership roles.

Moreover, current male decision makers in local governance have a significant role to play in supporting and enhancing women's participation in anti-corruption efforts. Experts suggested that these male leaders need to trust women who are running for office and allow them to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. Additionally, male leaders can support gender quotas, advocate for legislative reforms, and help create a culture of accountability that encourages women to take on leadership roles without fear of discrimination or harassment.

Women in leadership positions are seen as a crucial factor in improving transparency, accountability, and combating corruption in local governance. To encourage more women to participate in municipal governance, a combination of awareness-raising, legal reforms, and gender quotas is necessary. Men in decision-making positions must actively support women in these efforts by fostering an inclusive and transparent political environment and clear measurements for designations, and advancements.

7. Policy and practice recommendations stated by the experts

A key recommendation for improving municipal governance in Lebanon is the implementation of gender quotas. This would ensure women's inclusion in leadership positions within municipal councils, fostering more equitable and inclusive decision-making. Additionally, adopting proportional representation in local elections would enhance the diversity of councils, better representing various political parties and promoting self-reform and internal accountability.

Strengthening internal auditing within municipalities is also critical. By establishing robust auditing mechanisms, municipalities can effectively monitor financial and administrative activities, reducing the risk of corruption. It is equally important to empower municipal council members to select leaders based on competence rather than wealth or patronage, ensuring that leadership is both capable and accountable.

Reforming the powers of municipal presidents is another key issue. Experts suggest decentralizing decision-making by forming an executive committee composed of multiple members responsible for budgeting and financial management. This would improve transparency and facilitate a more collaborative, participatory governance model.

Decentralization of governance is crucial in Lebanon to provide local municipalities with greater autonomy, allowing them to better respond to the specific needs of their communities. This would reduce the concentration of power at the central government level and ensure more equitable resource distribution across regions.

Further reforms include the creation of neighborhood committees to increase local engagement and ensure that municipal governance accurately reflects community needs. The establishment of youth municipal councils would provide young people with the skills and knowledge necessary for public service, while fostering future leaders committed to good governance.

Effective monitoring and evaluation are integral to the success of these reforms. Assigning a dedicated team or department to oversee municipal activities, particularly in procurement, will improve resource management and accountability. The establishment of a fair and independent judiciary is also essential to holding municipalities accountable, particularly in addressing corruption.

Additionally, enforcing Lebanon's law on the right to access information is vital. While the law guarantees public access to essential municipal information, its inconsistent implementation undermines transparency. Ensuring compliance with this law would empower citizens to hold local governments accountable and help combat corruption.

Another critical area for reform is creating a safe and violence-free environment in political and municipal spaces. Establishing clear, effective mechanisms for receiving and addressing complaints, particularly those related to discrimination or harassment, is essential. These mechanisms must prioritize the protection and confidentiality of complainants.

Training women to address the growing issue of electronic violence is also a priority. Moreover, fostering collaboration among women in politics and municipal work should be part of a broader strategy to establish support networks across different decision-making sectors. Platforms for dialogue would allow women to exchange experiences, coordinate efforts, and advocate for policies that increase female participation in governance.

Finally, revising work regulations to ensure women's inclusion in key committees and preventing their exclusion from any tasks is essential for promoting gender equality in local governance.

These reforms aim to create a more transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance system that empowers both women and men to contribute equally to the political process, helping Lebanon establish a fairer and more effective municipal governance framework.

c. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide for women's awareness of anti-corruption measures in local governance

Building on insights gathered through a series of four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted to explore women's awareness of anti-corruption measures within local governance in Lebanon. The FGDs brought together women actively involved in municipal councils across diverse regions, including Mount Lebanon, North, Bekaa, and West Bekaa providing a platform to share their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in addressing corruption. Unfortunately, due to the recent war, it was not possible to include participants from the South of Lebanon. The objective was to delve into their understanding of anti-corruption laws, the effectiveness of existing mechanisms, and the barriers they face in promoting transparency and accountability. Each session, involving up to 10 participants, was structured to facilitate open and meaningful dialogue around key themes, such as familiarity with anti-corruption laws, experiences with accountability practices, and the social and institutional challenges encountered in municipal governance. Discussions also explored the use of anti-corruption tools, capacity-building needs, and participants' recommendations for enhancing governance frameworks and women's role in combating corruption.

The findings from all four FGDs will be analyzed collectively to identify common trends, key challenges, and actionable solutions. These insights will contribute to a deeper understanding of how to empower women in local governance to effectively participate in anti-corruption efforts and promote accountability within their communities.

1. Understanding corruption and accountability

Participants exhibited varying levels of awareness regarding laws aimed at combating corruption. Some were familiar with key legislation such as the Access to Information Law, Public Procurement Law, and Municipal Law recognizing their significance in promoting transparency and accountability within municipal councils. However, many participants admitted to having only a surface-level understanding of these laws due to a lack of educational initiatives or accessible resources that clearly explain their provisions and applications. Some women mentioned hearing about these laws but were uncertain of their specific content, implementation processes, or how to utilize them in their roles. This knowledge gap was particularly evident among participants who were not in leadership positions, highlighting a systemic issue where information about anti-corruption measures is not adequately disseminated across all levels of municipal governance.

When discussing reporting mechanisms for corruption in municipal councils, responses revealed a general lack of familiarity and confidence in existing systems. While a few participants knew about complaint procedures through municipal offices or oversight bodies like the Court of Accounts, they often described these mechanisms as being inaccessible, bureaucratic, and ineffective. Many women recounted experiences of navigating opaque procedures and unresponsive systems when reporting corruption, resulting in frustration and discouragement. Additionally, they perceived existing reporting mechanisms as lacking inclusivity, often requiring legal or procedural expertise that many did not possess. Fears of retaliation and social backlash further deterred women from filing formal complaints, particularly in close-knit communities where maintaining anonymity is challenging.

Participants identified several common forms of corruption within municipalities, including favoritism, nepotism, bribery, and the misuse of public funds. Many shared experiences of municipal resources being allocated based on personal or public political connections rather than community needs. They also pointed out instances of inflated project budgets and non-transparent procurement processes as key indicators of corruption, emphasizing how such practices erode public trust and lead to inefficient service delivery, often to the detriment of marginalized groups.

The impacts of corruption on the community were described as severe and far-reaching. Participants emphasized that corruption disproportionately affects women, who often bear the brunt of inadequate public services and economic instability resulting from mismanagement

of municipal resources. For example, women in rural areas spoke about poor infrastructure, such as unpaved roads and insufficient access to clean water, which hinders their mobility and ability to participate in public life. Corruption in public health and education systems was another concern, with participants noting how it creates additional financial burdens on families, limiting opportunities for women and girls. Some participants also mentioned that the perception of municipalities as corrupt institutions discourages women from engaging in public decision-making processes, further entrenching their marginalization.

2. Women's experiences and challenges in addressing corruption

Participants reflected on their personal and professional struggles with anti-corruption measures, as well as the broader societal and cultural barriers they encountered.

Knowledge of anti-corruption laws

Women acknowledged that their familiarity with anti-corruption laws was often limited than that of their male counterparts. This discrepancy could be attributed to a combination of factors, including the underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, where such laws are more prominently discussed. Participants noted that men were more likely to have access to legal training or to work in spaces where such topics were regularly discussed. In contrast, women often relied on informal channels or secondary sources for information, leading to gaps in their understanding. This lack of knowledge sometimes led to hesitation or uncertainty when attempting to take action against corruption, further deepening gender disparities in the fight against anti-corruption efforts.

Barriers to participation in anti corruption measures

Women shared specific key challenges in implementing anti-corruption measures. One prominent issue raised was a lack of resources and institutional support for women involved in anti-corruption efforts. Many highlighted the overwhelming burden of balancing family responsibilities with professional obligations, which limited their ability to actively participate in governance and accountability initiatives.

Cultural norms and traditional gender roles also emerged as significant barriers. In many communities, women were expected to remain silent in the face of wrongdoing, with societal pressure discouraging them from challenging authority figures or male colleagues. These cultural expectations were particularly prevalent in male-dominated spaces, where women often felt that their voices would be dismissed or undervalued. Some participants shared stories of being labeled as "too emotional" or "too sensitive" when raising concerns about corruption, suggesting a deep-rooted gender bias in how their involvement in anti-corruption efforts was perceived.

Experiences with male colleagues in anti-corruption efforts

Women reported mixed experiences regarding support from male colleagues in their anti-corruption efforts. While some shared positive examples of encouragement and collaboration, these instances were rare. Many participants noted facing resistance when challenging corruption or reporting unethical practices, often from male colleagues or higher-ups in their organizations. They frequently felt excluded from decision-making processes related to anti-corruption initiatives, with their efforts being sidelined or ignored.

In several cases, women experienced active undermining or disregarding of their contributions, which not only hindered their ability to address corruption but also reinforced existing gendered power dynamics. Participants shared experiences of having their ideas dismissed or overshadowed by male counterparts, reflecting a broader lack of solidarity. Additionally, frustration with the inefficiency of formal complaint mechanisms further discouraged women from utilizing them, even when they were aware of existing anti-corruption frameworks.

3. Applying anti-corruption tools in daily governance

When asked about their familiarity with various anti-corruption tools, participants demonstrated varying levels of awareness. The Lebanese Penal Code, Access to Information Law (Law No. 28/2017), and Whistleblower Protection Law (Law No. 83/2018) were among the most recognized legal instruments. However, a significant gap in awareness was noted regarding other legal frameworks, such as the Lebanese Contracts and Obligations Code, Anti-Money Laundering Law (Law No. 44/2015), and Municipal Law (Law No. 118/1977).

The Public Procurement Law (Law No. 244/2000) was mentioned but received little discussion, suggesting that its relevance or application may not have been fully understood by many participants. The disparity in awareness highlights a need for targeted educational initiatives to ensure that women—especially those in municipal governance, have access to comprehensive knowledge about available anti-corruption mechanisms.

Challenges in Utilizing Anti-Corruption Mechanisms

Despite some level of awareness, participants reported limited direct engagement with these tools. While some were aware of individuals who had attempted to use anti-corruption mechanisms, they personally had little experience navigating these systems. Key barriers to effective engagement included:

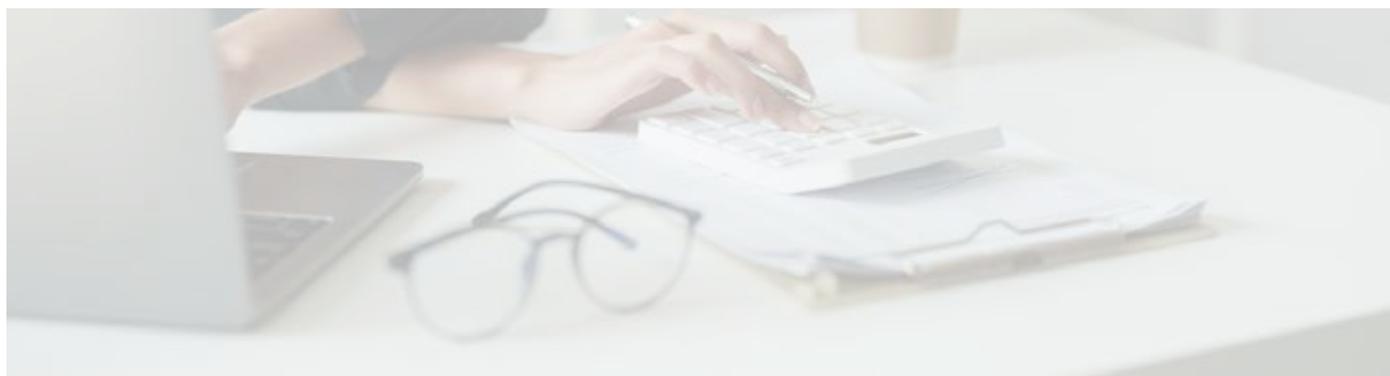
- Lack of comprehensive legal knowledge about available tools
- Deep mistrust of enforcement mechanisms due to weak implementation
- Fear of retaliation, both personally and professionally, discouraging action
- Bureaucratic inefficiencies that hinder timely and effective responses

Although some participants recounted positive outcomes from reporting corruption, these cases were exceptions rather than the norm. One participant described how reporting illegal logging and overhunting led to action by local committees. Another shared her experience of submitting a formal complaint to the Ministry of Interior regarding improper landfill practices near Naameh, though the report was ultimately disregarded due to political interference. A third participant highlighted how her organization resisted political party pressures, maintained neutrality, and eventually secured support from the Ministry of Defense, demonstrating that steadfastness and resilience can yield results despite systemic challenges.

Systemic barriers and lack of enforcement

However, the majority of participants emphasized that the obstacles to reporting corruption often outweigh the potential benefits. The lack of effective whistleblower protection, combined with bureaucratic delays, political interference, and a culture of impunity, led to a sense of disillusionment. Reports of corruption were frequently ignored, and when acknowledged, responses were often insufficient or unsatisfactory.

Additionally, the fear of social and professional stigmatization further discouraged individuals from coming forward. This reluctance was compounded by weak law enforcement and ineffective follow-up mechanisms, which made pursuing formal complaints a frustrating and often futile endeavor. Participants stressed that without clear enforcement measures, better protection for whistleblowers, and an independent judiciary, anti-corruption frameworks will remain ineffective in practice.



4. Capacity-building needs and support

Participants emphasized that combating corruption is not inherently a gender-specific issue, but rather one that depends on the integrity and commitment of leadership figures, particularly within local governance. This perspective challenges the stereotype that men are naturally more proactive in addressing corruption, instead attributing disparities to historical and structural inequalities. These inequalities have provided men with broader access to decision-making roles and social and political networks, allowing them to dominate anti-corruption initiatives. Despite these barriers, participants highlighted the resilience and courage required of women to challenge corruption, often at great personal risk. They stressed the need for enabling environments, including legal protections and institutional support, to empower women in addressing systemic corruption effectively.

Participants also noted the significant barriers that undermine women's ability to contribute to anti-corruption efforts. These include:

- Inadequate whistleblower protections, which discourage reporting
- Inefficient and bureaucratic formal reporting mechanisms
- Institutional inaction and lack of political will to address corruption
- Over reliance on social media as a reporting tool, due to the failure of formal channels
- Cultural and societal norms that frame corruption as a male-dominated issue, reinforcing stereotypes that marginalize women

These barriers restrict women's access to decision-making roles and limit their influence in governance. Participants emphasized the urgent need for targeted legal training, institutional reforms, and greater community engagement to dismantle these systemic obstacles and enable women to participate fully in anti-corruption efforts.

Additionally, participants identified specific capacity-building needs and practical steps to enhance their engagement. They highlighted the importance of incorporating real-life case studies into training sessions and simplifying legal frameworks to make them more accessible. Topics such as whistleblower protections, mechanisms for complaint follow-ups, and networking among civil society organizations were identified as critical areas for training. Participants expressed the need for organized platforms to coordinate anti-corruption efforts and share resources effectively. Personal accounts, such as being blocked from forming municipal committees due to a lack of legal awareness, illustrate how knowledge gaps can hinder women's participation in governance. These examples highlight the importance of education and awareness campaigns to equip women with the tools needed to navigate and challenge corrupt systems effectively.

Across all discussions, participants underscored the importance of involving women in municipal work and decision-making processes. They called for a shift from traditional caregiving roles to more active participation in governance, emphasizing the need for:

- Structural reforms to create more inclusive governance systems
- Legal awareness, campaigns to empower women with knowledge of their rights
- Institutional support, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen women's roles in anti-corruption efforts

By addressing these challenges through education, policy reforms, and increased institutional support, participants expressed optimism that women can play a stronger and more influential role in the fight against corruption

5. Recommendations for improving anti-corruption efforts

Participants proposed a range of strategic recommendations to improve anti-corruption efforts in local governance, emphasizing the need for comprehensive legal reforms, institutional support for women, and proactive initiatives that would foster transparency and accountability.

Strengthening legal and institutional frameworks

A strong call for stricter legal protections for whistleblowers emerged, with participants stressing the importance of ensuring anonymity and safety for those who report corruption. This protection would empower more individuals, especially women, to come forward without fear of retaliation. Additionally, participants advocated for:

- Clearer and more accessible regulations to enable broader citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts.
- Greater transparency in public procurement processes to prevent favoritism and financial mismanagement.
- Robust systems for auditing and monitoring municipal funds to enhance accountability and reduce corruption risks.

Enhancing women's participation in anti-corruption efforts

To better support women in combating corruption, participants emphasized the need for dedicated platforms where women can safely report corruption and voice concerns. Key recommendations included:

- Targeted training on legal frameworks, anti-corruption mechanisms, and whistleblower protections to equip women with the necessary tools to take action.
- Mentorship programs to empower women in governance, ensuring they receive guidance and resources to challenge corruption effectively.
- Mandatory inclusion of women in municipal committees, particularly those overseeing developmental projects, to guarantee active participation in decision-making processes.

Future initiatives for local governance and accountability

Looking ahead, participants proposed several long-term initiatives to improve governance and reduce corruption:

- Establishing independent oversight bodies to monitor local governance, ensuring transparency and holding officials accountable for corrupt practices.
- Adopting a zero-tolerance policy on corruption, alongside clear and transparent procedures for reporting and investigating corruption within municipal offices.
- Strengthening enforcement mechanisms for existing anti-corruption laws to improve their effectiveness.
- Holding timely municipal elections, as participants expressed concern over continuous election delays, with the last elections held in 2016.
- Introducing a women's quota law to ensure equal female representation in municipal governance, along with the creation of women's committees or task forces to oversee local government activities and ensure the responsible use of public funds.

Decentralization and community engagement

Participants also emphasized the need for decentralization to address the unique challenges faced by rural and remote areas, where limited access to resources and governance structures exacerbates corruption. By redistributing administrative responsibilities, local governments would be more responsive to the needs of marginalized communities, reducing opportunities for corruption to thrive.

Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of civic engagement and public awareness through:

- Regular anti-corruption awareness campaigns to educate the public on existing laws and reporting mechanisms.
- Community-led initiatives that foster greater trust in governance and encourage active participation in accountability efforts.

Through these recommendations, participants underscored the importance of creating an inclusive and transparent governance system where both women and men can play an active role in combating corruption and strengthening local governance.

V. Discussion



The findings from the survey, KII, and FGD shed light on the considerable challenges women face in engaging with anti-corruption measures in local governance in Lebanon. These results not only highlight gaps in awareness and engagement with anti-corruption laws, but also point to broader structural and societal barriers that hinder women's active participation in governance processes.

The study's findings resonate with broader literature on gender and corruption, which suggests that corruption is not inherently gendered but that women often face systemic barriers in engaging with governance and anti-corruption initiatives. The Transparency International's Topic Guide on Gender emphasizes that while women have been recognized as key agents in anti-corruption efforts, they are frequently excluded from decision-making roles and face barriers such as societal biases, gendered expectations, and limited access to political power.¹⁷ The limited knowledge of anti-corruption measures among women, as reflected in the study, aligns with these observations. Women's exclusion from formal decision-making processes and the lack of targeted legal education make it difficult for them to challenge corruption effectively, reinforcing the findings of Bohnet (2016), who underscores the importance of gender-inclusive policies in combating corruption.¹⁸

The lack of awareness and underutilization of anti-corruption mechanisms among municipal professionals presents a significant challenge to combating corruption at the local level. The survey's finding that %78 of participants were unaware of anti-corruption measures within their councils, despite their awareness of corruption, indicates a critical gap in both the education of municipal workers and the functioning of anti-corruption channels. This finding echoes the analysis by Della Porta (2015), who notes that transparency initiatives often fail without proper enforcement mechanisms and citizen engagement.¹⁹ The inefficacy of current reporting mechanisms, highlighted by the survey and KII, reinforces the need for robust legal reforms that prioritize accessibility and accountability.

Women's limited awareness of anti-corruption laws and the underrepresentation of women in municipal governance roles compound these challenges. As the FGD participants indicated, the societal and institutional barriers that restrict women's participation in governance, ranging from cultural norms to political interference, are pervasive.

These findings mirror Svensson's (2005) argument that gendered inequalities in governance contribute to the perpetuation of corruption. When women are marginalized from decision-making spaces, the broader anti-corruption efforts are less inclusive and less effective, as women's perspectives and solutions often remain absent from key conversations.²⁰

17. Transparency International. *Topic guide on gender*. Transparency International Knowledge Hub (n.d).

18. Bohnet, I. *What works: Gender equality by design*. Harvard University Press (2016).

19. Della Porta, D. *Social movements in times of austerity: Bringing capitalism back into protest analysis*. Polity Press (2015).

20. Svensson, J. Eight questions about corruption. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 19(3), 19-42 (2005).



While the study confirmed expected trends such as the widespread perception of corruption and the underutilization of reporting mechanisms in Lebanon, some unexpected findings emerged that warrant further discussion. One surprising result was the strong belief among %76.5 of participants that women can play a significant role in addressing corruption, despite their limited involvement in anti-corruption efforts. This finding suggests a latent recognition of the potential for women to drive change within governance, which is not yet fully realized due to the structural barriers they face. The survey also revealed an overwhelming desire for stricter legal frameworks, with %75 supporting harsher penalties for corruption, but this must be tempered with reforms to address the systemic issues that prevent effective enforcement. The suggestion that greater inclusivity in decision-making could help reduce corruption, particularly through increased female participation, aligns with findings from Kaufmann (2005)²¹ and Duflo (2012)²², who argue that inclusive governance structures lead to more transparent and equitable outcomes. The call for better training on legal frameworks and anti-corruption laws, particularly among women, also reflects a growing recognition of the need for capacity-building as a means of empowering individuals to take active roles in governance. The participants' recommendation for mentorship programs and support networks for women in governance could be seen as an innovative approach to overcoming some of these barriers.

The findings from this study reveal a complex and multifaceted landscape in which corruption and gender inequality intersect. While the awareness of anti-corruption measures is relatively high, both women and men in local governance lack sufficient knowledge and access to effective tools for addressing corruption. This is compounded by the systemic challenges that hinder women's full participation in governance. The study's results suggest a pressing need for reforms that address both the structural inequalities in decision-making and the gaps in legal education and reporting mechanisms. Increasing women's representation in local governance and empowering them with the knowledge and tools to combat corruption will be critical steps in fostering more transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance in Lebanon.

21. Kaufmann, D. Transparenting transparency: Initial empirics and policy applications. *International Monetary Fund* (2005).

22. Duflo, E. Women empowerment and economic development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50(4), 1051-1079 (2012).

VI. Recommendations

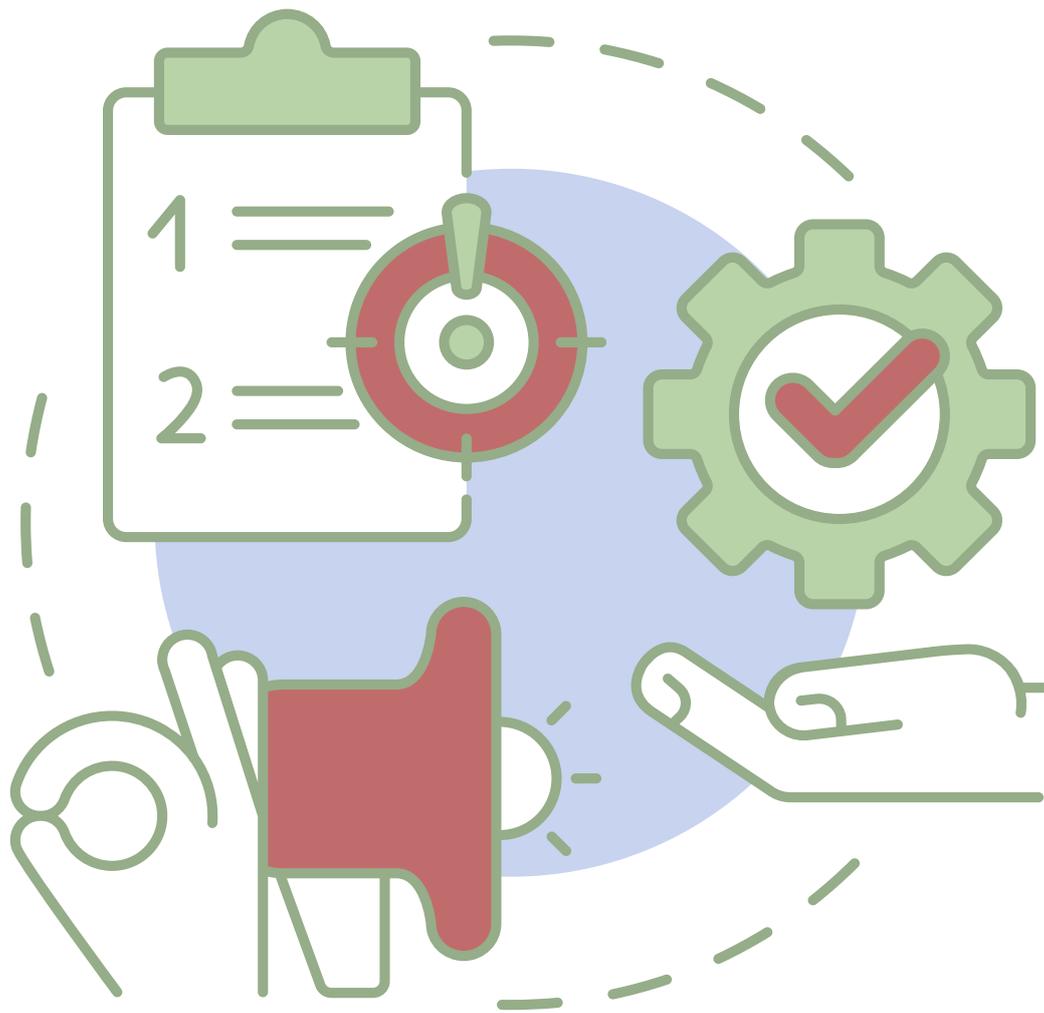


Based on the findings from the survey, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted in this study, several actionable recommendations emerge to address corruption and enhance women's participation in local governance. The results highlight significant gaps in awareness among women about governance mechanisms and anti-corruption measures. Therefore, one of the primary recommendations is the launch of comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns targeting women. These campaigns should aim to inform women about their roles in governance and their rights within the anti-corruption framework, ensuring that they are well-equipped about the tools available to combat corruption. The campaigns should be designed to reach women from various socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, using accessible media channels such as community radio, social media, and local gatherings. Such campaigns should not only focus on spreading knowledge about corruption but also engage women in understanding its detrimental effects on their lives, thereby encouraging their active participation in governance and transparency efforts.

Another essential recommendation is the integration of gender-sensitive approaches into existing anti-corruption policies and frameworks. The research revealed that anti-corruption measures in Lebanon often overlook the specific challenges that women face in accessing governance processes and reporting corruption. This gap highlights the need to ensure that anti-corruption policies are tailored to address the distinct needs of women, particularly those in marginalized communities. For instance, the establishment of women-specific reporting mechanisms for corruption could be a critical step that ensures safe and confidential channels for women to report corruption would alleviate the fear of retaliation that often discourages their involvement in governance. Additionally, gender-inclusive policies could include the creation of female quotas in anti-corruption bodies to ensure that women's voices are adequately represented in decision-making processes related to corruption control. Such measures would not only provide women with a more significant role in local governance but also help in developing more diverse, effective, and inclusive anti-corruption frameworks.

The survey, KIIs, and FGDs also highlighted that many women in Lebanon are interested in local governance but feel discouraged from participating. This discouragement arises from witnessing ill-equipped men successfully running for elections and winning, while well-qualified and capable women face systemic barriers that prevent their success. These findings point to the need for addressing structural and societal challenges that hinder women's participation in local governance, rather than focusing solely on capacity-building programs, as women already possess the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute effectively. Instead, efforts should prioritize creating an enabling environment that fosters equal opportunities and dismantles barriers to their active engagement. The training could focus on critical areas such as understanding public administration, financial transparency, public procurement processes, and the legal framework around anti-corruption. By providing women with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate political structures and actively participate in governance, these programs would help to break down the barriers that limit their involvement in local decision-making processes. Furthermore, given that many women face challenges in balancing public responsibilities with familial duties, these programs should be flexible, offering evening or weekend sessions and providing support services such as childcare to encourage greater participation.

Lastly, fostering stronger collaboration between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and government institutions is another crucial recommendation. The results from the research suggest that while CSOs in Lebanon are key players in advocating for transparency and accountability, there is often a lack of trust between these organizations and government institutions. Strengthening this collaboration, particularly in the context of anti-corruption efforts, can ensure greater transparency and the inclusion of women's perspectives in political discussions.



Joint task forces, public forums, and collaborative workshops could be organized to bring together government officials, CSOs, and community leaders, allowing them to work together on issues of local governance and corruption. Moreover, women’s CSOs should be empowered through training to monitor local government activities, track public expenditures, and hold local governments accountable. By enabling these organizations to actively participate in anti-corruption efforts, Lebanon can ensure a more transparent and inclusive governance system.

These recommendations aim to build a more inclusive and transparent political system in Lebanon by addressing the barriers women face in engaging with local governance and anti-corruption efforts. By raising awareness, integrating gender-sensitive policies, building the capacity of women in governance roles, and fostering collaboration between CSOs and government institutions, Lebanon can move toward a more equitable and effective political environment. These steps will not only enhance governance, but also empower women to play a vital role in shaping the future of their communities, ultimately contributing to the fight against corruption in Lebanon.





The findings of this study reveal significant concerns regarding the prevalence of corruption in local governance in Lebanon, with particular emphasis on the underrepresentation and limited engagement of women in anti-corruption efforts. The research highlighted that while there is a general awareness of corruption and its detrimental effects on decision-making, there are notable gaps in understanding key legal frameworks and anti-corruption measures. Women, in particular, face substantial barriers due to limited access to information, lack of capacity-building opportunities, and societal norms that often marginalize their involvement in governance. The survey, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) underscored the need for comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns tailored specifically for women, which would empower them with the knowledge and tools to effectively engage in anti-corruption initiatives and local governance.

It was clear that without bridging the knowledge gap, women will remain at the margins of governance and anti-corruption efforts, unable to fully contribute to the development of a transparent and accountable system. Their presence at all levels of local governance could play a crucial role, not as external monitors but as a natural and essential part of the process. Women should be viewed as active contributors within the governance structure, with their involvement recognized as vital for promoting inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating gender-sensitive approaches into anti-corruption policies, ensuring that women have safe and accessible reporting mechanisms, and advocating for gender-inclusive policies within local governance structures. This approach would not only empower women but also enhance the overall effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives.

Furthermore, the research points to the critical need for capacity-building programs that provide women with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate political and governance systems, particularly those related to anti-corruption measures. These programs should focus on legal education, transparency mechanisms, and leadership development. Strengthening collaboration between civil society organizations and government institutions was also identified as essential in promoting transparency and accountability, with particular emphasis on involving women in these collaborative efforts to create a more inclusive and effective governance system.

The study underscores the importance of empowering women to actively engage in governance, as their involvement can bring a fresh perspective to anti-corruption efforts and contribute to building a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable political system. However, a notable discrepancy exists between the humanitarian role that women often play in their communities and their lack of adoption of transparency measures within governance structures. This gap further limits their ability to contribute fully to anti-corruption and local governance efforts.

Future studies should focus on the specific barriers women encounter in accessing and utilizing anti-corruption tools, as well as the effectiveness of gender-sensitive anti-corruption policies. Additionally, studies could explore how local governance structures can be reformed to foster more inclusive and participatory systems, ensuring equal representation and opportunities for both women and men to influence the future of their communities.

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