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Assessing Individuals' Perceptions of the Impact of Corruption on the Domains of Sustainable Development: A Cross-sectional Study in Palestine

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Abstract:

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of corruption on the social, economic, environmental and political domains of sustainable development from individuals' perspective. The study also attempts to relate individuals' perceptions to their socioeconomic characteristics. The study uses the convenience sampling approach, where 521 responses are collected through an online-administered questionnaire. Each domain of sustainable development is defined by a set of items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Individuals' perceptions of the impact of corruption on sustainable development domains are assessed by measuring the mean score value of each item. The association between individuals' perceptions and their socioeconomic characteristics is evaluated using the independent-samples t-test. The study finds that the impact of corruption on the four domains of sustainable development as perceived by individuals is within the high level. Results also show a statistically significant difference between individuals from different socioeconomic groups in their perceptions of the impact of corruption on sustainable development. Results revealed that a high level of corruption would hinder the progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at all levels. Therefore, improving

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the quality of governance in public institutions and controlling corruption is crucial to attaining economic and sustainable development.

Keywords:
corruption, economic domain, environmental domain, political domain, SDGs, social domain

1. Introduction

Corruption is considered one of the most persistent problems adversely affecting countries' economic growth and economic development (Murshed & Mredula, 2018; d'Agostino et al., 2016). Although a unified definition for corruption is lacking, the frequently used definition is that proposed by the World Bank where corruption is defined as the abuse of governmental institutions' power to achieve private benefits (Liu, 2016). Corruption has many different aspects, which include (i) financial corruption – defined as the abuse of power to achieve monetary benefits (Orakwue, 2017) – and (ii) administrative corruption – defined as any deviation practiced by governmental employees to achieve self-interest gains (Gouda, 2023). Administrative and financial corruption impedes the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and negatively affects the ability of state institutions to carry out all the tasks entrusted to them. Therefore, SDGs in all domains cannot be achieved without implementing administrative reforms and regulations seeking to curb the crime of corruption (Mousavi & Pourkiani, 2013).

Furthermore, goal number 16 in the 2030 SDGs requires the government to "*promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*". Accordingly, the current research's primary goal is to analyse corruption's impact on achieving sustainable development. The research will focus on sustainable development's social, economic, environmental and political domains.

The impact of corruption on economic growth and other economic indicators has received much attention in the empirical literature (e.g. Malański & Póvoa, 2021; Damoah et al., 2017; Huang, 2016). It has been shown that countries in early stages of development tend to be more corrupt, and, hence, highly and negatively affected by corruption practices (Malański & Póvoa). Empirical evidence shows that corruption is highly associated with low levels of sustainable development (Hoinaru et al., 2020; Venard, 2013). Some of the empirical literature has focused on human capital development (Yaroson et al., 2017), while others investigated the impact of corruption on socioeconomic indicators, including poverty and unemployment (Rizki & Solihati, 2022). In general, it has been demonstrated that corruption practices represented in the abuse and misallocation of government resources reduce the government budget share

allocated for public and social benefits (O'Hare & Hall, 2022). Hence, these inefficiencies in the allocation of resources hinder the progress towards achieving the SDGs. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the impact of corruption on the implementation of and progress towards achieving the SDGs, especially in developing countries that committed to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Regarding the social aspects of SDGs, the impact of corruption has been investigated on some indicators such as poverty (Hoinaru et al. 2020), income inequality (Akçay, 2006), and equality of opportunity in access to healthcare and education (Murshed & Mredula, 2018; Tiongson et al., 2000). As for the economic aspects, the main focus was on economic growth (Malański & Póvoa, 2021) and government budget allocation of resources (O'Hare & Hall, 2022; Borlea et al., 2017; Ivanyna et al. 2015). The impact of corruption on the environmental aspects was measured by looking at the correlation between corruption and pollution (Ren et al., 2022) and projects oriented towards alleviating the waste problem (Herder & Larsson, 2012). When looking at the political aspects, the impact of corruption was measured on individuals voting behaviour and political participation (Inman & Andrews, 2015), and on public trust in public institutions (Morris & Klesner, 2010).

In Palestine, corruption is an issue of crucial concerns for citizens, local investors, foreign investors, and donors. In a recent opinion poll conducted by the Coalition for Integrity and Accountability (AMAN) on the reality of corruption and combating it in Palestine, it has been shown that 58% of the respondents believed that corruption in Palestinian society is high (AMAN, 2020a). Further, about a third of Palestinian citizens think that policymakers and public employees are involved in corruption activities (Global Corruption Barometer, 2016). Moreover, it was indicated that 95% of Palestinian citizens believe that the spread of corruption is the primary obstacle to achieving SDGs (AMAN, 2020b).

The bulk of related research in the region uses cross-country data to measure the impact of corruption on economic growth or any indicator of economic or sustainable development (Bakari & Benzid, 2021; Fahad & Ahmed, 2016; Helmy, 2013). Most of the single-country analysis is applied to the Iraqi case (e.g. Alamry et al., 2022; Talab et al., 2019) as well as to the Egyptian case (Emara, 2020; Ghalwash, 2014) and the Algerian case (e.g. Bounoua & Matallah, 2014). The empirical literature on corruption needs to be improved in Palestine. Most of the literature uses the corruption perception index as a proxy variable for corruption. In Palestine, more data must be on this measure or any other numerical measure that measures corruption annually.

Further, to the best of our knowledge, there has been no previous attempt to assess the impact of corruption on SDGs from individuals' perspective. Therefore, the current study tries to fill this gap in the related literature by addressing the following two questions: (i) What is the impact of corruption on the social, economic, environmental and political domains of SDGs as perceived by individuals in Palestine?, (ii) Is there any statistically significant association between individuals' perceptions regarding the

impact of corruption on the domains of sustainable development and their socioeconomic characteristics. Accordingly, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H_a^1: There is a statistically significant difference between individuals with different levels of education in their perception regarding corruption's impact on sustainable development domains.

H_a^2: There is a statistically significant difference between individuals with different income levels in their perception regarding corruption's impact on sustainable development domains.

H_a^3: There is a statistically significant difference between employed and unemployed individuals in their perception regarding corruption's impact on sustainable development domains.

H_a^4: There is a statistically significant difference between individuals working in different sectors in their perception regarding corruption's impact on sustainable development domains.

The remaining of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the methodology used to fulfil the research questions. Section 3 reports the main results of the study. Section 4 discusses the results and some policy implications, while Section 5 concludes and provides future insights.

2. Theoretical-conceptual framework

This section defines the concepts of corruption and social, economic, environmental and political domains of sustainable development are defined. As mentioned, the current paper considers corruption practices within governmental institutions, whether financial or administrative. This type of corruption follows the strand of literature that is related to "*systemic corruption*", sometimes known as "*endemic corruption*" (Martinsson, 2021; Persson et al., 2012), as opposed to "*occasional corruption*" or "*incidental corruption*". Corruption is considered systemic if it is widespread and persistent within a country (or organisation) (Davis, 2021). Accordingly, corruption practices are perceived to be normal rather than exceptional.

Moreover, individuals are well aware of corruption practices and their negative impact. However, they know that even an anti-corruption organisation cannot enforce the punishment of the corrupt. Eventually, they will be involved in corruption practices such as paying a bribe to obtain the necessary public service.

Regarding the four domains of sustainable development, we define each domain based on the empirical literature examining the impact of corruption on SDGs in developing and developed countries, focusing mainly on corruption practised in governmental institutions. The dimensions/items of each concept are summarised in Table 2:

1.The social domain is defined in terms of the impact of corruption on (i) public allocations in the health sector, (ii) hampers public allocations in the education sector; (iii) poverty levels, (iv) income inequality, (v) brain drain of highly-skilled individuals, and (vi) the abuse of humanitarian aid.

2.The economic domain includes the following dimensions: (i) economic growth, (ii) government revenues, (iii) allocation of government revenues, (iv) government deficit and debt, and (v) private investments.

3.The environmental domain includes four dimensions that are mostly related to our context. These are (i) air pollution, including CO2 emissions, (ii) the implementation of laws oriented towards alleviating environmental deterioration, (iii) implementation of the public-private partnership oriented towards waste management problem, and (iv) the role of green projects oriented towards reducing environmental pollution.

4.The political domain is defined in terms of the effect of corruption on (i) democratic governance and the rule of law, (ii) individuals' voting behaviour and political participation, (iii) violations of human rights, and (iv) public trust in government institutions.

3. Methodology, research procedure and research methods

This study investigates the impact of corruption on the domains of SDGs from the point of view of citizens in Palestine. We use data from a sample that has been chosen using the convenience sampling approach. The survey was conducted during September-October 2022. An online questionnaire was created and administered to adult citizens residing in the West Bank of Palestine through social media. Eligible respondents include male and female adults ($\geq$ 18 years old) residing in the West Bank of Palestine. A total of 521 questionnaires were obtained.

The study uses a questionnaire that includes questions about individuals' perceptions regarding the impact of corruption on the social, economic, political and environmental domains of SDGs. The questionnaire is structured around five sections. The first section includes socio-demographic and socioeconomic questions such as gender, age, marital status, level of education, employment status, employment sector, place of residence, governorate and household income. The other four sections included questions about individuals' perceptions regarding the impact of corruption on the four domains of SDGs. Table 2 shows the items used to measure the impact of corruption for each domain of SDGs. These items were chosen based on the empirical literature on corruption, where the items are inspired by the analysis of the impact of corruption on the aspects of SDGs, as outlined in the previous section. The items presented here were selected per their relevance to the Palestinian context. Each item is measured using the five-point Likert scale – with values ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree

(5).

To answer the first question, we first summarise people's perceptions regarding each item of the four domains of SDGs by calculating the mean score of the Likert scale for each item. Then the level of corruption from individuals' perspective is assessed based on the mean value as follows: very low (mean $\in [1.00, 1.80)$); low (mean $\in$[1.80, 2.60)); moderate (mean $\in$ [2.60, 3.40)); high (mean $\in$ [3.40, 4.20)), and very high (mean $\in$[4.20, 5.00]) (Gabriel, 2017). In order to answer the second question, we test the association between individuals' characteristics and their perceptions regarding the impact of corruption on the items of the four domains of SDGs. The hypotheses were tested using the independent-samples t-test. We test the relationship between a selected set of items of the four domains – which are deemed to be important – and individuals' characteristics, including the level of education (higher education vs secondary education); income (low vs high); employment status (employed vs unemployed), and employment sector (public vs other).

The main socio-demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the sample are summarised in Table 1. The sample size is first provided for each characteristic, while the sample share is in parentheses. Table 1 shows that the sample size is 521, 57% female. The average age of respondents is 29.7 years. 60.7% and 30.3% are, respectively, single and married, while the divorced and widowed individuals represent 9% of the sample. The shares of individuals living in rural and urban areas are equal (46.4%), while only 7.1% of the respondents reside in refugee camps. Approximately the sample live in Ramallah and the Albira governorate (48.6%), followed by Nablus (9.8%), Jerusalem (9.4%), Salfit (6.1%), Hebron (6.0%), and Jenin (5.0%). The sample share of all the other governorates (Bethlehem, Qalqilya, Tubas, Tulkarem and Jericho) represents 15.1%.

Most individuals hold a Bachelor's degree or diploma (68.5%), while 10.2% and 2.9% hold, respectively, a Master's degree or a PhD. The remaining sample has secondary (12.9%) or less than secondary education (5.6%). Looking at household total income, approximately a third of the sample indicated a household monthly income of 2000 to 3500 ILS (34.4%) and 3500 to 5000 ILS (32.4%). 7.5% belongs to the lowest income category (less than 2000 ILS), while 25.7% is in the highest income category (more than 5000 ILS). Regarding employment status, 13.1% are out of the labour force, 29.8% are unemployed, and 56.8% are employed, with 28.7% employed in the public sector, 52.3% in the private sector and 19.0% in NGOS.

Table 1:

The main characteristics of the sample

Size	**521**
Female	**297 (57.0%)**
Age	**29.7**
Marital status	
Single	316 (60.7%)
Married	158 (30.3%)
Others (Widowed and divorced)	47 (9.0%)
Place of residence	
Rural	242 (46.4%)
Urban	242 (46.4%)
Refugee camps	37 (7.1%)
Governorate	
Ramallah and Albira	253 (48.6%)
Nablus	51 (9.8%)
Jerusalem	49 (9.4%)
Salfit	32 (6.1%)
Hebron	31 (6.0%)
Jenin	26 (5.0%)
Other governorates (Bethlehem, Qalqilya, Tubas, Tulkarem and Jericho)	79 (15.1%)
Level of education	
Lower than secondary	29 (5.6%)
Secondary	67 (12.9%)
Bachelor or diploma	357 (68.5%)
Masters	53 (10.2%)
Ph.D.	15 (2.9%)
Level of monthly income	
Less than 2000 ILS	39 (7.5%)
2000 to 3500 ILS	179 (34.4%)
3500 to 5000 ILS	169 (32.4%)
More than 5000 ILS	134 (25.7%)
Employment status	
Out of the labour force	68 (13.1%)
Employed	296 (56.8%)
Unemployed	155 (29.8%)
Sector of employment	
Public	85 (28.7%)
Private	155 (52.3%)
NGOs	56 (19.0%)

Source: Author's own, 2023.

4. Results

4.1 Individual's perceptions about the impact of corruption on the four domains of SDGs

This section summarises the main results related to the first question about the impact of corruption on the domains of SDGs. Table 2 shows that the mean scores of the impact of corruption on the four domains of SDGs as perceived by individuals are within the high level (the mean scores are between 3.4 and 4.2). High mean scores indicate that individuals believe that corruption adversely affects social, economic, environmental and political sustainable development. First, in the social domain, the mean score of the impact of corruption on income inequality is the highest (3.95), followed by brain drain (emigration of highly-skilled individuals), then poverty and abuse of humanitarian aid. The mean scores for these items of the social domain of SDGS are, respectively, 3.92, 3.91 and 3.90. The impact of corruption on equal opportunity in access to healthcare and education obtained lower mean scores (3.75 vs 3.84) than the other items of the social domain.

Next, regarding the impact of corruption on the economic domain, the highest mean score is observed for the impact of corruption on private investment and progress of small and medium-sized enterprises (3.83). Further, individuals consider that corruption may increase government deficit and debt, with a mean score of 3.81, and may lead to misallocation of government revenues with a mean score of 3.79. The fact that corruption reduces government revenues and economic growth obtained a mean score of 3.74 as perceived by individuals.

Regarding the environmental impact, only individuals' perceptions of the impact of corruption on pollution, especially CO2 emissions is found to be moderate (mean score = 3.23). As for the other domains of the environmental aspect of SDGs, individuals believe that corruption hampered the implementation of laws oriented towards alleviating environmental deterioration at a high level with a mean score of 3.44. Also, they firmly believe that corruption hampered the implementation of green projects and public-private partnership projects oriented towards waste management problems with mean scores of 3.48 and 3.46.

Lastly, results on the political domain of SDGs show that individuals think that corruption reduces trust in governmental institutions at a high level (mean score = 3.90). Similarly, individuals firmly believe that corruption lead to violations of human rights, affects voting behaviour and political participation, and undermine democratic governance and the rule of law.

Table 2:

The items of the four domains of SDGs

Domain	*Item*	*Source*	*Mean score*
Social	Corruption hampers public allocations in the health sector; thus, it may hinder equal access to healthcare and worsen the quality of healthcare	Murshed & Mredula (2018); Tiongson et al. (2000)	3.75
	Corruption hampers public allocations in the education sector; thus, it may reduce equal opportunities in education	Murshed & Mredula (2018); Tiongson et al. (2000)	3.84
	Corruption increases poverty levels	Hoinaru et al. (2020)	3.91
	Corruption increases income inequality	Akçay (2006)	3.95
	Corruption may increase brain drain (emigration of highly-skilled individuals)	Cooray & Schneider (2015)	3.92
	Corruption may lead to the abuse of humanitarian aid	BouChabke & Haddad (2021)	3.90
	Overall		3.88
Economic	Corruption may hinder economic growth	Malański & Póvoa (2021)	3.74
	Corruption reduces government revenues, especially tax revenues due to tax avoidance	Borlea et al. (2017); Ivanyna et al. (2015)	3.74
	Corruption leads to misallocation of government revenues	O'Hare & Hall (2022)	3.79
	Corruption increases government deficit and debt as well as the debt service	Cooray et al. (2017); Kaufmann (2010)	3.81
	Corruption may hinder private investments and limit the progress of small and medium-sized enterprises	Amate-Fortes et al. (2015); Campos et al. (2010)	3.83
	Overall		3.78
Environmental	Corruption may lead to an increase in pollution, especially CO^2 emissions	Murshed & Mredula (2018); Ünver & Koyuncu (2017)	3.23
	Corruption hampers the implementation of laws oriented towards alleviating environmental deterioration	Islam & Lee (2016)	3.46
	Corruption may affect the implementation of the public-private partnership private oriented towards waste management problem	Herder & Larsson (2012)	3.44
	Corruption may lead to a decrease in the role of green projects oriented towards reducing environmental pollution	Ren et al., (2022)	3.48
	Overall		3.40
Political	Corruption may undermine democratic governance and the rule of law	Hoinaru et al. (2020)	3.67

	Corruption affects individuals' voting behaviour and political participation	Inman & Andrews (2015)	3.77
	Corruption leads to violations of human rights	Ren et al. (2022)	3.87
	Corruption reduces public trust in government institutions	Morris & Klesner (2010); Lavallée et al. (2008)	3.90
	Overall		3.80

Source: Author's own, 2023.

4.2 Hypotheses testing

The section summarised results pertaining to the second question of the study. In order to relate the above results to individuals' characteristics, this section tests the association between some selected items of the four domains of SDGs and individuals' socioeconomic characteristics. The results are summarised in Table 3. Each item has two rows; the first summarises the mean score of the item for each group, while the second summarises the significance level of the independent-samples t-test. The first hypothesis to be tested is about the statistically significant difference between individuals with different levels of education in their perception of corruption's impact on sustainable development domains. The results show a statistically significant difference between those with higher education and those with only secondary education or less in their perception of the impact of corruption on the role of green projects oriented towards reducing environmental pollution. Individuals with higher education report a higher mean score (3.54) compared to those with lower education (3.23).

The second and third hypotheses concern the statistically significant difference between individuals with different levels of income and employment status in their perception of corruption's impact on sustainable development domains. In general, there is a statistically significant difference between individuals according to income and employment differences in their perceptions of the impact of corruption on the different domains of SDGs. For example, individuals with high income have a higher mean score regarding the impact of corruption on economic growth (3.85) than a mean score of 3.59 for individuals with low income. Further, employed individuals' perceptions of the impact of corruption on the allocation of government revenues obtained a statistically higher mean score than that perceived by the unemployed (3.89 vs. 3.59).

The last hypothesis tests the existence of the statistically significant difference between individuals working in different sectors in their perception of the impact of corruption on the domains of sustainable development. The results show a statistically significant difference between those working in the public sector and those working in the private sector or NGOs in their perception of the impact of corruption on the role of green projects oriented towards reducing environmental pollution.

Table 3:

The association between selected items of the domains of the SDGs and individuals' characteristics

Item	Education[1]		Income[2]		Employment status		Employment sector[3]	
	Secondary	High	Low	High	Employed	Unemployed	Public	Other
Corruption increases poverty levels	3.82	3.93	3.73	4.04	4.04	3.72	3.93	3.97
	0.386		**0.002**		**0.003**		0.783	
Corruption increases income inequality	3.76	3.99	3.74	4.09	4.09	3.68	3.94	4.00
	0.058		**0.000**		**0.000**		0.674	
Corruption may increase brain drain (emigration of highly-skilled individuals)	3.88	3.93	3.74	4.05	3.97	3.80	3.93	3.89
	0.651		**0.001**		0.112		0.746	
Corruption may hinder economic growth	3.71	3.75	3.59	3.85	3.81	3.59	3.74	3.74
	0.719		**0.005**		**0.039**		0.990	
Corruption reduces government revenues, especially tax revenues due to tax avoidance	3.60	3.76	3.56	3.86	3.83	3.57	3.86	3.75
	0.164		**0.001**		**0.011**		0.343	
Corruption leads to misallocation of government revenues	3.70	3.81	3.61	3.92	3.89	3.59	3.89	3.76
	0.311		**0.000**		**0.003**		0.273	
Corruption may affect the implementation of the public-private partnership oriented towards waste management problems	3.24	3.49	3.43	3.45	3.43	3.35	3.28	3.44
	0.052		0.836		0.539		0.254	
Corruption may lead to a decrease in the role of green projects oriented towards reducing environmental pollution	3.23	3.54	3.44	3.51	3.49	3.35	3.25	3.53
	0.018		0.488		0.244		**0.043**	
Corruption affects individuals' voting behaviour and political participation	3.69	3.79	3.57	3.91	3.84	3.54	3.74	3.80
	0.390		**0.000**		**0.004**		0.606	
Corruption reduces public trust in government institutions	3.79	3.93	3.61	4.09	3.98	3.66	3.93	3.92
	0.255		**0.000**		**0.003**		0.948	

1 Secondary education includes those with either secondary education or less than secondary education, while higher education includes those with bachelor or diploma, master and PhD degrees.

2 The low-income group includes those with income less than 3500 ILS, while the high-income group includes those with income higher than 3500 ILS.

3 Other includes those working in the private sector and NGOs.

5. Discussion

Some of the main interesting results obtained from this paper are worth highlighting and discussing in terms of the existing empirical evidence and the achievement of SDGs. First, the impact of corruption on the four domains of SDGs is high as perceived by individuals. Palestinian citizens believe that corruption practices in governmental institutions hinder the progress towards achieving SDGs particularly, social, economic, environmental and political goals. This is consistent with the empirical evidence suggesting that different forms of systemic corruption may lead to development failure (Otuonye, 2020). Furthermore, available literature on developing countries shows that systemic corruption may discourage investment, affect government spending, particularly spending devoted to the education and health sectors, and hence reduce economic growth (Keeper, 2011). Secondly, results regarding the impact of corruption on the social domain demonstrate that corruption can increase inequality: income inequality and inequality of opportunities in access to services – mainly health and education. Such results support the theory stating that corruption leads to changes in income distributions and increase income inequality (Gyimah-Brempong & de Gyimah-Brempong, 2006).

Furthermore, such negative impact of corruption would hinder achieving goal number 3 – good health and well-being – and goal number 4 – quality education – as well as goal number 10 – reduced inequalities. This finding is in line with the empirical evidence suggesting that corruption would reduce public spending, increasing inequality in access to health and education (Swaleheen et al., 2019). In addition, empirical evidence shows that systemic corruption in the education sector, where individuals deal with corruption as normal behaviour, would decelerate the development process (Karimli, 2022). Thirdly, the current study shows that individuals believe that corruption may hinder economic growth and lead to misallocation of government revenues. Most of the existing literature uses the international perception of corruption index to measure the long run impact of corruption on economic growth. This strand of literature reveals that corruption would reduce the GDP per capita and the economic growth over time (Malański & Póvoa, 2021; Gründler & Potrafke, 2019; Damoah et al., 2017). Thus, with the persisting level of corruption in the country, it is difficult to progress towards achieving goal number 8 of the SDGs: "*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth…*". Fourth, results on the impact of corruption on the environmental domain of sustainable development support the empirical evidence indicating that corruption may lead to an increase in pollution especially CO2 emissions (Ünver & Koyuncu, 2017) and that corruption may lead to a decrease in the role of projects oriented towards reducing environmental pollution (Ren et al., 2022) and alleviating the waste problems (Herder & Larsson, 2012). Alleviating corruption would reduce the negative impact on the environment, hence improving progress towards many SDGs which are directly and indirectly related to the environment, such as goal 6 – clean water and sanitation, goal 7 – affordable and clean energy, goal 13 – climate action, goal 14 – life below water, and goal 15 – life on land.

Fifth, results on the political domain of SDGs show that corruption may affect individuals' voting behaviour and reduce their trust in public institutions. These findings also align with the empirical evidence as shown at the outset. Lastly, the current results show that individuals' perception of the impact of corruption on the four domains of SDGs may differ based on individuals' socioeconomic characteristics. For example, the impact of corruption on the role of green projects oriented towards reducing environmental pollution is higher when perceived by individuals with higher education compared to individuals with secondary education or less.

Furthermore, employed individuals and individuals with high incomes have higher mean score regarding the impact of corruption on the social and economic domains of SDGs. Lastly, available evidence shows that to curb corruption and progress towards achieving the SDGs, corruption should be perceived as a collective-action problem – as opposed to a principal-agent problem (Persson et al., 2012), which entails that everyone in the system should cooperate with others to curb corruption rather than acting selfishly to achieve only self-interests.

6. Conclusion

Corruption has been considered an everlasting chronic issue in developing countries. This study mainly aims to evaluate the impact of corruption on social, economic, environmental and political domains of sustainable development in Palestine from the citizens' point of view. The results obtained from this study align with previous empirical evidence demonstrating that a high level of corruption would hinder the progress towards achieving SDGs at all levels (social, economic, environmental and political). Many developing countries, including Palestine, have committed to achieving SDGs by 2030. However, Palestine has not yet made noticeable progress in achieving most of the SDGs, including those related to health, education, inequality, poverty, and environmental and political goals. SDG 16 is the goal related to enhancing anti-corruption policies, mainly Target 16.3, which is about promoting "the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all"; Target 16.5 regarding "Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms", and Target 16.6 concerning developing "effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels". Therefore, to accelerate the progress towards implementing and achieving SDGs in Palestine, it is crucial to successfully develop anti-corruption policies that are in line with the targets of SDG 16 and are feasible in the Palestinian context.

Furthermore, it is imperative to enforce the application of these policies, monitor their implementation over time, and update them in case needed. First, improving the quality of governance in public institutions and controlling corruption is necessary to attain economic and sustainable development. It is also necessary to practice a democracy that offers greater opportunity for broad public participation, whether in elections or developing programmes and policies and monitoring their implementation.

It is also crucial to ensure effective political will to combat corruption and take appropriate measures to enhance transparency and integrity, which are essential to all policies, programmes and projects. It is crucial to reconsider allocating the general government budget across all economic sectors, mainly health and education. The government could also combat corruption by implementing effective laws that are intended to criminalise any employee in the public sector who practice any kind of corruption. Finally, the government should create a specific unit that is responsible for collecting, analysing and monitoring all the financial data related to all public institutions. This step would help alleviate financial corruption and the associated negative impact on the different domains of sustainable development.

This paper adds to the empirical literature of corruption in Palestine and the region as it attempts to analyse the impact of corruption on SDGs from individuals' perspectives. However, some limitations of the study are worth highlighting. First, the current analysis accounts for four domains of sustainable development only. Further studies on the impact of corruption on other indicators and domains of SDGs are needed. For example, given the evident level of corruption in the education and health sectors in the country, it is crucial to assess the impact of corruption on these two important sectors using actual data. Second, the study assesses corruption's impact at a given time. However, the level of corruption is still high and increasing based on citizens' beliefs. Accordingly, future research may be devoted to analysing the dynamic of corruption and its impact on the progress towards attaining the SDGs, mainly gaol 16, which is about prompting societies for sustainable development and building accountable institutions.

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