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**Challenges and Opportunities for Equal Participation of Women and Girls in Rural
Development in Georgia**

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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“How wrong is it for a woman to expect the man to build the world she wants, rather than to create it herself?” -Anais Nin

Introduction

Development processes in rural areas remain intricately tied with the participation and collective action of men and women. Nevertheless, although women play a crucial role in the rural economy through their contribution to the agriculture production process, their equitable participation in rural development remains minimal. Furthermore, their role in decision-making and in leadership positions within these development processes remains negligible. This disproportionate mismatch in participation is not only detrimental for women but also has negative effects on the household and on the rural economy.

Gender and Governance

Georgia has a two-level administrative structure of governance – central and local governments. Local self-governance is present in municipalities – self-governing towns and communities. At this point, local self-government is in force in 76 municipalities, including 64 self-governing communities and 12 self-governing cities. Municipalities have their own powers, as well as the statutory powers delegated by the central government. Local self-governance in municipalities is implemented by the local legislative (Sakrebulo - city assembly) and executive (Gangeoba - municipal government) institutions. The general meeting of the settlement is the form of citizens' participation in the self-governance of the city/borough/village. The participation of women in the decision-making process is low in municipalities –, especially in the villages. Women's employment in the Sakrebulo is only 9%. In general, women are more passive in the decision-making process on the community level. This fact is conditioned by the perception of what a woman's role is in society, which often pertains to activities within a family.

Georgia is in the process of advancing a gender equality agenda. Significant progress has been made by the Government of Georgia in ensuring the implementation of the gender equality commitments laid out by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>. In March 2010, the Government of Georgia adopted the law “On Gender Equality” and developed a National Action Plan. The Gender Equality Council of Parliament, initially a temporary advisory structure, became a standing body in March 2010. Despite progress made in recent years, women are still under-represented at decision-making levels and disempowered economically. According to the Gender Inequality Index⁵: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/68606.html>, Georgia is placed 71 of the 137 countries surveyed. It has been extremely difficult for women to be elected to parliament, the supreme legislative body of Georgia. In the last two decades, the proportion of women MPs has never exceeded 10 percent (In Parliament) elected in 1991, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2008 women comprised respectively 6.8, 5.6, 7, 6.4, 9.4 and five percent of total MPs). At the moment, the number of female MPs approximates 11 percent, 17 out of 150 parliament members are women.

Women in rural communities generally tend to sustain a significant share of farm work, including crop cultivation, attending to livestock, and processing agricultural and dairy products. However, inadequate social services and the unreliability of public utilities have made the burden on Georgia's rural women even direr. What is more, due to the emigration of men in search of employment outside of Georgia, the quantities of homes, headed by women has grown considerably. Overall, within rural communities, homes headed by

women who have children are most vulnerable to poverty. According to International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in certain rural regions of Georgia, women are four times more likely to be impoverished than in other, more urbanized regions. Despite legislative gains that are designed to protect gender equality, families are largely patriarchal, especially within rural areas, where women are mostly expected to fulfil traditional gender roles as homemakers; women tend to have fewer opportunities for employment and when they do have employment within the formal sector, they receive lower wages than their male counterparts do.¹ Due to an absence of men, or their inability to work, women have a double burden of caring for the family and generating income.

The experience from the establishment of over 50 women's self-help groups (SHG) and Community Based Organizations (CBO) in the rural areas in Georgia shows that there is great and still under-utilized potential that can significantly contribute to local development and income-generating agricultural and husbandry production. The increased participation of active women in local planning, budgeting, and decision-making processes, as well as the direct implementation of women-led local projects that improve social infrastructure or support women's skills and abilities to engage in income-generating agricultural production, deserve further exploration and support.

Despite the existence of numerous policies and laws with gender equality provisions, the reality shows that: a) most of the gender equality commitments stay on paper; there is a lack of implementation and a lack of a clear division of responsibilities, b) commitments to gender equality lack time-bound targets, baselines and indicators to measure progress; there is also a lack of monitoring and reporting mechanisms, c) commitments lack budget allocations; there is an over-reliance on these commitments being financially supported by donors, and d) despite some improvements in recent years, sex-disaggregated data is not collected and/or not analyzed in many areas.

Gender equality is not only a goal in its own right but also an essential ingredient of achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is at the core of the SDGs that will be achieved from improving health and fighting disease, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to increase access to safe water and to ensure environmental sustainability. An attempt to meet the SDGs without incorporating gender equality will increase the costs and minimize success. Therefore, without incorporating gender equality and empowerment in sustainable development efforts it is not possible for developing countries like Georgia to achieve seventeen SDGs.

Labor Participation

Currently, in many families, women have taken on the role of breadwinners. This has given them a certain degree of empowerment through some measures of economic independence, but this new situation has done little to alter the traditional gender division of labor and women remain the primary caregivers, responsible for the housework, feeding, and caring for the children. The majority of women who remain employed in the formal sector work in the low-paying fields of agriculture, education, healthcare and light industry. The

¹International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2009).

vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the labor market is obvious from the high concentration of women in lower-paid positions in the less profitable sectors of the economy.

One of the critical issues is the involvement of women in the workplace and their relative remuneration for work. An overwhelming amount of research shows that women tend to work in lower-paying sectors and in lower positions than men do. In addition, it suggests that women earn less, even when they are doing exactly the same job.

In 2012, women's average monthly nominal wage was 57% of that of men in Georgia². This is explained by the fact that women are underrepresented in profitable and high-paying sectors, whereas fields in which women dominate, such as education and healthcare, have the lowest salaries.

The integration of women in rural development means something more than mere labor involvement, but there has never been a clear definition of what it means. 4 principal concerns of policy-makers are briefly described as they affect women: 1) unemployment and inadequate employment; 2) the satisfaction of basic needs and women's participation in decision-making; 3) population issues; and 4) rural-to-urban migration. The actual inter-household and inter-personal distribution of more work and higher productivity work result in some hard-working people working even longer hours because of additional tasks with others losing their intermittent employment opportunities due to mechanization. These contradictions are particularly acute for women. The non-material basic need of decision-making powers is more important in the case of women than of men, yet the personal status of women is being threatened by the institution-building that accompanies smallholder farmer-based agricultural intensification plans and anti-poverty programs. The education of females has been seen as a possible factor favoring family planning. In addition, education for women can mean access to public information and new expectations from life for themselves.

Access to Productive Resources

The participation and consequent empowerment of women remain conditional on their access to and control of assets. The lack of access to productive resources has a significant impact on their short-term economic well-being as well the long-term position of women in society in general and households in particular. The ownership and control over assets correlate with economic security and provides incentives to invest in increasing productivity through the use of better inputs. It also lends an impetus to marginalized groups such as women and rural poor to take calculated risks in order to achieve higher returns and engage in collective actions through rural organizations, associations, saving groups, credit schemes, cooperatives, and entrepreneurship to enhance economic returns.

Rural women remain at a severe disadvantage with respect to the ownership and control of assets. This lack of ownership of economically valuable assets implies that women are unable to access credit, other financial services, as they do not hold land titles. Land tenure laws and social/cultural norms govern the access and control of assets. These norms and laws are usually gendered in their application. Lack of formal ownership of land leads women to take suboptimal decisions due to which crop yields are lower on the one hand, on the other hand, this limits women participation in business-oriented rural organizations, like cooperatives and

²Geostat

credit unions. Women are often disadvantaged in both statutory and customary land tenure systems. They have weak property and contractual rights to land, water, and other natural resources. Even where legislation may be in place to strengthen women's property rights, lack of legal knowledge and weak implementation limits women's ability to exercise their rights.

Deprivation of property rights represents an important barrier for women in Georgia. This refers to not only limiting women's economic empowerment such as for example owning a land and managing a farm, having an income, receiving services from various institutions such as banks for example but generally deprivation of right to property makes women more vulnerable to domestic violence and violates many of her rights such as the right to life.

The provision of and access to credit is one of the most important and powerful tools for developing institutions, including ROs at the community level. Access to credit can facilitate the adoption of technology by women either as an individual or as part of groups. Credit is a difficult resource for the rural female to obtain. In different regions, there are multiple barriers facing women's access to financial services and they receive less than 1 percent of credit of the total agricultural credit. In cases where women are able to secure access to credit through microfinance institutions, the loans that they receive are much smaller as compared to men even for the same economic activities.

Agriculture and Environment

Agriculture is a major source of employment and income for Georgia's rural population. Currently, 43% of the total workforce is engaged in agriculture, while 97% of those people are self-employed. There are few opportunities for finding alternative employment in rural areas. In 2015, added value in agriculture (state GDP) amounted to 2,507.6 million GEL, while real growth was 1.5%. According to 2015 data, agriculture made up 9.1% of Georgia's GDP. 48% of the added value generated in primary production comes from cattle-breeding, while 21% is derived from the production of fruits and nuts, as well as from agricultural crops used for the further production of drinks and spices³.

The productivity of the agriculture sector is highly dependent on agricultural production means and access to services. One of the main obstacles in this direction is the absence of production means and services on the market that are relevant to price and quality. This often leads to unfavorable financial results for rural smallholder farmers and women-headed households.

Despite the increased investment in the agricultural sector, poor access to financial resources for women remains one of the main challenges for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as for producers of primary agricultural products.

The State Programme on Land Registration has been launched and is being implemented successfully. The programme aims to promote and increase citizen access, particularly women, to the land registration process, which will help to complete the registration of land.

³ Geostat

Land degradation has been exasperated by climate change and has also received minimal attention from authorities in spite of the immense ramifications of these factors on agriculture. The societal and economic impacts of weather, climate, water and environmental conditions are great in Georgia – and they are growing. Today up to 30 percent of a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is sensitive to weather, climate, and water. Extreme weather events due to climate variability and low capacity to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change aggravate food security risks. This situation is further compounded by rapid environmental degradation as a result of agricultural expansion and deforestation, inadequate knowledge and skills in the productive use and management of land and natural resources in rural areas. Extreme climatic events and natural disasters such as recent droughts and flooding exacerbate these problems. The projected impacts of climate change, i.e. increasing occurrence and magnitude of natural disasters such as drought, floods, poses serious constraints and challenges for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD). Women and girls are most affected by Climate Change impacts.

Water, Sanitation and Energy

Most rural households rely on firewood as the main fuel, which is often illegally logged or with an expensive license, and sold at very high prices to the households. The labor burden on women is high due to them having no access to warm water and energy inefficiency in the houses, which impacts on their health as they mainly use cold water for household tasks. This double burden also restricts their ability to participate in the economic or political sectors due to heavy burdens within the home and the care economy.

Unhygienic pit latrines do not respect the needs of women for privacy and dignity. The pit latrines pollute the groundwater and river bodies and are linked to incidences of waterborne diseases. This interrelated problematic situation also leads to epidemics. The rural women and in general population lacks awareness about the causes, consequences and solutions to their problems.

Moving up the energy ladder from biofuels to petroleum fuels and electricity for cooking is a distant dream in most parts of rural Georgia. Biofuels are collected from the local environment and therefore viewed as a cheap, if not a "free" source of energy in most households. Electricity, on the other hand, is increasingly being used for lighting in households. Nearly 80 percent of rural domestic energy needs are derived from biomass. Typically, biomass fuels such as fuelwood, dung, or crop residues are burned in traditional stoves, which are highly inefficient and harmful to health. The type of biofuel used varies by the local access to wood, agricultural residues, and dung. Women play an especially important role in managing domestic energy when biofuels are the principal domestic energy source. Their lower status in a largely patriarchal society renders them ideal candidates for this back-breaking, time-consuming, and in many cases unhealthy but essential "survival work". While the negative impact of fuel collection on the local environment is quite well known. In many areas, women are compelled to use crop residues that burn more quickly and require constant attention. The poor quality of the fuel burned in combination with the use of traditional stoves results in longer cooking times and prolonged exposure to harmful smoke detrimentally impacting women's health.

Women's role in economic development

Women play a vital role in the economic development of Georgia. They provide an important source of labor for cash crop production, cultivate food for household consumption and generate additional income

through cottage industries. Due to the time-consuming nature of their diverse responsibilities, women tend to work longer hours than their male counterparts. Studies concerning the allocation of women's time among different activities have greatly increase recognition of the importance of women's economic contribution.

Since women produce a large share of agricultural output, successful agricultural reform will require raising women's productivity. The diversity of women's duties makes it difficult to determine their share of agricultural production, much less place an economic value on their work. It is estimated that in addition to work within the household, women provide about 60% of agricultural labor in Georgia. However, much of this work is statistically invisible in that women often receive no payment for the work they perform. Moreover, the most important role of women is providing food security for the households. This is accomplished through the supplementation of household earnings, diversification of household income sources and raising of livestock. Women's investments in revenue generating projects and livestock are crucial to stabilizing household income, especially in female-headed households, where resource constraints are the most severe. However, financial investment is inherently risky when credit and resources are unavailable, reducing the variability of household earnings generally entails choosing less efficient methods of production and thus result in lower income. This situation occurs most frequently in a female-headed household, where resource constraints are greatest. As a result of their restricted ranges of choice, women tend to retain traditional modes of economic activity and their productivity becomes stagnated while that of men has continued to improve. An improvement in economic condition would improve the standard living of the women. However, real change would require a transformation of the attitudes of governments and men regarding women.

Women economic participation

Traditionally, women are involved in productive, reproductive and participatory roles. A number of studies indicate that women do about 50-60% of the agricultural work in farming household. Women are the backbone any society and are active in micro and informal sector, which is given little consideration. The majority of women are engaged in domestic and informal activities, such as a provision of fuel and water, child and family care and food processing, which are essential for the survival of households. These informal and household jobs are unpaid and are generally governed by custom. In this regard, most frequently women are excused from formal sectors.

Country civil service report of 1997/8 indicator that of the total civil service employees in the country, only 18% are women. About 95% of these women are in clerical and other low-paying jobs. Only about 5% are working in administrative and decision-making positions. Moreover, the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are encouraging micro-credit facilities and skills training program for women. Such a movement will definitely improve their economic status, but the process is low.

Cooperatives are seen as one of the best ways to develop local agriculture and farming. As a result, more and more cooperatives are being established in Georgia, however, the idea is still often met with resistance. Our focus group participants can be divided into two groups regarding their involvement and attitudes towards cooperatives: a) those that are involved in a cooperative and see its positive sides, and b) those that are not involved and see its negative sides. The discussions revealed that those who are not involved are scared of the idea of putting their own property into a cooperative, as they are not sure they can get

their property back if they decide to quit. In reality, according to the regulations of cooperatives, members can withhold their property as soon as they decide to exit. It has to be noted that we were able to receive this information from focus groups because women, who are active in various ways in local development issues, were specially recruited to participate in the discussions. These women are involved in various activities through NGO projects (TASO, CENN, etc.) as well as in cooperatives. Despite the positive effect of cooperatives' development for women's social and economic involvement mentioned in the Strategy for Regional Development, gender is not mainstreamed in the Law on Cooperatives, and it is clear that the establishment process is not involving women to the same extent as men. According to the Agricultural Cooperatives Development Agency, there are 8,834 members of cooperatives in Georgia, out of which 2,221 are women, constituting 25% of the total membership base. About 100 cooperatives are chaired by women. There are 35 women's cooperatives with 192 female members in total. Some of these cooperatives were created with the support of developmental organizations' projects⁴

The currently approved law "Development of Mountainous Regions" aims to encourage people to live and work in the country's mountainous regions. Incentives include 20 percent higher pensions and social benefits; and an additional salary for veterinarians, agricultural professionals, teachers and doctors working in the mountains. This could potentially motivate more women and men to work in these regions. One of the most important challenges for increasing women's role in the agricultural value chain is the facilitation of a shift from the supply of production inputs to the retail of products. Within this, the promotion of domestic production is necessary via active marketing campaigns and developing market information systems. The state plans to implement capacity building programs for women to support this goal.

Constraints to effective women's and girl's economic role in rural development

There are many constraints that hinder the effective role of women in economic development. Among these obstacles, the most and the often still unsolved problem is the traditional backward attitudes, beliefs, and customs of the society towards women which are continued as a historical legacy across the country. This traditional backward attitudes towards women (assuming women as a weaker sex, second citizens, dependent, passive, and ignorant) are not only hinder and make the effective role of women invisible and unrecognized, but also it make and force women's to internalize and accept their weakness and for long period even still remain unconfident. Even though, the government tries to change the attitudes of the society through different mechanisms it is not eradicated and remain difficult. In general, the following are considered as common barriers and often make the role of women unrecognized and insignificant.

Low-level educational background: According to women's and child's affairs office, the majority of rural women and girls do not receive adequate education as men. From this, we can conclude that women's non-educational status hinder their expected role.

Lack of initial capital to start their own business: Despite, the high interest and motivation of women to work, lack of initial capital to start up and to run the business hinder their economic activity.

⁴ <http://enpard.ge/en/agricultural-cooperatives-development-agency-acda/>

Lack of business know-how: Women involved in various economic activities especially in the marketing process and trading activities, but they lack business know-how i.e. how to run business and cost-benefit analysis.

Lack of monitoring women's cooperation activities: The government is trying to coordinate women in the group to work in cooperation and solve their economic problem. However, there is no supervision and follow-up about the day-to-day activities of these women's cooperation work. According to the respondents, women's organized activities are run in the town even without a better problem identification, problem-solving and technical support rather various local government bodies and NGOs continue to assist women's only financially.

The dependency of the family on women's: Culturally, in some family, some members are dependent on the earning of women. In some cases, husband remains dependent on their wife income. Such dependency of family members on women makes their role invisible and unrecognized. However, women are continued to play their role in various economic activities.

Lack of interest to work in a group (cooperation): Women are fearful of cooperation and they are not well aware of the benefits of working together. Working in cooperation especially for women can make their role visible and it also increases their confidence.

Women's dependency on men's income: Despite the existence of family dependency on women, in some cases, there is also women's dependency on men's income. This is due to the influence exerted by their husband. If this is developed, they did not give a decision on their own in their overall life. In this case, a dependency of women can bring lack of decision-making power and this makes the role of women unrecognized.

Lack of confidence and inferiority: In this case, the most and often difficult problem for the integration of women into the economic development and in other various political offices is lack of confidence. Women's lack of confidence is mainly due to the culture of the society and their inferiority assumption. In addition, women's are not highly committed and they lack the interest to take full responsibilities and accountabilities and they are fear of challenges especially in office positions. Despite, the existence of the above-mentioned barriers for women's effective role in economic development, they continue to play their role in economic development. Even though different problems hinder the participation of women, their roles in various economic activities are very significant.

Conclusions

Like any other less developed countries, in Georgia, more than half portion of the society, women, suffer from economic, political, social, and cultural aspects. Despite the increasing advocates for women empowerment through equitable policy framework, many women and girls in rural areas of Georgia still face serious obstacles that frustrate their attempt to secure qualitative livelihoods.

Women are excluded from participating in high-income economic (generating) activities; often women lack the right to have their own property and equality of employment opportunity. Cultural norms like men dominance and traditional belief system are the major constraints that face women and also affect their

role in economic development and other sectors. The society assigned a lower status to women, lower valuation to their work and denied recognition to their contribution. Women's role and their involvement in economic activities can benefit the whole society and also enable to conduct to fight against poverty. It also speeds up economic growth, food security, promotes efficiency, helping future generation and promotes sustainable development.

Moreover, the role of women and girls in the economic development of rural areas of Georgia is considered as having the greatest value in building up local production and in promoting economic growth. Without question, women who apply their knowledge to produce valuable goods and services and to solve problems of the society often are regarded as important ingredients of economic development.

Recommendations

In order to ensure equal and meaningful participation of women, a combination of empowering and capacity development measures must be put in place to bring to fruition the development potential of rural women. To achieve this following step-by-step and consequential measures are suggested:

- Formulating country-specific initiatives that empower rural women
- Government and development partners, including local non-governmental organizations, should prioritize awareness-raising initiatives (national campaigns as well as initiatives tailored to address specific regions) communicating the benefits of gender equality for both men and women
- Promote women's and girls' education in the agricultural sector and rural development, support initiatives that remove various barriers for girls to enter this type of educational programs
- Formulation and implementation of women-biased landholding and titling policies through modification of the present land tenure system,
- Creating a financial credit pool for women using the Community Development Funds of local government councils,
- Organizing women farmers into functional women cooperatives for easy access to loans, information, farm inputs and markets
- Supporting women based rural organizations ROs is essential for women empowerment
Interventions for women's economic empowerment, including to free up women's time by reducing women's burden of childcare and other unpaid work (e.g. work-place childcare; time-saving technology; IT),
- Increase women's access to finance (e.g. credit information, women-friendly loans, saving groups, etc.).
- Develop women skills to run and launch businesses through training and accessible consultation services
- Spreading education among women and girls especially farm women requires urgent attention. Location-specific and need-based training programs should be organized
- Provision of extension services for women and girls linked with initiatives ensuring the provision of production and marketing support, undertaking capacity building, providing organizational and institutional support,
- In order to increase women's incentives to participate concerted efforts are needed to ensure that they move into the production of higher value-market oriented products rather than produce for subsistence
- Access to social infrastructure, especially kindergartens, should be improved in order to ease the burden of women's unpaid labor

- Develop women oriented Vocational Training programs
- Explore and introduce women business opportunities in different value chains
- Introduction of labor-saving technologies for women remains instrumental in freeing their time to participate in income-generating activities and rural organizations
- Develop and employ women-friendly agriculture technologies so that they can involve themselves in productive and commercially viable agricultural activities
- Appointing more women trainer/ extension worker can give better result in technology transfer by avoiding social hindrances. This would result in providing better access to technology as well as render transfer of technology efforts more successfully
- Organizing women's agriculture and technology clubs and implementing extension through women ROs, Resource Centers would improve women's access to information.

The initiatives have to be informed by the subordinate and secondary role women invariably envelop in the household and the communities. Only initiatives informed by these constraints can generate suitable strategies for women's and girl's participation in the rural development process.