

EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IN TKIBULI



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Women's Participation in Extractive Economies - the Case of Tkibuli, Georgia

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Framework/Literature Review

Extractivism

The concept of extractivism¹ has attracted significant scholarly and political interest in the recent years. According to Acosta, extractivism denotes extraction and export of large quantities of crude natural resources (including, but not limited to minerals and hydrocarbons (Acosta 2013). It is often tied to transnational capital/capitalism, states and the neoliberal agenda. However, extractivism can encompass much more. Many sociologists consider extractivism a prism for perceiving the world with a profound impact on peoples' lives. Klein, on her part, defines extractivism as a "nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking" (Klein 2015, p.187). Extractivism neglects the earth and the environments where minerals and other natural resources are extracted from. Its principal forms are mining and extraction of oil and natural gas (including through fracking). Foraging and industrial agriculture are also considered as forms of extractivism, as they extract resources from natural environments through a process that leads to severe ecological deterioration. (Auciello 2019).

Further, extractivism is a social process that has a profound impact on the geographic area where extraction is performed and its indigenous inhabitants². As Acosta argues, in many countries poverty is directly connected to an abundance of important natural resources. According to him, countries that are rich with natural resources and base their economies primarily on extraction and export struggle more with development. This phenomenon is known as the "paradox of abundance" or the "resource curse" (Acosta 2013).

Not only do countries where extraction take place fail to achieve capitalist development and progress and remain poor/underdeveloped, but extractivism also generates a myriad of problems for their social and natural environments. Extractivism comprises a range of economic, social and ecological transformations which transfer the products of ages-long geological processes from natural to social and economic environments using technology and labor.

Extractivism entails covert threats to social and natural environments. Large-scale extractivist operations cause irreparable damage to the environment. This is often posited as an necessary cost that the impact countries should pay for development. Further, the majority of environmental activities can never become sustainable, as they are de-

1 Natural resource extraction is referred to in this study as extractivism/extraction.

2 In this study indigenous population/environment is referred to as local or native inhabitants/environment.

structive and depleting by their very nature. Research into the mining and hydrocarbon industries has shown that far from merely affecting natural environments, extractivism also profoundly alters social environments and leads to human tragedies. These processes impact the rural, indigenous communities which lose access to resources that they have traditionally depended on for sustenance either directly, through land confiscations or through indirect effects of water pollution and environmental degradation. Confiscations of native land always involve loss of food sovereignty. Due to them, indigenous communities can no longer control their sustenance and agricultural systems. Extraction affects all aspects of local value-chains, including the procurement, processing and transport of basic goods.

Along with polluting and limiting access to environments and food sources, extractivism has a negative impact on the labor of colonized/indigenous populations. During the age of colonialism, extractivist activities relied on lethal exploitation of colonized subjects' labor, including through practices of slavery (Gedick, 1993; Banerjee, 2000). In the post-colonial period, despite the promises of new jobs and development of the extractive industry by corporations and their states, workers in this and related fields toil under dangerous and degrading conditions for low salaries. Due to harsh working conditions and lack of viable alternative employment options, locals, particularly women often flee from their native environments,³ leaving dwellings abandoned. Along with these negative consequences, in extractivism tied to conflicts, violence and militarization in various countries.

The Extractivist Economy and Local Women

The social and environmental costs of extractivism are often borne by local inhabitants, particularly women. Men receive the majority of benefits from resource extraction, including employment and therefore occupy most of the extraction-related positions. Further, extractivism negatively affects households where, due to gendered socialization, women act as primary care-givers. (Federici 2004). Based on this status, women play a key role in agriculture, farming and management of natural resources, as well as in their distribution for household consumption. (MacGregor 2006; Martinez-Alier, 2002; Agarwal, 1992). Therefore, when mining starts to affect the local environment, women are often the first to be exposed to its effects such as the contamination, pollution or drying up of water resources, air pollution and degradation of living environments due to explosions in the mines. These effects also correlate with an increased rate of alcoholism and domestic violence (Gies 2015).

³ See Alexandra Aroshvili's study: "How Extractive Capitalism Turns Care into an Exhaustive Resource", *Extractive Crossings*, 2020.

The patriarchal disregard of women and indigenous communities is exacerbated under the conditions of extractivism and colonialism. (Smith 2003, p. 81). Mining industry's assault on nature can impact the bodies of indigenous women. Environmental pollution and contamination affect women's reproductive systems the most and lead to complications such as uterine cancer, miscarriage and birth defects (Smith 200, p. 82). The rate of miscarriage among women living in the coal mining town of Blackhill (USA) is six times higher than the national average (Smith 1997, p. 23). Extractivism, as a conceptual framework of exploitation of nature, can extend to encompass the bodies of indigenous women. In this case, both nature and woman are seen as the passive "others" and objects of exploitation.

To sum up, the extractive industry has a negative social impact on women's employment, sustenance, family care, domestic safety, land rights, decision-making power and reproductive health. Extractivist industries currently operate under a neo-extractivist model, whereby local businessmen and states, rather than colonizers or transnational companies, oversee extraction. Nonetheless, indigenous people, particularly women still face the same challenges that their ancestors grappled with during the colonial period. (Acosta, 2013).

Extractivism in Georgia

In Georgia's case, scholars employ the concept of extractivism to designate the social and economic realities of several mono-industrial cities (Chiatura, Tkibuli, Kazreti), rather than of the whole country. According to Ana Diakonidze, this is due to the fact that the economy of Georgia as a whole does not fit into the classical definition of an "extractive regime". According to Paul K. Gellert, extractive regimes are defined by their two main characteristics: 1) extraction of natural resources forms the basis for the generation and accumulation of value; 2) a sustainable economic and political regime of growth and accumulation that can withstand crises and last for several years, if not decades (Gellert 2010). While Georgia as a whole does not possess either of these characteristics, extractivism still plays a major role in the country's mono-industrial cities (Diakonidze 2020).

In the monoindustrial cities of Tkibuli, Chiatura and Kazreti the mining sector is the sole significant source of employment and income. The specificities of mono-industrial production lead to high socio-economic dependence on the mining sector in these regional centers. Despite the contraction of the industrial sector, decision-makers at the national level extractivism is still marked as an important source of economic

dynamism and employment in Chiatura, Tkibuli and Kazreti. Women of these cities, living in subordination to men due to the patriarchal nature of Georgian society⁴, could be facing double oppression. In Tkibuli, the challenges posed to women by patriarchy are compounded by the gendered distribution of the negative socio-ecological effects of extractivism and of the city's mono-industrial environment. These considerations point to the necessity of studying women's employment in the mono-industrial and extractivist Tkibuli and the obstacles to their participation in the labor market at the level of national legislation and policy.

The Mono-industrial Tkibuli

While coal mining in Tkibuli may not fit into the model of traditional extractivism and may possess neo-extractive⁵ traits, the environmental damage caused to the city by extraction is still significant. According to Giorgi Tsintsadze, the ecological situation in Tkibuli is severe. The mining and subsequent enrichment of coal leave extremely harmful ecological footprint. They lead to the accumulation of coal dust, soot, nitrogen and sulfur oxides in the air, along with other pollutants. Both surface and underground waters feeding local reservoirs are contaminated. Soil quality also deteriorates due to problems with waste management. Landscape transformations caused by mining and the detrimental impact of this process on the local flora and fauna are also significant (Tsintsadze, 2020). According to Tsintsadze, in addition to the environmental problems, the local population struggles with precarious working conditions. The dangerous work environment, low wages and environmental problems have given rise to protests and resistance in Tkibuli on several occasions (ibid.) The largest of these came in 2016, when a protest by a small group of workers grew into a 16 day general strike. An agreement drafted in the aftermath of the strike guaranteed the miners 10% pay increase and safer work conditions. Tax breaks for the Tkibuli municipality were also reinstated at the time. (Qeburia and Chubabria 2017, p.11).

The National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) does not collect data on gender parity of employment by municipality. According to Geostat, in 2020 the labor force in the Imereti consisted of 179.2 thousand individuals, of which 143.8 thousand were employed. Among the employed population, 64.1 thousand were women and 79.7 thousand - men. The employment rate was 28.4% for women and 40.1% for men. See table 1 for

4 See the Research Report: 3. Men, Women and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes, UNDP, 2020. According to the one of the findings of the research, 63% of women and 54% of men think that Georgia has yet to achieve gender equality.

5 According to Acosta, traditional extractivism is a mineral-dependent economy that reproduces by exploiting natural resources and selling the obtained products abroad. Acosta focuses on neo-extractivism in which it is not foreign companies but local governments that accumulate capital by extracting raw materials.

the a breakdown of employment region based on gender and main types of economic activities.

	Woman	Man	Total
Total (Thousands)	64,1	79,7	143,8
Agriculture	5,9	7,8	13,6
Industry	6,0	17,9	23,9
Services	52,2	54,0	106,2

The data clearly shows that men are disproportionately represented in all three sectors. Particularly striking is the ratio of men employed in the industrial sector.

Further, Ana Diakonidze has explored the scarcity of jobs outside the extraction industry in Chiatura, another mono-industrial city of Imereti. According to Diakonidze, employment opportunities beyond the mining sector „primarily consist of public and social services (local administration, kindergartens, schools, hospitals and ambulatory care facilities), trade and agriculture.“ Public and social services are the only alternative means of formal employment in Chiatura. However, due to their small scale and low turnover rate, demand for these offices is limited“ (Diakonidze 2020).

To sum up, the socio-economic conditions of Tkibuli and the deeply unequal structure of the labor market, on the one hand, reflect the inequalities persisting in the country as a whole, but, on the other, present a specific case with particular characteristics. While Tkibuli is not a classic example of an extractivist city, as coal extracted in the city is not exported outside Georgia, the city is still permanently dependent on the extraction industry that fails to generate safe, well-paid jobs and may well be constantly reproducing social, economic and ecological crises. These crises can have disastrous consequences for local women. The socio-economic and employment challenges that Tkibuli women face have not been yet been explored in depth. The overall aim of this study is to provide decision-makers and local residents with research-based knowledge and information about the social, cultural or institutional barriers that limit women's participation in the labor market in the mono-industrial Tkibuli. One of the objects of interest in this study is whether women of Tkibuli face the challenges that extractivism generally poses to local women: those connected to employment, family care and care-giving, nutrition, domestic violence, alcoholism, land rights, lack of decision-making power, reproductive health, etc. The study is also interested in how the national legislation and local policy address challenges to women's employment in the mono-industrial Tkibuli.

Apart from extractivism and its detrimental consequences for women, an important factor here is the conditions of women's overall economic inactivity in Georgia and the world. In 2018 UN Women and Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) conducted a quantitative survey under the title of *Women's Economic Inactivity and Engagement In the Informal Sector* in Georgia. According to the report of the study, The UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment highlights four key barriers to women's economic activity: "adverse social norms; discriminatory laws and lack of legal protection; the failure to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid household work and care; and a lack of access to financial, digital and property assets" (UNHLP cited in Diamond and Jenkins 2018, p.9).

In Georgia, the main reason for women's economic inactivity is gendered division of labor. 21% of adult women and 27% of women of productive age identify as housewives. Women with this status dedicate 74% of their time to household and personal chores (Diamond and Jenkins).

According to the study, education has the most beneficial impact on the participation of women in the labor force in Georgia. Women with higher education are 20 percent more likely to be part of the workforce than women with only secondary education (ibid.).

These theoretical considerations, research and recommendations laid basis to questions regarding challenges to women's employment in the extractive mono-industrial city of Tkibuli. I posed these questions to experts on the matter in order to gather primary sociological information on relevant issues.

The Goals and Aims of The Study

Based on these considerations discussed above, the goal of the study is:

- ▶ To promote the creation of knowledge about employment, unemployment and disproportionate concentration in the informal part of labor market of women and young women living in the mono-industrial, extractivist Tkibuli

The research objectives are to:

- ▶ Study extractivism in Tkibuli as a mono-industrial city;
- ▶ Identify problems posed by extraction to women living in Tkibuli as a mono-industrial, extractivist city (employment, family care, domestic violence, alcoholism, lack of power, land rights, reproductive health difficulties);
- ▶ Study / identify labor market trends and existing barriers (education, employment, gender and patriarchy) related to women's unemployment in Tkibuli and their disproportionate concentration in the formal / informal sector;
- ▶ Expert analysis of the gender policy of the Tkibuli Municipality and state legislation (Labor Code of Georgia, Law on Work Safety).

Research Methodology, Methods and Tools

This study is a feminist study, meaning that it accounts for following issues: 1. Are national and municipal legislations androcentric, in terms of centering and accommodating the male gaze?; 2. Is gender insensitivity characteristic to the labor market of Tkibuli? I.e., are sex and gender as potential variables ignored and is the market adjusted to the experiences of a single sex?; 3. Are gender roles enforced at the labor market of Tkibuli? I.e. is childcare seen as a female responsibility and are women therefore compelled to abstain from both formal and informal employment? Finally, this study is feminist as it aims to emancipate women as a social group.

During the study I employed the qualitative methods of social research, namely the method of in-depth expert interviews. 8 experts on gender, employment in mono-industrial cities and labor legislation were interviewed using a semi-structured inter-

view-guide (See appendix 1). ⁶In-depth interviews with relevant individuals enables researchers to gather information, ideas and opinions on selected matters (Kumar, 1989). As sociologists usually consider conducting 15 to 25 interviews appropriate for a single study, and as this study relies on only 8 interviews, it is limited in scope and does not claim to be representative. It aims to identify issues that can serve as objects for further, representative research. Additionally, the information information was gathered through desk research and secondary analysis. Sources for research were selected based on recommendations by the experts: the Imereti Region Development Strategy⁷; the Statement and the Action Plan of the Tkibuli Municipal Gender Council⁸; the Labour Code of Georgia⁹; and the Law on Work Safety¹⁰.

In-depth interviews were conducted in two stages. First, 4 experts were interviewed on extractivism. These initial interviews helped identify the labor market trends in Tkibuli, problems related to extractivism in the mono-industrial city and documents for desk research. After the completion of desk research, I conducted 4 more interviews with lawyers working on labor legislation in Georgia and members of the Tkibuli municipal administration in order to identify the challenges, problems and barriers that women struggle with in Tkibuli.

Qualitative information was assessed employing the data analysis method. The data was categorized and local and inclusive integration was performed. During the initial stage of local integration, the respondents opinions, ideas and views were identified and summarized, thus developing the main line of argumentation. Following this step alternative, differing opinions in the respondents' narratives were identified and grouped. The isolated areas of analysis resulting from local integration were brought into a single coherent story through inclusive integration (Tsuladze 2020). The small number of respondents had an influence on the analysis and interpretation of the data.

As for the desk research, the documents recommended by the respondents were analyzed from a feminist point of view, aiming to expose those aspects of the Imereti Region Development Strategy, the Tkibuli Municipal Gender Council Action Plan and the Labor Code of Georgia that lead to direct or indirect discrimination of women at the labor market of Tkibuli.

6 Along with the 8 respondents, the author would like to thank Tsira Jgerenaia, Raisa Liparteliani, Tamara Laperadze, Ana Diakonidze, Alexandra Aroshvili and the personelle oft he Tkibuli Municipality for their assistance throughout the course of the study.

7 <http://imereti.gov.ge/res/docs/strategia.pdf>;

8 <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3774692?publication=0>;

9 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1155567?publication=19>;

10 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4486188?publication=1>;

Analysis of Qualitative Sociological Data

Eight experts (key informants) were interviewed during the qualitative research: four experts on women's issues and extractivism, two members of the local municipal administration and two lawyers with experience in working on women's labor rights. The study adapted the theoretical framework of extractivism to fieldwork and most of the questions were related to the challenges that extraction poses to young women and women at the local labor market of Tkibuli. Further, in my interactions with the experts I explored the Imereti Region Development Strategy, the activities and the action plan of the Tkibuli Municipal Gender Council and the Labour Code of Georgia through the lens of extractivism and feminist research. During the interviews I gathered information conducive of discussing the problems that women face at the local labor market. Due to the small sample size and scale of the research, its findings may not fully reflect existing knowledge and information on these matters.

The sociological data obtained through qualitative interviews was grouped based on research objectives. First, the study explored extractivism in the mono-industrial Tkibuli and determined whether the experts consider Tkibuli a classic example of an extractivist city. As a follow-up, I asked the experts whether in future theoretical and applied research Tkibuli could be designated as an extractivist city that faces the problems and challenges associated with classical extractivism.

The experts argued that despite the fact that Georgia exports coal and manganese, the country cannot be considered extractivist, as extraction does not define its economy. However, a link between the mono-industrial cities (Tkibuli, Chiatura, Kazreti) and extractivism still emerged in the experts' narratives. According to them, these cities are fully dependent on an extractivist economy and do not provide alternative avenues of employment.

If Tkibuli is an extractivist city, it could be facing the negative consequences of extraction common in other extractivist cities and countries. This includes environmental pollution, poverty, employment challenges and oppression of women. Therefore, the next aim of the research was to reveal the challenges posed to women by extraction in the mono-industrial, extractive Tkibuli (low employment, household duties, domestic violence, alcoholism, lack of power and land rights, reproductive health complications).

Extractivism, Labor Market Trends and Local Women

Labor Migration

The study has revealed that due to poverty, Tkibuli women leave their homes and move to other countries for work. This tears the social fabric of the city apart. As the respondents testify, Tkibuli does not offer “alternative life for women”, which was more or less developed during the Soviet era. At this time women in Tkibuli were not solely dependent on their husbands. Theaters, local media, cultural establishments provided employment for women and chances to escape dependence on their husbands. As one of the respondents argues, current environment in Tkibuli generates “social hopelessness” that particularly affects women.

Local respondents claim that unemployment and lack of jobs for women forces Tkibuli residents, particularly women to flee the city. Female migration from Tkibuli is common. According to one of the respondents, women leave Tkibuli in search of work more often than men. However, they hold that this is commonplace all around Georgia and the phenomenon of female migration is not connected to extractivism. However, it is more drastic in Tkibuli, as there are no options for employment beyond extraction in the city and local women suffer r double oppression under extractivism and the patriarchy.

One of the respondents argues that migration is tied to the prevalence of the so-called “liberal discourse” in youngsters, who feel that they should study and achieve success. They may not see local hardships as connected to extraction. Therefore, once they finish high school, they try to move to Tbilisi and then struggle with going back to Tkibuli, as the local labor market has nothing offer them.

Physical Safety and Anxiety

The respondents speculate that along with social hopelessness, local women could be facing a heightened risk of domestic violence. One of them argues that as working in mines is seen as a male occupation, Tkibuli women act mostly as housewives. This status entails an emotional and financial dependence, that significantly reduces the likelihood of escaping from violence.

One of the interviewees posited a link between unemployment and domestic violence in Tkibuli. The same respondent also discussed the fear and anxiety that Tkibuli women experience due to the fact that their children and husbands work in mines that pose

constant threats to their health and life. This anxiety is exacerbated by the experiences of those women who have already lost a family member in a mining accident.

Finally, along with domestic violence, anxiety and fear that women struggle with in Tkibuli, local residents, regardless of their gender, can be experiencing demoralization and depression. Even an employed man might not be able to provide for his family, potentially leading both partners down the road of demoralization and subsequent alcoholism and depression.

Access to Private Property

Another important challenge for women in Tkibuli is the lack of private property. While this problem may not stem exclusively from extractivism and may be more connected with patriarchy, lack of ownership puts women in a more troublesome position under extractivism. One of the respondents has argued that in Georgia, most of the property is owned by men due to their higher income and cultural and social norms. While men can earn income and buy or inherit land, women are denied such opportunities both by their financial standing and socio-cultural norms.

As a respondent recounted, even in cases when women earn income, e.g. through working abroad, the property purchased by their remittances – cars, houses, land – is still registered on men. According to another expert, lack of property puts Georgian women, particularly those residing in Tkibuli and other mono-industrial cities in a terrible situation. While the state occasionally provides incentives for women to start a business, in such cases they are required to present property, which they do not possess, as collateral.

According to the same respondent, periodically the state also offers women free allotments of land. However, they rarely use such opportunities, as their husbands or fathers do not allow them to do so and instead register land under their name. This issue might affect women of Tkibuli particularly adversely, as due to extractivism they already live in an environment of social despair and cannot work in the male-dominated extractive sector. These hardships are compounded by the lack of access to private property, leaving local women totally dependent on their husbands, fathers and sons.

Lack of Jobs

All eight respondents agreed that a diversified labor market in Georgia exists only in Tbilisi and some other large cities, such as Batumi and Kutaisi. In the rest of the rest of the country, labor markets remain homogenous. The in-depth interviews have also revealed that employment opportunities for women in Tkibuli are not diversified and they often struggle with finding a job. According to the respondents, drawing conclusions about barriers to entry and gender inequality that women and young women face in the formal and informal labor markets is only possible in the conditions of a diversified labor market. The experts also argued that the main problem in the extractive Tkibuli is employment in general, rather than gendered division of employment. As one of the respondents put it: "to be honest, the gender problem as such is not particularly pressing in Tkibuli. The more important problem, in my opinion, is the absence of any real employment opportunities. By this I mean that the labor market is not developed and diversified."

One of the respondents argued that while a certain labor market indeed exists Tkibuli, its small size makes it hard to discuss the problems that affect women and young women specifically. The interviews also revealed that in Tkibuli there are no employment spaces for either women or men apart from mining. Gender differences and inequality become relevant in the extraction industry, as in this sectors employers mostly hire men. In this regard women are discriminated. Furthermore, other avenues of employment are limited and already marked as feminine - working as an assistant at a supermarket or as a teacher in kindergartens and schools are seen as traditionally feminine activities and women are unlikely to face barriers to employment in these spaces.

Gendered Employment

According to the respondents, women in Tkibuli work mainly in shops, clinics, educational facilities and local public offices: "Women mostly work in the field of education - kindergartens, schools, so on. As for the rest, the shops here are very small and rare. [Women may also find work] in healthcare facilities -there is an Evex Clinic and a Medi clinic has just opened and maybe there. This is the horizon, so to say, of women's employment [in Tkibuli]."

One of the respondents indicated that public offices in Tkibuli have taken the responsibility to employ women. However, an analysis of Tkibuli municipal administration's web-site clearly show that the majority of decision-making positions and seats at the municipal councils are still occupied by men. Women comprise a majority only in the local gender council.

Respondents argued that the labor market in Tkibuli is not diversified and it is therefore difficult to draw conclusions about gender discrimination and barriers to entry for women at the labor market. Nevertheless, they agree that the extractivist logic and the exclusive space of extraction still accommodate and benefit only men. According to one of the local experts, the main avenue of employment in Tkibuli is coal mining which predominantly excludes women.

Low-Paying Jobs

As we've seen, mining and extraction are marked as masculine, putting women in a disadvantageous position and leaving them financially dependent on men. This is compounded by the fact that the spaces where women are employed pay so little that they are still forced to leave in subjugation to men or extreme poverty. One respondent claimed that women's salaries in public services are so low that they resemble more a social allowance than a pay. "These work relationships look like social assistance and women working there often do not even feel that they are advancing their career, or benefiting someone or creating some sort of a [public] good. Rather, [through their work], they assist their families a little financially at the end of the month or just pass time."

One respondent indicated that there is a sewing factory operating in Tkibuli, but women choose to not get employed in it. The respondent held that women make this decision independently. Another respondent provided an explanation for this rejection. In the factory, kindergartens and schools women are paid so little that it is not worth it to for them to work there. As household and care-giving duties fall solely on them, they would rather refuse such employment to take care of their families to not get reprimanded by their family members and community.

Small Entrepreneurship and Women

The research has also revealed that there are family hotels in Tkibuli, run mostly by women. However, as one of the respondents argued, they occupy such a small share of local market that is difficult to draw conclusions based on them: "There are family hotels in several villages and they are mostly managed by women. But such hotels are rare and we cannot really draw conclusions".

According to women, state offers Tkibuli women no assistance in starting a business. While such initiatives do exist, they are so formalistic and have such strict requirements, that local women cannot get funding through them.

Barriers to Entry for Tkibuli Women

Despite the absence of a diversified labor market in Tkibuli, I still explored the barriers that might hinder Tkibuli women from entering the local formal and informal labor markets. One of the respondents argued that the first barrier to entry that may exist in Tkibuli for women is education. According to them, women who currently live in Tkibuli and are unable to participate in the labor market, could have lacked access to quality education during their youth, or might have only graduated from high school and never received higher education.

The next barrier is early marriage¹¹. Respondents revealed that due to the lack of employment opportunities and access to the labor market, young women may consider marriage as their only option. Consequently, they become housewives and can no longer enter the labor market. Experts also argued that while early marriages are not as common as they were say ten years ago, they might still be acting as one of the main barriers to entry.

The next barrier is the gendered division of family care duties which confines women to the private sphere and prevents them from entering the labor market. One of the respondents argued that in Tkibuli a woman cannot enlist an elderly family member at an assisted living facility, as this would tarnish her reputation. According to other respondents, there are no such facilities in Tkibuli in general and women cannot use this service to alleviate their household and family-care responsibilities: . "Elderly care houses, or any similar facilities do not exist in Tkibuli, so it is impossible for families bring an elderly member to a shelter and free up some time for women".

Another barrier that the research has uncovered is the inadequate communication infrastructure in region. According a respondent, the Tkibuli municipality and especially its villages are not covered by fast internet. This may have a negative impact on the education of local children and, consequently, on youth employment. Young women are affected especially negatively, as unlike young men they cannot work in mines.

Tkibuli municipality administration members provided sociological information on this matter. According a respondent who is a member of the Tkibuli Municipal Gender Council, neither the state nor the local policy includes assistance for women. Even funding for their education is not provided. However the respondents emphasized that this situation is not unique to Tkibuli and is a country-wide problem.

11 <http://dictionary.css.ge/content/early-marriage-child-marriage>

Concerning child-care and care-giving as gendered barriers to entry, a local respondent indicated that Tkibuli has several quality kindergartens where mothers can leave their children and thus free up some of their time. "I cannot say that there are no kindergartens [in Tkibuli]. The state has declared the education system its priority. A new kindergarten is being built in Tkibuli. It has not started operating yet." Tkibuli also has a municipal elderly care facility, but it is used targeted to elderly people without family.

Further, the research has uncovered that the Tkibuli Municipal Gender Council not yet collect gendered data related to household labor, family care and other reproductive duties. However, Tkibuli may not differ from other Georgian cities in this regard.

Policy and Legislation

The final aim of the research was to analyze the documents recommended by the respondents, namely the Imereti Region Development Strategy, the Gender Policy of the Tkibuli Municipality and the state legislation (the Labour Code, the Law on Work Safety). I explored whether the regional and the municipal administrations take into consideration the challenges that Tkibuli women faces in terms of their employment in the mono-industrial, extractivist city. I was also interested in whether the legislation contains any discriminatory entries that might hinder women residing in Tkibuli from entering the labor market.

First, I analyzed the Imereti Region Development Strategy for 2014-2021. The quantitative data provided in the strategy, whether coming from Geostat or elsewhere, does not account for gender differences. Women remain invisible in this strategy. The documents devotes just one chapter to gender equality and even this discusses only women's political participation. As for Tkibuli, the city is mentioned just once in the document, in the overview of the natural resources of the region which gives information only on the amount of coal currently remaining in Tkibuli.

Further, the document provides a factorial analysis of the Imereti region and its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. According to the development strategy, weaknesses include gender inequality in the private and public sectors, high levels of unemployment and poverty and unsatisfactory levels of social security. However, the document never discusses the weaknesses and threats of the region's mono-industrial cities. These cities and their extraction-related problems are invisible in the document.

According to the respondents, Tkibuli faces problems with waste management and environmental pollution. The regional development strategy aims to develop the separation, collection and disposal of waste in settlements of all sizes, clean up the public places, eliminate illegal landfills and create modernized sites of waste disposal, along with decontaminating and recycling the collected waste. However, as the local respondent still indicated the existence of such problems, it seems that goals of the strategy are yet to be fulfilled. Further, one of the aims of the strategy is to provide the settlements of the region with stable, high-speed internet. However, the research data shows that access to high-speed internet still remains a problem and one of the possible barriers to entry at the labor market for women in Tkibuli.

Another document recommended by the experts is the Statement of the Tkibuli Municipal Gender Council. Based on clause (d) of article 2 of the statement, the council shall

elaborate proposals for eliminating gender equality and present them to the Parliamentary Gender Equality Council. However, the research has revealed that this has not yet been done.

Further, clause (a) of article 2 of the document states that based on Georgian legislation and the National Action Plan, the council shall develop an action plan for achieving gender equality, present it to the city assembly for review and oversee its implementation.

One of the respondents argued that the action plan does not present clear quantitative and qualitative indicators. Most of the latter remain vague. As an example, one of the aims of the plan is to strengthen the cooperation with the NGOs, private companies and other parties involved in the field of gender equality and to hold meetings with civil society representatives and female entrepreneurs. However, the indicator given in the plan is simply "the number of meetings held". How many meetings should be held (a quantitative indicator), or what the meeting should be about (qualitative indicator), is not specified. According to a respondent, while the action plan may be based on primary data and indeed reflect the needs of local women, it lacks specificity and does not view the problems that women face at the labor market through an extractivist lens. However, one of the respondents argued that in the current situation it is hardly possible for the Tkibuli municipal administration and its gender council to have high levels of awareness of extractivism and of challenges it poses to women, and therefore it is hard to blame them for not taking these phenomena into account.

The final documents that the respondents recommended for review are the Labor Code of Georgia and the Law on Work Safety. According to the respondents, these documents do not contain any specific entries on the extractivist mono-industrial cities and labor relations within them. There is also nothing to be found in these legislative acts about women who live in the extractivist mono-industrial cities and act as care-givers while also being formally employed.

The story told by one of the respondents turned out to be particularly interesting in terms of the restriction imposed by the Labor Code, according to which pregnant and breastfeeding women cannot be employed at an exceptionally hazardous position. In addition, the Law on Work Safety contains a similar stipulation.¹² The respondent emphasized the established vicious practice, according to which the employer rather than compensating breastfeeding or pregnant employees, chooses not to hire them or dismiss afterwards.

12 In 2020, a government decree was passed, listing exceptionally hazardous jobs. This list in fact includes all kinds of extractive activities: metal mining, non-ferrous metal, heavy metal, stone cutting, mining and so on.

The above-mentioned government decree was adopted to eliminate discrimination against women, so that activities and professions would not be inaccessible for women, which would be both discriminatory and ineffective for labor safety purposes. Therefore, the government decree is not in itself problematic or discriminatory. The alternative might have been listing the professions and activities where in case of increased risk a woman (pregnant or non-pregnant) should not work at all and it is likely that this list would inevitably include the professions of the mining industry. Thus, finally the most optimal option was selected; the risk was determined based on factors, only during pregnancy and lactation.

However, the Labor Code is flawed in that the state obliges the employer to keep pregnant and breastfeeding women away from arduous and harmful work, while remaining silent on the issue of compensation, which in practice results in the fact that pregnant and lactating mothers are left without compensation.

Another respondent offered an alternative view on the matter. According to them, Georgia, unlike several other post-Soviet countries, has long repealed the legislation which banned the employment of women at hundreds of occupations. Therefore, there is currently no regulation that would formally bar women from any kind of employment, including in the heavy industry. However, they argued that women in Tkibuli are still in a disadvantageous position in terms of employment, due to the gendered division of labor and the cultural marking of mining as a male occupation: "Getting hired in mines is problematic for women. This is connected more with traditional views and selection of professions. Traditionally, [mining] is not the field that employs women."

Further, the respondent argued that while the legislation stipulates that women and men should get equal pay for equal work, it is hard to define what constitutes equal work. According to them, unlike work of equal value, this notion cannot be measured. Therefore, the respondent sees the regulation as a merely declarative statement and holds that ensuring equal pay for equal work remains an unresolved problem that can negatively affect the well-being of women in Tkibuli.

Finally, the same respondent emphasized the problems related to maternity leave that women, possibly including those living in Tkibuli, face. "The same goes for maternity leave. What's particularly problematic? While there are some ostensible achievements – women, regardless of their occupation, can receive medical check-ups during work hours and get reimbursed for them, employers are obligated to preserve women's positions [during maternity leave] – if the maternity leave is not paid, or is paid the way it is now – for example, by a one thousand GEL reimbursement for six months –, it will offer [women] no real assistance and relief".

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ To address the monoindustrial nature of the local economy in Tkibuli and to improve working, social and economic conditions for local women, **the gendered consequences of extractive operations should be accounted for and taken into consideration in action plans both at the municipal and national levels.** Such study of mining's social and economic effects could include compiling sex-segregated data on employment in the industry, an assessment of education, skills and qualifications among the local population as well as a gender-sensitive study of local needs.
- ▶ To address gender inequities revealed in the labour force participation and to increase women's labor force participation rate, it is important to design and implement **training and re-qualification programs** for local women to become equipped with relevant skills and qualifications needed for different productive economies.
- ▶ To identify and address possible gender-related inequities in education, **the municipal government should track sex-segregated data on educational attainment.** To ensure access to digital educational resources, the region's internet infrastructure should improve.
- ▶ Since the extractive industry operating in Tkibuli is unable to provide adequate jobs for local women, employment opportunities from other sectors of the economy should supplement mining and **provide a diverse job market in the region.** Efforts at diversifying the regional economy could include promoting small business initiatives (including through providing initial investment through grant-making) and tax instruments aimed at creating jobs beyond the mining industry for women.
- ▶ To address the unequal distribution of key positions at the municipal level among men and women, **the local government should overview its policies of promotion and eliminate possibilities for discriminating practices.**
- ▶ To address the finding that private property is distributed unequally between local men and women, a targeted small business assistance program should be designed to **provide local women with the capital necessary for small business initiatives.**
- ▶ To address the problem of women facing barriers to registration of the private property purchased by their own remittances in Georgia, **local municipality should develop guidelines for raising the financial, taxation and registration literacy** among women residing and working outside Georgia for promoting private property ownership by them.

- ▶ To address the dire environmental conditions in Tkibuli, it is necessary and urgent to **set up a multidimensional epidemiological study** focused on mining-related health hazards for the local population. Such assessment should include both those employed directly in mining as well as the rest of Tkibuli's population. Because certain mining-related environmental pollutants are considered to produce gendered health effects, such epidemiological studies should be designed to identify possible gender-specific harm related to mining's environmental footprint.
- ▶ To improve physically demanding working conditions and to address the social, psychological and economic consequences of frequent workplace accidents, including workplace fatalities, **a program for supporting affected families should be developed and implemented.**

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