Application of the concept of ‘Social Licence to Operate’ beyond infrastructure projects
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CHAPTER 5
Social Licence to Operate through a Gender Lens: The challenges of including women’s interests in development assistance projects
5.1 INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A GENDERED APPROACH

Development assistance organizations face many challenges in ensuring that their target communities achieve positive outcomes from their efforts. Development projects do not necessarily always bring about positive change to every sub-group in a given community (Fowler 2013; Slim 2002; Vanclay 2012), and some sub-groups may suffer unintended negative consequences if their needs and interests are not carefully considered (Vanclay 2002; Esteves et al. 2012). This is especially the case for the most vulnerable groups in a society, who typically experience cultural and institutional challenges in making their voices heard (Narayan & Patel 2000; Narayan et al. 2000; Narayan & Petesch 2002). In this paper, we focus on one such sub-group, women in traditional conservative rural societies. The aim of the paper is to argue that a gender dimension must be applied in conjunction with the concept of Social Licence to Operate (SLO). We demonstrate how development assistance organizations and their target communities can benefit from applying a gender perspective in their consideration of social licence.

The SLO concept has been used by different types of organizations to consider the level of approval accorded to their operations by a local community (Boutilier & Thomson 2011; Prno & Slocombe 2012). SLO is a conceptual approach an organisation applies in engaging with communities and stakeholders. It assists organizations in identifying proactive actions they can take to increase the likelihood that they will enjoy the support of the communities where they work. ‘Obtaining’ a SLO is relevant to all phases of an organization’s activities. In the context of development assistance, organizations need a SLO from the community members where they work, even if these people have limited power or are unable to directly affect the project activities. Although there are some critiques of the concept (Bice 2014; Owen & Kemp 2013), from a pragmatic point of view ensuring SLO is ‘good business’ (Vanclay 2014), and for development assistance organisations, being able to demonstrate that they have the approval (i.e. SLO) of their target audiences helps them attract grants for future projects. Thus, even the least powerful groups can still influence a project in the long term.

In this paper, we point out that SLO is gendered in the sense that women and men have differing needs, interests and situations. In some traditional conservative societies, existing gender roles often result in a low level of external (outside the house) activity for women, making it difficult for organizations to engage with them and consider their needs adequately (Moser 1993). To maintain an ongoing social licence, an organization needs to ensure it addresses the needs of all their stakeholders. Thus, development assistance organisations must ensure that they engage with women and obtain their approval from them, as well as from the male stakeholders they typically consider. By exploring the experience of CARE international in two rural areas of Georgia, Samtske-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, we discuss the challenges development assistance organizations potentially encounter in trying to obtain a gender-aware SLO.

For a fully gender-aware SLO, it is not enough to simply include a gender component to a project as part of a box-ticking exercise. This ‘add women and stir’ approach puts women in opposition to
men, and women’s interests would then be considered as ‘separate to and in isolation from those of men’ (Lahiri-Dutt & Ahmad 2012: 119). Organizations and consultants often see communities as homogenous entities, ‘without taking into consideration the different roles, positions and situation of women and men’ (Lahiri-Dutt & Ahmad 2012: 118). This leads to them formulating assumptions which are essentially based on men’s lives, and thus the consequent project interventions cause further weakening of women’s positions in their communities.

The paper first discusses the evolution of the SLO concept and its relevance to the development assistance world. We then outline the methodology we used and provide an overview of CARE International and its JOIN project (local actors join for inclusive economic development and governance in the South Caucasus) in Georgia. The JOIN project is basically about empowering local communities by creating sustainable mechanisms to enable the development of local economies. Next, we focus on CARE’s activities in relation to gender. Then we conceptualize the challenges for a gendered social licence to operate, based on CARE’s experience in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. This is followed by a conclusion with recommendations about what would enhance the consideration of gender issues in development assistance projects and thus increase the likelihood of development assistance organisations gaining social licence from women as well as from men.

5.2 MOVING BEYOND ‘PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT’ TO ‘EARNING A SOCIAL LICENCE TO OPERATE’

Development assistance organizations have acknowledged that projects often leave out important aspects associated with local contexts and are too ‘donor-driven’ (Conlin & Stirrat 2008). Consequently, they have started to focus on involving beneficiaries more at various phases of their projects, rather than simply implementing projects designed without input from target communities (Spence 2007). ‘Participation’ became a cornerstone of the narrative of development assistance organizations (Ellis & Biggs 2001), even though it has no singular understanding (Rebien 1996). In fact, there are many ways in which participation is effected in development settings, including through the use of: Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers & Blackburn 1996), Participatory Action Research (Oakley 1991) and Participatory Evaluation (Garaway 1995; Rebien 1996). Despite some critiques (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Benjamin 2012; Cooksy & Mark 2012), it is generally considered that the shift towards greater involvement of target communities in project development and implementation is beneficial (Cavill & Sohail 2007). However, simple participation is not enough, and a specific gender and sexual orientation assessment is required (Thierry 2007; Sauer & Podhora 2013). Participation is fundamental to SLO, because without participation how could a project or organisation know it was meeting stakeholder needs.

There are several main problems with participation. Although nice in theory, a number of studies (Rebien 1996; Gregory 2000; Mikkelsen 2005; Craig & Vanclay 2005), and our experience, have demonstrated that participation can be hard to apply in practice. Not all beneficiaries can actually be
included in the participatory processes, and selecting a limited number of participants is problematic. Basic forms of participation (i.e. simple consultation methods) are inadequate. Furthermore, there are many reasons why people may not want to participate, e.g. because they have no interest in the project; because they don’t trust the project team; or conversely, because they do trust the team and don’t feel the need to participate. Finally even if participatory processes are conducted effectively, it may still not be possible to make inferences about the needs of all the various subgroups in a community because there will always be stakeholders who can’t be or weren’t included for a wide range of reasons (Hayward et al. 2004).

Women in traditional conservative communities are, obviously, in a particularly disadvantageous situation, and consequently it will be hard for them to take part in project activities or consultation processes, even when there is a deliberate effort by project organisers to involve them. Thus, there is a risk that their specific needs and ideas will be left out, even when a gender lens is applied. In such cases, measuring the number of participants and the extent of their participation is not particularly useful, because people who do not participate cannot push for their interests, thus leading to a potential bias in the outcomes (Hayward et al. 2004). Therefore, the issue of participation should be considered carefully and to achieve better results, development organizations should go beyond a basic participatory approach or box ticking exercise to a more fully considered and reflexive community engagement process that seeks to ensure a social licence to operate from each stakeholder group.

SLO is a relatively new concept currently gaining much recognition in the corporate sphere (Boutilier & Thomson 2011; Vanclay 2014). Although the concept started to develop about fifteen years ago, especially in the mining (Prno & Slocombe 2012; Joyce & Thomson 2000) and forestry (Dare et al., in press) industries, it is now widespread across many business sectors. SLO is used to indicate the level of acceptance or approval of the work of a particular organization by its stakeholders (Boutilier & Thomson 2011). Joyce and Thomson (2000), for example, highlight that mining is considered to be a ‘dirty business’ and the sector increasingly faces social opposition, which can lead to the closure of operations. The SLO concept was later extended to other sectors, typically those causing environmental harm. For example, Gunningham et al. (2004) examined pulp and paper manufacturing. Over time, the concept has been widely applied and is much used by consultants. Particularly noteworthy is Boutilier and Thomson’s website – sociallicense.com – where they outline their model of SLO in which they visualize four levels of social licence: ‘withheld’, ‘acceptance’, ‘approval’ and ‘psychological identification’ (Boutilier & Thomson 2011).

In Jijelava and Vanclay (in press), we applied the SLO concept to a field which is not perceived as being ‘nasty’ and does not belong to the corporate world. We looked at the work of an international NGO, Mercy Corps, and concluded that the SLO concept can be useful in assessing the work of humanitarian and development assistance organizations. The concept can be useful in other NGO domains as well. Despite the generally positive perceptions about development assistance organizations, there are many areas where things can go wrong. It is not hard to imagine a scenario in which an organization pursues its own agenda not matching the needs of
the local population. Conlin and Stirrat (2008: 194), for example, point out that when the right systems of connecting with local people are not in place, at best donor projects become ‘islands of excellence demonstrating what might be achieved; at worst, [they lead to] unsustainable and undermined local systems’.

The humanitarian and development assistance discourse has become increasingly aware of the risks of detachment from local communities it faces, and there have been attempts to design more effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Cracknell 2000). Although the development assistance literature does not use the SLO concept (at least till now), the trajectory of monitoring and evaluation work is moving towards similar understandings – better connections with local communities, less usage of pre-determined indicators and more participatory approaches (Conlin & Stirrat 2008; Vanclay 2013).

The SLO concept can be usefully employed in the work of development assistance organizations as it helps to address the needs of local communities and specific sub-groups within these communities (Jijelava & Vanclay in press). It is essential that an organization is flexible and able to develop and modify its projects as a result of feedback from stakeholders. Although having local partners and building their capacity is important, donor organizations should not use this as an excuse to be detached from local communities. SLO is a useful conceptual framework because it potentially encourages development assistance organizations to assess continuously the dynamics and needs of the target communities. Considering the interests of the various sub-groups in a community, including those who are not necessarily vocal, will increase the chance of sustainable, long-term success (Vanclay 2012). Embodying the concept of SLO is very different to the conventional approach used by development assistance organizations (i.e. the logframe, the project management document that outlines the desired outcomes and indicators to measure progress), because it is a different way of thinking about and engaging with affected communities. Specifically, it implies conducting thorough impact assessment processes which take into account the interests of the different sub-groups in the target communities and ensures that their expectations are acknowledged and managed and that trust is built. Moreover, it also implies that organizations should engage in continuous communication with all sub-groups.

5.3 METHODOLOGY

This paper is largely based on previous research undertaken by the primary author, a native Georgian, in his capacity as a research consultant in Georgia. With the research consultancy firm, GeoWel Research, he has managed baseline studies, monitoring and evaluation projects, and has investigated various topics of specific interest for development assistance organisations and other clients. Five years of working in the field enabled him to collect a vast amount of data and to acquire much nuanced understanding of the dynamics in Georgia. In this paper, we use this knowledge and apply it to the concept of SLO.
Several research projects undertaken by GeoWel Research are particularly relevant. For CARE International, in 2013 we completed an evaluation of their JOIN project, as well as a more specific research project inquiring into the possibilities for cross-border cooperation in selected value chains in the target communities. The data collection activities for these two projects included six focus groups and interviews with 10 representatives of local government and civil society. As a separate project, in 2013 GeoWel Research undertook an assessment of gender roles in selected value chains associated with the JOIN project (GeoWel Research 2013). For this project, eight focus groups with members of the local population, predominantly women (women facilitators were hired for the four women-only focus groups), were conducted, along with 20 key informant interviews with local and national level experts and representatives of civil society organizations, and a survey of 142 local inhabitants in the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. The study also included an analysis of Georgian legislation. Consistent with good ethical research practice (see Vanclay et al. 2013), the JOIN project staff were given the opportunity to comment on the paper, and have agreed to it being published.

The JOIN project operated in six municipalities in two regions of Georgia: Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. These regions are mostly rural and contain significant proportions of people from ethnic minority groups. For example, in the two municipalities in Samtskhe-Javakheti, over 90% of the population were ethnic Armenians. Of the four municipalities in Kvemo Kartli, three had over 60% ethnic Azerbaijani population and one had about 45% ethnic Azerbaijani population.

In more-or-less the same geographic location, GeoWel Research has also conducted several other projects, including for Mercy Corps (see Jijelava & Vanclay in press), the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs, the Eurasian Partnership Foundation and GIZ, addressing a wide range of issues, including the social dimensions of development assistance projects, internal displacement, youth development, and education (see www.geowel.org).

5.4 CARE INTERNATIONAL AND THE JOIN PROJECT IN GEORGIA

CARE’s JOIN project started in 2011 and at the time of writing in early 2014 was anticipated to finish in late 2014. The project covered six municipalities in southern Georgia, as well as six municipalities in the northern part of Armenia. The project had three main components:

1. Creating Municipal Working Groups (MWGs) in each municipality including local government representatives, farmers and civil society representatives (NGOs and media). CARE hires facilitators who help the MWGs develop Municipal Development Plans. The MWGs identify a value chain (industry sector) on which they focus, for example, milk processing or potato production.
2. Creating Business and Development Information Centres (BDIC) in each municipality where farmers can go to receive technical advice on agricultural matters.

3. Facilitating better links between national and local actors by organising events at which national level actors can learn about the situation in the target municipalities, while local actors can gain access to information from national level actors.

Unfortunately, the JOIN project encountered serious problems and delays due to the political upheaval in Georgia in 2012. With a new government coming into power, many government employees were retrenched (with only some being replaced), and it took time to find new local partners. These issues were particularly significant for the second component of the project because the central government decided to establish its own agricultural consultation centres in almost all municipalities and CARE’s BDICs would thus be redundant. CARE therefore made a strategic decision not to facilitate the establishment of independent BDICs in Georgia and instead to assist with the implementation of the government’s agricultural consultation centres.

By examining CARE’s project documents, it can be concluded that a reasonable attempt was given to consider women’s needs during project implementation. For all three project components, CARE included gender-specific indicators in the project logframe. For the first component, one of the indicators was defined as: ‘MWG members have advocated for the inclusion of their analyses and pro-poor and gender sensitive activity plans into official planning and budgeting’. An example of a gender-sensitive indicator for the second component was: ‘Information and services provided by the BDICs take into consideration roles, capacities and potentials of women in local economy and address prevailing discrimination’. In both indicators, CARE stressed the importance of including women in the actions envisaged by the project. In effect, it established gender-based quotas to ensure women’s participation.

A sophisticated analysis of development programs in 500 Afghan villages concluded that the implementation of gender quotas improves ‘outcomes specific to participation in some economic, social and political activities … they, however, produce no change in more entrenched female roles linked to family decision-making or in attitudes toward the general role of women in society’ (Beath et al. 2013: 540). Thus, gender quotas seem to be a necessary but not sufficient measure to empower women (Mukhopadhyay 2004). This was well understood by CARE and, in addition to including women in their activities, they also commissioned a gender study, conducted by the primary author of this paper, to identify the needs and opportunities for women in the target regions (GeoWel Research 2013).

After the gender study, which involved qualitative methods and a small quantitative component, CARE designed and implemented a gender awareness training course which was delivered in each of the six target municipalities. The training sought to raise awareness about the gender issues identified during the study and to suggest possible strategies to address these issues.
5.5 THE GENDER SITUATION IN GEORGIA

To have a complete picture of the gender challenges that influence a SLO, it is useful to consider the macro level first. We reviewed national legislation and several international gender-relevant indexes to assess the gender situation in Georgia. In terms of laws and regulations, it might seem that the situation of women in Georgia is good. Georgia adopted a Law on Gender Equality in 2010 and subsequently implemented an action plan. A Gender Equity Council of the Parliament has been established and includes senior politicians. A position of adviser on gender issues has been established within the Prime-Minister’s office. Moreover, soon every Ministry is supposed to have its own gender adviser. Despite these initiatives, however, women continue to have significant problems, especially in the rural regions of Georgia. UNDP’s 2012 Gender Inequality Index ranks Georgia in 81st place amongst a total of 148 ranked countries (UNDP 2013). Georgia is far behind its neighbours – Russia (51st), Azerbaijan (54th), Armenia (59th) and Turkey (68th) (UNDP 2013). Georgia is also ranked low on other gender indicators (see Figure 5.1). Furthermore, for all indicators except the Women’s Economic Opportunity Index, Georgia’s positions have deteriorated slightly compared to the previous year. Together, this emphasizes that the situation in Georgia is far from being good and is not improving. Figure 5.1 provides a summary of Georgia’s position in 2012.

Figure 5.1. | Georgia’s ranking in various gender indexes in 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Georgia’s rank</th>
<th>Total number of countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN Gender Inequality Index (GII)</td>
<td><a href="https://data.undp.org/dataset/Table-4-Gender-Inequality-Index/pq34-nwq7">https://data.undp.org/dataset/Table-4-Gender-Inequality-Index/pq34-nwq7</a></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)</td>
<td><a href="http://genderindex.org/ranking">http://genderindex.org/ranking</a></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: constructed by authors

It is generally expected in Georgia that men should head the family and have the dominant financial and decision-making status within the household. An annual poll conducted by the Georgia office of the Caucasus Researchers’ Resource Centers (CRRC) had a question on who should be a head in a household. Figure 5.2 provides a chart summarizing the answers broken down by gender. As can be seen from Figure 5.2, the majority of the population, and more so among men than women, thought that a man should be the head of a household. Only 1% of the whole population thought that a woman should be the head. The idea that women are not supposed to work outside of a family to generate income also explains that only 57% of all eligible women in Georgia are in the labour force, compared with 78% of men (Geostat 2013). This is a gender participation gap of 21 percentage points difference between females and males. In OECD countries, the average gender gap is around 10% (IMF 2012).
As is the case elsewhere, female-headed households are generally worse-off than male-headed households (Buvinić & Gupta 1997). According to the World Bank (2009) report, ‘Poverty Assessment in Georgia’, female-headed households are much more likely to face extreme poverty. The workload and division of roles between women and men in a household are quite different. While men generally deal with the physically-challenging tasks, women spend more time than men to accomplish the many tasks assigned to women. Often women help men and substitute for them, while men are not generally expected to take on women’s responsibilities.

![Figure 5.2](http://crrc.ge/oda/?dataset=4&row=145&column=2)

**Figure 5.2.** Who should be the family decision-maker in the family?

## 5.6 CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING A GENDER-SENSITIVE SOCIAL LICENCE TO OPERATE

Development assistance projects typically bring different outcomes to men and women in local communities. Below we discuss the six key challenges CARE’s JOIN project faced in attempting to address this gender dimension. While not an exhaustive list and sometimes repeating what is already well known (e.g. Feldstein & Jiggins 1994; Sachs 1996; Peiris 1997; Guijt & Shah 1998; March et al. 1999), we document what we believe to be the main issues development assistance organizations encounter when working with traditional communities in Georgia and arguably elsewhere. The six challenges were identified from our analysis of the data, based on what was most significant either in terms of the stated concerns of our research participants or from what was most evident from an analytical perspective. We acknowledge that many of these issues have been said before (even many times), but the fact that they continue to emerge in project settings demonstrates that much still needs to be done to make development assistance gender aware. The six challenges to gaining a gender-sensitive SLO are:
SLO through a Gender Lens: The challenges of including women’s interests in development assistance projects

- cultural protocols and gender roles reinforce and exacerbate women’s traditional disadvantage
- the existing relationships between women and local authorities limit their opportunities
- the limited mobility of women creates additional barriers
- there is gender disparity in access to information and resources
- women are exploited as a means to access financial resources
- the out-migration of men means that many women are at risk of increasing vulnerability.

These challenges are issues faced by development assistance organisations. They are related to the SLO concept in that development assistance organisations must obtain the approval and active engagement of all their stakeholders. More than just addressing target groups, they must ensure that there are not inadvertent consequences on non-target groups. Unfortunately, as we demonstrate below, that lack of a gender lens has meant that some projects have worsened the position of women, even if they were intended to be beneficial.

1. Cultural protocols and gender roles reinforce and exacerbate women’s traditional disadvantage

The dominant gender roles in many traditional societies tend to keep women confined within the house, while encouraging men to be engaged in the community. Women typically accept the gender roles and their actions tend to be based on the traditional values to which they try to adhere. In public meetings, women were much more restrained in the presence of men than they were when there were only with other women. In our women-only focus groups, they talked much more openly about the burdens of their workload and other issues. The cultural protocols also create other constraints to the active involvement of women in on-going project processes, and reduce their access to information and resources. That such cultural protocols exist in traditional societies is not a new finding. However, this is such a fundamental and overarching issue, and perhaps the main cause of the disadvantaged position of women, we believe it deserves renewed and continued attention.

The entrenched gender roles demand that men be considered the ‘head of the household’ because ‘men are always wiser than women’ (Marneuli women focus group, gender study). However, most of the work in the home is carried out by women. While men generally deal with the physically-challenging tasks, women deal with tasks which require continuous attention, such as cleaning the house and looking after the children. In the UNDP study, only four percent of men said that it was okay for men to do women’s tasks at home, such as washing or cleaning (UNDP 2013). Our fieldwork showed that people acknowledge that women have a much greater workload than men, and men
only rarely help in doing women’s tasks. Even in those households where men were helpful, many
tasks were still left exclusively to women.

Given this context, it becomes clear that merely increasing the agricultural productivity of a family
farm will not translate into improving women’s situations, as the following story demonstrates. In
all municipalities targeted by CARE, especially in Samtskhe-Javakheti, potatoes were a popular crop.
The most challenging task on potato farms is harvesting, which is done manually in the fall. The
job is physically demanding as the people doing the harvesting must bend down on their knees to
collect the potatoes. Usually, this task is assigned to women, with the men being busy loading the
potato bags on to trucks. When development assistance leads to increased yields per hectare, or
increased area sown, as a consequence women have more work to do. Already busy with household
and other women’s tasks, they will thus end up with less free time, more physical work, and less
independence. This creates a conundrum for development assistance organizations as they often
desire to help local communities to increase productivity and thus the yield of potatoes. If gender
roles along the value chain are not considered in advance, then a development activity might actually
lead to an increase in the workload of women and increase their dependence and/or reduce their
wellbeing.

2. The existing relationships between women and local authorities limit their
opportunities

An illustration of women’s roles in a community and the challenges it can pose for SLO can be gained
by looking at local government. This is another dimension of cultural protocols that puts women
in a disadvantaged position. In Georgia, local governments are predominantly comprised of men.
According to official statistics, 68% of local government employees are male; rising to 76% when
only managerial positions are considered (IDFI 2013). In rural areas of Georgia, these percentages
are much higher. By comparison, in some European countries the share of women in the public
sector often exceeds 60% (OECD 2012). All the heads of the representative and executive bodies
in all of Georgia’s 65 municipalities are male (IDFI 2013). This gender imbalance leads to further
disadvantage for women in traditional societies because it is difficult for women to communicate
their local problems to male decision-makers. In fact, men frequently fail to listen to women, and
do not consider that they have a valuable contribution to make. A focus group participant described
such a situation:

‘For us women, it is harder to talk to men than to women about local problems.
In our village, we had this water problem and one woman decided to solve it.
When she interacted with local officials, she faced derision. Men were telling her
that it was not a woman’s job to solve water issues in the village and if men can’t
solve it, then it probably can’t be solved! She still fought on and found some non-
governmental organizations who were supporting small infrastructural projects.
And she did win in the end, and managed to fix the water problem, after two years
of fighting. You should have seen the faces of children when the water was fixed, they were playing and cheering! Everybody was happy! ... We proposed her as a local representative for our village on a Board, and the whole village supported her. We went to the municipal centre and even got approval from the head of the municipality. But her formal appointment never came through. After several months, the municipal head said that there was a man from a neighbouring village who aspired to the same position, and he could not appoint a woman now. People would not understand how he could appoint a woman when there was a man after for the same position. So, in the end, that man was appointed.'

This example highlights several issues. It initially mentions the unease women have in talking to men. It then highlights how women’s ideas are disregarded. Finally, it highlights that women are not taken seriously and cannot have political influence, even when they have proved themselves capable.

Gender considerations are important in other ways as well. All activities, be it infrastructure development or technical advice, are influenced by gender. The challenge for a gendered SLO is to make sure that local government practices do not remain masculinized. When an international organization helps local authorities develop infrastructure projects, they must take care not to ignore women’s roles and needs. Women can experience greater impact (inconvenience) than men in many ways because the male technicians do not give any consideration to women’s activities. This can inadvertently cause problems in many ways. For example, because water is essential for washing and cleaning, if the scheduling of water delivery or the time set for switching the water (or electricity) off for maintenance does not take into account women’s needs and routines, then it will put more stress on their daily chores.

3. The limited mobility of women creates additional barriers

One of the biggest issues for women, which we came across many times and in many ways, related to women’s limited mobility. Women are culturally expected to perform a range of tasks and roles prescribed as female, which typically constrain them to remain within the house. Although sometimes they need to go to local markets or administrative offices or to help out on the farm, there is little opportunity for them to socialise with other women and little independent freedom. This was reinforced by the lack of transport options for women. While public transport does exist to a limited extent, it was primarily between villages rather than within a local neighbourhood. The lack of transport options, in conjunction with the cultural restrictions on women’s public presence and movement, does not facilitate their independence.

Women are particularly restricted by the cultural expectation that they are not to drive vehicles and their consequent lack of ability to be able to drive. Not only is this a restriction on their mobility, it limits the roles they can play on the farm, which is particularly an issue for women-headed households.
(see point 6 below). An issue is that even though some women may be interested in learning how to drive, this would not necessarily be accepted by other members of the community, and even local civil society organizations might not take them seriously, as one focus group participant told us:

‘There was an NGO that came from the capital and held meetings with the local population on identifying local needs and finding solutions to them. I proposed that it might be a good idea to teach women how to drive so that interested women could be employed as drivers in some projects. Unfortunately, my idea was met with sarcasm from the other participants at the meeting. The person from the NGO did not take my idea seriously either and quickly dismissed it.’ (Marneuli women FG, gender study)

Another aspect of the mobility issue relates to access to veterinary services for female-headed households. Veterinary services are not well developed in Georgia and apart from serious diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, farmers have to look after their livestock largely by themselves. However, if a farmer notices something wrong with an animal, they can take a urine sample to a government veterinary laboratory. Unfortunately, these laboratories are located in only a few municipal centres. So, for example, somebody from Akhalkalaki municipality would have to travel about 70 kilometres (i.e. around 1.5 hours travelling time each way) to get to Akhaltsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti’s regional centre. Laboratory results are typically available only after about 4-5 hours. While waiting, men usually deal with other farm and household issues given they are in the regional centre. However, for women the length of waiting time is more challenging because the traditional gender roles limit what they can do during this time, and they still have their daily chores to do back at home. Also, the gender roles influence the quality of interaction women have with the government representatives. Because they are women, the government representatives do not take them seriously (a situation women farmers face everywhere, see Vanclay & Silvasti 2009). Thus, when a development assistance organization is trying to solve issues like veterinary access, gender considerations must be taken into account. For example, if new facilities are to be opened, a ‘women friendly’ environment should be arranged. This could take a number of forms, such as: establishing the facilities near other places where women have an interest, such as markets or shops; and arranging suitable waiting rooms with enough chairs.

4. There is a gender disparity in access to information and resources

Because women are expected to spend most of their time at home while men deal with ‘external’ activities, women end up with fewer opportunities, resulting in less access to education and to the resources that could lead to their professional or personal development. This problem was exacerbated in JOIN’s target areas where knowledge of Georgian language was limited, creating additional problems in accessing information (see Figure 5.3). Thus, literacy and/or fluency in the local language is a relevant issue for SLO, as an organisation must be able to communicate with its stakeholders. How could an organisation have social acceptability (i.e. SLO) if the stakeholders cannot understand what the organisation is doing? There is a dual issue here: the need for ethnic
minorities to have opportunities to learn the official language; and the need for an organisation to be able to communicate in local minority languages.

The gender study showed that in 2013 only 13% of ethnic minority women in the target municipalities claim they can speak fluent or conversational Georgian; with 58% of women knowing only basic Georgian. Limited knowledge of Georgian language poses significant constraints for them. Although there are no available comparative statistics about the knowledge of the Georgian language among men, it is generally believed that the situation is better for men because they have learned the language through their frequent interactions outside of their households and language communities, for example when trading commodities or dealing with state authorities. The low level of Georgian language knowledge and the inadequate resources available in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages creates many barriers for women in the target areas.

The language problem creates a particularly challenging SLO issue for development assistance organizations like CARE. Usually, development assistance organizations try to involve as many people as possible in their projects. But ethnic minority women are excluded from the process because it is hard to get the information to them; and even if they hear about particular projects, it is hard for them to see the value in the activities which are mostly, if not fully, carried out in a language they barely understand. This problem cannot be solved by using just Armenian or Azerbaijani languages, as the target municipalities in Georgia are ethnically mixed and there are always some Georgians involved in the process who do not understand the predominant (ethnic) languages in their municipalities. Running multiple activities in smaller, language-based groups is not considered feasible because the number of participants may not be sufficient. More importantly, splitting the society into language (and thus ethnic) groups would inhibit activities aimed at connecting local actors. Also, often the key local decision-makers and national experts who are to be involved in the project are usually only Georgian speaking. Providing translation services at meetings has been widely used. However,
it doesn’t solve the problem because translations are usually done into Russian, a fairly common
second language for all groups but for which many people also have low proficiency. As a result, all
ethnic groups and many project stakeholders find the process difficult to follow and often drop out.

5. Women are exploited as a means to access financial resources

Due to high unemployment levels, there is little cash availability in households in Samtskhe-Javakheti
and Kvemo Kartli. When farmers need to purchase agricultural inputs, they turn to banks for loans.
However, the annual interest rates for consumer loans at banks in Georgia range from 20% to 36%.
Nevertheless, even with high interest rates, banks rarely approve loans for farmers because in rural
areas only a few people have formal jobs, and agricultural land and rural houses are not worth very
much; consequently, they cannot be used as collateral.

One of the largest formal employers in most villages is the public school. A typical village with a
population of 500 households will have a school with around 25 teachers. Schools tend to employ
women as teachers. These women have better access to bank loans than men due to their formal
employment, which frequently results in their taking out loans for agricultural inputs. This means
that, at least until after harvest (and sale of produce), women make the repayments on these loans.
Consequently, their independence within a household decreases. In cases where a household cannot
pay off a loan due to a bad harvest or other reason, the salary of the borrower (i.e. the woman)
is ‘frozen’ and they therefore lose their financial independence altogether. Such exploitation of
women’s salaries to access financial resources for the family is common.

6. The out-migration of men means that many women are at risk of increasing vulnerability

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, there was a very high level of out-migration of men, typically to Russia for
construction work. As a demonstration of the impact of this out-migration, in 2013 the municipality
of Ninotsminda had about 33,000 women and only 28,000 men (Geostat 2013). Hence, many
households were female headed. For development assistance organizations, this gender imbalance
creates additional challenges because the gendered nature of project impacts are more tangible for
female-headed households (Buvinić & Gupta 1997). An example of this is the gendered nature of
commercial transactions. When a family needs to hire a tractor to plough or harvest a piece of land,
men usually make the necessary negotiations. Female-headed households typically have to rely on
male relatives to do this for them. In a traditional setting, it is particularly difficult for women to
negotiate such issues because they are not normally expected to deal with technical issues (men’s
business) and consequently they often do not have the appropriate experience in selecting the right
equipment, negotiating the price, or organizing other logistical matters. Hence, women-headed
households have a greater risk of lower productivity and in being exploited.
5.7 CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A GENDER-AWARE SOCIAL LICENCE

Corporations are expected to conduct impact assessments to identify negative consequences to mitigate and opportunities to enhance. Effective impact management is one means to achieve a social licence from a community. Based on the case we discussed in this paper, it is apparent that development assistance organizations can also benefit from focusing on their social licence. In our view, there is not one single social licence, but multiple social licences which an organization needs to take into account before implementing a project. In this paper we focused on a gender perspective when considering a social licence and we highlighted issues which can be addressed by development assistance organizations. We emphasised that the benefits local communities might obtain – in terms of infrastructure development, agricultural productivity or economic growth – have a gendered impact that needs to be taken into account. In traditional societies, development assistance organizations can avoid worsening women’s dependence on men by acknowledging and addressing the risks of creating gender-differentiated outcomes of their activities.

Being female, of course, is not the only source of vulnerability in rural communities in Georgia or elsewhere. Development assistance projects have differing effects on various groups such as ethnic, religious, language, and sexual preference minorities, as well as the aged, the young, the unemployed, and persons with disabilities. The real challenge for development organizations is to make sure that the interests of all vulnerable groups are not neglected. When an organization starts to work in a community, it is relatively easy to connect with active people in dominant positions and with organised community groups, but it is difficult to reach out to those who are quiet or unable to advocate their interests. In the Georgian context, such groups include: (1) women who can barely leave their houses because they need to undertake their daily housekeeping chores, including looking after children, the aged, or sick household members; (2) persons who do not speak fluent Georgian and therefore find it hard to understand the changes in their own community; and (3) people who live in remote areas and cannot easily travel to the municipal centres where the majority of activities tend to be undertaken.

There are no readily-available, immediate solutions for development assistance organizations to assist them in addressing the challenges of developing a comprehensive social licence that takes account of gender issues, and the specific strategies will always depend on the local context. However, we can draw some general conclusions and recommendations based on our discussion above.

First, to get past the barriers created by the established cultural protocols and gender roles, development assistance organizations should consider the gendered impacts of their activities before they plan their projects. For example, in considering projects aimed at creating job opportunities in a local community, development organizations should ensure that either some female-specific jobs are created, and/or ensure that women are specifically encouraged and enabled to apply for the job vacancies in general. Other actions can include helping various sub-groups to organize and identify common interests. For example, increasing potato production could be done in a way that
benefits the community as a whole, and the capacity of women is built through providing education and training in management and marketing for potato production. Such a strategy will also help to alleviate the conflict between different sub-groups in a community as an organization will be supporting a common interest.

Second, development assistance organizations need to seek to increase the participation of women in local decision-making. CARE’s experience shows how such measures can be implemented – by introducing minimum quotas for female participation and enhancing the decision-making capacities of those women already working in the local government.

Third, the mobility barrier faced by women should be specifically addressed. Echoing an initiative voiced in one of the women’s focus groups we conducted, development organizations can facilitate the gaining of specific skill-sets that are locally in demand. For example, in rural Georgia, teaching tractor skills and providing car driving instruction to women could be a good start.

Fourth, it is very challenging for development assistance organizations to provide resources and information to people who spend most of the time at home. This emphasizes the importance of an active information campaign for any kind of project, including disseminating information and resources in women-friendly places such as schools, small shops and marketplaces. In some cases, depending on the context, development assistance organizations might consider going to households directly to make sure that women are not excluded, but receive the information and resources that might be useful to them.

Fifth, addressing the lack of financial resources in local communities is difficult. The role of development assistance organizations here could include explaining the nuances of getting loans from banks to ensure people fully understand the relevant banking concepts, including compounding interest rates. They could also discuss the options for borrowing that are available to local communities.

Sixth, in communities where out-migration of men is a big issue, development assistance organizations should take specific measures to alleviate the problems experienced by female-headed households. The initial steps should be to identify such households and maintain an accurate, up-to-date database. Discussions should be held with them to determine their needs and how assistance can be rendered. Then, special activities can be designed to provide assistance consistent with those needs.

For development assistance organizations, there are challenges in obtaining a SLO from women and vulnerable groups in traditional societies. Even well-intentioned projects, aimed at bringing development to a local community, can pose a significant risk of further disadvantage those who are already disadvantaged. We hope that our paper will help development assistance organizations to be more gender-sensitive when designing projects.
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