— Chapter 7 —

Gender, Regulation, and Corporate Social Responsibility

The Case of Equinor's Social Investments in Tanzania

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In April 2016, at one of Dar es Salaam's most posh hotels, Equinor, a Norwegian energy company, awarded prizes to the finalists in their business competition, Heroes of Tomorrow. The seven finalists on stage were all young men. After the winner had received his prize and been congratulated by his fellow contestants and the company representatives, Norway's female ambassador to Tanzania called on stage two of the young women who had participated in the competition. She hailed them for their efforts and awarded them token prizes.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) have been criticized for their rhetorical support to—as opposed to substantive engagement with—gender equality in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in low-income countries. This chapter focuses on the factors that influence the gendered dimensions of CSR in the petroleum sector: host country regulations, perceptions of risk, and the company's profile in terms of gender equality. We use Equinor in Tanzania as a case study. Equinor is a private energy company focusing mainly on oil and gas, in which the Norwegian state owns 67 percent of the shares. We argue that national regulations in host countries, perceptions of risk, as well as the need to gain a social license to operate from host communities mean that the gendered dimensions of CSR in the petroleum sector differ in important ways from other sectors. The study also shows that company ownership by a state that profiles itself as a champion of gender equality does not in itself lead to gender-sensitive social investments. The main beneficiaries of Equinor's social investments in Tanzania in the period 2014–18 were men, but this fact is disguised by the use of gender-neutral language in CSR reporting.

Global development institutions, such as the UN and the World Bank, have invited business entities to play a central role as development partners, and several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are linked to the private sector. Many corporations have embraced this new role as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies. At the same time, the "gender equality as smart economics" agenda has won terrain. This agenda was initially introduced by the World Bank and later adopted by the UN, other development actors, and business. By claiming to empower women, corporations attempt to moralize their image in order to attract consumers and investors and to expand their markets (Calkin 2016: 164). The business case for empowering women is linked to women as consumers, women as beneficiaries of social investments, and women as employees, managers, and members of boards. Feminist researchers have criticized this instrumental engagement with gender equality for simply being window dressing and for disregarding the structural factors behind poverty and global inequality (Allison, Gregoratti, and Tornhill 2019; Calkin 2015b, 2017; Moeller 2013, 2018; Roberts 2015; Tornhill 2016). While some companies have appropriated the concept of women's empowerment for their own purposes, women as a group as well as women's perspectives and needs are still missing from many CSR initiatives (Grosser and McCarthy 2019: 1106; Kolk and Lenfant 2018:14). This is particularly true in the extractive sector.

CSR was for many years regarded as the voluntary contributions of corporations to society. Multinational corporations (MNCs) in the extractive sector have been heavily criticized for bypassing governments by territorial enclaving and for taking over the role of the state by offering social services and thus increasing their own power (Ferguson 2005; Rajak 2011, 2016a). Recent years have seen a trend by host countries to introduce laws and policies that regulate CSR and make corporate contributions mandatory (Hayk 2019; Jayaraman, D'souza, and Ghoshal 2018; Wanvik 2014). However, there has been limited research on the way in which such actors are involved in CSR decision-making and how they influence the processes and outcomes of CSR (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017; Welker 2014; Hayk 2019; Knudsen 2018; Scheyvens, Banks, and Hughes 2016; Strønen 2020; chapter 6 in this volume). In addition to the companies themselves, central and local governments, NGOs, consultancy firms, and various forms of community representatives, including traditional authorities, can be involved.

A number of authors have called for studies of the "institutional culture of actors in the corporatized gender-equality agenda" (Calkin 2015a: 305) and for "more field-based research on how corporations engage in gender and development" (Allison et al. 2019: 54). In this chapter, we look at the different factors that may influence the gendering of CSR, focusing on the following research question: Why, despite Norway's focus on gender equality, did Equinor not succeed in implementing a stronger gender focus in its Tanzanian operations?

Equinor is an interesting case for a study of the gendered aspects of CSR in the extractive sector for several reasons. First, it is an MNC from the Global North with large investments in the oil and gas sectors of several countries in the Global South. Second, Equinor is a national oil company in which the Norwegian state is the largest shareholder with 67 percent ownership. Norway is a country that has profiled itself as a champion of gender equality and, in its foreign policy, has stated explicitly that other countries can learn from its experience (Selbervik and Østebø 2013; Skjelsbæk and Tryggestad 2020).

There is a certain Anglo-American bias to the literature on CSR (Knudsen Rajak et al. 2020; introduction to this volume), focusing on private companies from the English-speaking world. But the ownership of the MNC—that is, whether the company is private or state owned—and the MNC's geopolitical background can potentially play a role when it comes to CSR (Frynas 2009). So far, few studies have investigated the link between the gendered dimensions of the CSR of state-owned companies and the gender policies of the states that own them.

Due to unresolved legal regulations within the petroleum sector in Tanzania, a final investment decision has yet to be made, but Equinor, together with other petroleum companies, plans to build a plant for liquified natural gas (LNG) in Southern Tanzania. In an effort to comply with national policies and laws and in order to secure a social license to operate, Equinor has made a number of social investments.

A working hypothesis for this study was that Equinor's CSR in Tanzania would reflect Norway's self-proclaimed concern with gender equality. Our hypothesis proved to be only partially accurate. We argue that the company has adopted the business case for gender equality in terms of leadership and staff, but corporate guidelines do not focus on gender equality in social investments. In the four-year period 2014–18, Equinor's social investments at the local level in Tanzania almost exclusively benefited men. A comparison with Equinor's social investments in Brazil demonstrates the importance of regulations in the host country and the qualifications and profile of local partners (consultancy firms and NGOs).

Methods

This study is part of a larger multiyear research project titled Energethics: Norwegian Energy Companies Abroad; Expanding the Anthropological Understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility (see introduction to this volume). Data collection took place in Tanzania and Norway in the period January 2016 to December 2019 and focused on labor rights (chapter 8 and Lange 2020) and gender equality in social investments (this chapter and Lange and Wyndham 2021).[1] In 2018, the company changed its name from Statoil to Equinor. For simplicity, we will refer to the company as Equinor throughout this chapter.

We interviewed and had informal conversations with sustainability staff at various levels, board members, country managers, and community liaison officers as well as representatives of civil society organizations at both the national and local levels. We also examined the company's web pages and relevant Tanzanian and Norwegian policy documents. We have focused on projects that were set up specifically as social investments by Equinor and that were initiated before December 2018.[2]

The chapter is structured as follows: first, we present an overview of the literature on the promotion and regulation of CSR and the role of national institutions and perceptions of risk in the extractive sector. We then follow with a presentation of the role that the Norwegian state, as the majority owner of Equinor, takes in shaping the company's CSR. The main part of the chapter analyzes Equinor's self-presentation as a corporation, demonstrates the way in which its most costly social investments in Tanzania were put in place as a result of legal requirements in the host country, and examines how perceptions of risk and the efforts to achieve a social license to operate have shaped the social investments at community level. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the study and draws some parallels between Equinor's projects in Brazil and Tanzania, arguing that national regulations—and characteristics of the consultancy sector in the two countries—can partly explain the great discrepancy between the company's CSR projects in the two countries.

Regulating and Promoting CSR: Global and National Measures

The UN has called for the involvement of the private sector in development efforts, and the SDGs differ markedly from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by explicitly giving business a role to play (Hayk 2019; United Nations 2020). In the early 2000s, many corporations started linking their CSR to sustainability (Dashwood 2012; Dolan and Rajak 2016), and several scholars have argued that MNCs, particularly those that operate in the Global South, have coopted the discourse of sustainable development (Gilberthorpe and Banks 2012; Orock 2013: 46; Spencer 2018). One reason why MNCs may be inclined to link up to the SDGs is that the goals, in the words of Rochelle Spencer (2018: 79), "do not challenge the structural causes of poverty, the patterns of wealth distribution, and structural inequality."

Companies in the food/drinks and apparel sector—such as Coca-Cola and Nike—have, as a central part of their CSR, made a claim of empowering adolescent girls and women in an effort to "moralize the corporation" (Calkin 2016: 164). In the case of Nike, the focus on empowerment of adolescent girls came as a response to public critique of the company, which took the form of anti-sweatshop campaigns and the anti-globalization movement (Moeller 2014). Feminists have debated the difference between rhetorical and substantive "engagement with feminist aims" and to what degree feministic ideas and goals have been depoliticized by mainstream institutions (Calkin 2015a: 304; de Jong and Kimm 2017). While some feminists have argued that the co-optation of feminist aims has in fact served to "legitimize anti-feminist policy goals," others have argued that the visibility of gender in current development work reflects "the success of particular strands of (neo) liberal feminism" (Calkin 2015a). Adrienne Roberts (2015) has coined the term "transnational business feminism" (TBF) to describe the market-oriented approach to gender inequality, which holds that it makes sense economically to invest in women and to include them at all levels of decision-making.

In addition to linking their business activities to the MDGs and SDGs, many MNCs have signed voluntary global guidelines, including the UN Global Compact (UNGC), which was launched in 2000. The Global Compact presents itself as the "world's largest corporate sustainability initiative" (UN Global Compact 2020) but has been criticized for being merely symbolic, "legitimizing the business case for development" (Roberts and Soederberg 2012), and for allowing "member companies to enhance their reputation despite few mechanisms for accountability" (Welker 2014: 145). The UNGC lends not only authority to the MNCs that are signatories to it but also offers concepts and terms that the companies can reproduce in their image building and reporting on CSR (Rajak 2016b: 46). Daniel Berliner and Aseem Prakash (2015: 115) have introduced the term "bluewashing" to describe this effect of membership in UNGC. In an effort to link itself to gender equality agendas, the UNGC collaborated with UN Women in 2010 to formulate the seven Women's Empowerment Principles, but gender equality is not mentioned in the ten UNGC principles that companies sign on to.

Corporate social responsibility was for many years understood as the voluntary contributions to society that a company undertakes in order to enhance its public image and to secure a social license to operate. CSR, then, was an add-on to the taxes and royalties that companies were obliged to pay by law. Many states have failed to regulate the practices of multinational corporations (Dolan and Rajak 2011; Idemudia 2014; Spencer 2018). In the case of the extractive industries, limited regulation is linked to advice from the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s, which recommended that countries in sub-Saharan Africa put in place investor-friendly laws and policies to attract investors (Hilson 2012; Lange 2011).

In recent years, a number of countries, including India, Indonesia, and Ghana, have enacted laws that regulate CSR and make it mandatory (Hayk 2019; Jayaraman et al. 2018; Pandey and Mukherjee 2019; Wanvik 2014). In Brazil, special requirements for the petroleum sector were introduced in 2011, mandating that oil and gas companies must by law implement community projects. The process is organized by a subdivision of the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment: the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA). IBAMA was set up under President Lula da Silva and is still staffed by people who are concerned about civic and political rights (as seen in chapter 6). The consultancies are invited to submit project proposals in line with IBAMA's guidelines, and the projects are then developed in cooperation between IBAMA, the consultancy, and the corporation. The consultancy firm that oversees Equinor's social investment in Brazil is inspired by "the tradition of popular education and critical pedagogy" in the country, where "subaltern groups must develop knowledge about the structural conditions for their marginalization, learn to think of themselves as political, acting subjects, and develop collective emancipatory strategies in order for social transformation to occur" (Strønen 2020: 49). In addition to helping women improve their economic status, including pension rights, the judicial status of the association "allows them to solicit representation in formal municipal consultative councils and to solicit audiences with political bodies" (Strønen 2020: 48). Through the project then, the women involved have managed to gain political representation. Strønen found that, when oil and gas prices plummeted in 2015, Equinor decided to stop financing some of their voluntary social investments in Brazil, but the project targeting poor women was continued because it was mandatory by law.

Like Exxon (Muñoz and Burnham 2016: 153), Equinor is very attentive to compliance. One reason is that corporations within the extractive sector have enormous up-front capital costs and are therefore quite concerned with risk. MNCs face risk from national governments, which may withdraw concessions in case of noncompliance or may change regulatory frameworks, including nationalization of the resources (Lange and Kinyondo 2016; Sørreime and Tronvoll 2020; Wilson 2015; and chapter 6 in this volume). MNCs also face risk from local communities in the form of social unrest (Dashwood 2012; Davis and Franks 2014: 32; Shapiro, Hobdari, and Oh 2018), and many are open about the fact that CSR is, first of all, a question of risk management and getting a social license to operate (Kirsch 2016; Wanvik 2016: 524). Calkin adds a twist and describes CSR as "a mechanism to minimize resistance" (Calkin 2016: 159). This is often done by sponsoring social services and infrastructure in collaboration with local stakeholders (Frynas 2009: 4; Visser 2006).

In the coming sections, we contribute to this field of research by analyzing the gendered aspects of Equinor's CSR: the role played by Equinor's majority owner, the Norwegian state; the way in which Equinor presents its CSR at the corporate level; host country regulations; and the social investments that the company has carried out at the national and local levels in Tanzania.

Equinor's CSR at Corporate Level: Limited Regulation by the Owner

Statoil was established in 1972 as a national oil company. It started operating abroad in the 1990s and is now present in more than thirty countries. Statoil was partly privatized in 2001, and in May 2018 the company changed its name to Equinor. The majority shareholder of Equinor is the Norwegian state, with 67 percent of the shares. Norway has a strong tradition for state-supported feminism, and there is largely a consensus for gender equality. Ingunn Skjelsbæk and Torunn Tryggestad (2020: 184) argue that, in Norway, gender equality has in fact "emerged as an identity marker of a core value that characterizes 'us.'" Gender equal, they write, "is a descriptive term for the national identity." In 2016, when the Norwegian foreign minister launched the new National Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Norway's Foreign and Development Policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016), he argued that Norway could become a "superpower" within the fields of pro-gender foreign policies (Skjelsbæk and Tryggestad 2020: 183).

While Norway flags gender equality in its aid programs, the Norwegian government has adopted a hands-off policy when it comes to state-owned MNCs, such as Equinor. Norway requires state-owned companies to sign on to the UNGC, apply the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards, adhere to the OECD responsible business conduct recommendations, and "take up ILO's core conventions in their business" (Knudsen, Müftüoğlu, and Hugøy 2020: 61; and chapter 10). Apart from this, there is little interference in state-owned companies.

Equinor's Self-Presentation

The image of a young, smiling blond woman on an offshore platform adorns Equinor's web page on sustainability (Equinor 2020c). In terms of global CSR initiatives, Equinor's website refers to the company's adherence to the UNGC and eight other external voluntary codes (2020c). The company's sustainability report for 2019 links strategies, milestones, and performance directly to six different SDGs—"Decent work and economic growth, Life below water, Partnerships for the goals, Quality education, Affordable and clean energy, and Climate action" (Equinor 2020a: 11)—but not to SDG 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." For Equinor, the moralizing of the corporation is not tied to gender but to climate change and the efforts to brand itself as a climate-friendly corporation.

In the scholarship on business and gender, there has been concern with the limited number of women on most company boards and the fact that "women remain under-represented at the most senior corporate level" (Gutiérrez-Fernández and Fernández-Torres 2020). Equinor's sustainability reports demonstrate that the company gives high priority to informing the public about the gender profile of the staff. The report for 2019, for example, states that, in that year, 30 percent of the permanent employees were women and that Equinor submitted "employees' gender profile for inclusion in the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index"[3] (Equinor 2020a: 55). The report also presents a graph showing more than one-third of leadership positions as being held by women. What is missing from the sustainability reports in the last few years, however, is reporting that shows how gender is considered in the company's social investment efforts.

The company's change of name from Statoil to Equinor in 2018 was a major exercise in corporate communication. In addition to numerous advertisements in newspapers and magazines, the company released a one-minute commercial titled "Equinor: This Is What Changed Us" (Equinor 2018b). One of the very first sequences of the film shows Norwegian women marching in the 1970s under the banner "Unity in the fight for women's emancipation."[4] In her analysis of this commercial, Emilie Hesselberg (2019: 36, 65) argues that Equinor uses women's liberation as a metonym for development and change and thus seeks to create a link between women's rights and Equinor's business activities. The reference to gender equality as national branding for Nordic countries is not uncommon (Jezierska and Towns 2018; Nickelsen 2019). It should be noted that the film also shows a gay couple with a baby and a wedding between a woman of color and a white man. The main message of the film is that Norwegian society has changed for the better and so has Statoil/Equinor, which has evolved from being an oil and gas company to a "broad energy company" and thus needs a new name that reflects this change (Equinor 2018b).

National Regulations in the Host Country: Tanzania

The discoveries of large natural gas deposits in Tanzania from 2012 onward spurred a heated debate as to how the resource could best benefit the country. Based on the negative experiences with MNCs' investment in the country's mining sector, politicians and local businessmen argued that it was important not only to secure fair revenues to the state but also to ensure that this sector created employment for Tanzanians. The National Natural Gas Policy of 2013 emphasizes skills development of Tanzanians in the sector (United Republic of Tanzania 2013: 14–15). The Petroleum Act of 2015 makes it mandatory for all companies within the sector to draft detailed plans for local content (United Republic of Tanzania 2015b), and there are strict restrictions on the number of foreign employees that a company operating in Tanzania is allowed to hire (Kinyondo and Villanger 2017; Lange and Kinyondo 2016: 1102; United Republic of Tanzania 2015b).

In direct response to the local content requirements, Equinor initiated a program to support higher education within the fields of geosciences and petroleum engineering through a collaboration between universities in Tanzania, Angola, and Norway (Statoil 2017b). In the period 2013 to 2017, Equinor spent US$2.3 million on the Angola Norway Tanzania Higher Education Initiative (ANTHEI) program.[5] In the batch of petroleum geoscience students who graduated from the ANTHEI program in December 2016, there were eight men and only one woman. The gender balance is better in the master's degree program in petroleum financing, where approximately 30 percent of the students are women.[6] However, there are no gender disaggregated data on the company's web pages or in the sustainability reports, just an overall total number of students.

Tanzania's Environmental Management Act (2004) mandates Environmental Impact Assessments, and the National Natural Gas Policy (2013) has a short section on CSR, but up to 2015 Tanzania had no laws, policies, or guidelines focused specifically on CSR. Equinor was therefore relatively free to design their social investments projects in line with their own corporate policies. In the coming section, we will present these policies and the social investments that were carried out at the local level in Southern Tanzania.

Equinor's CSR in Relation to Risk at Community Level and Achieving a Social License to Operate

An important part of Equinor's self-identification and image is to have high ethical standards. The company refers to its performance culture as "values-based" (Equinor 2018a: 22). The most central guideline in this regard is the *Equinor Book* (formerly the *Statoil Book*), a fifty-page document presenting, among other things, the vision, values, performance framework, and corporate toolbox of the company. Approximately half a page is dedicated to a section on "working with communities," where the main message is that Equinor will conduct its business in a manner consistent with the ten principles of UNGC and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Equinor 2018a: 20). The book states that the company is "committed to equal opportunity," but it does not mention gender or women (Equinor 2018a: 24).

Since gender is absent from the company's main policy document at the global level, the incorporation of gender perspectives depends

Table 7.1. Overview of stakeholders and relevant policy documents. © Siri Lange

Stakeholders that Equinor relate to for their planned investment in Tanzania	**Relevant policy documents**	**Mention of "women" or "gender"**
The Norwegian state	white papers	No
The United Republic of Tanzania	National Natural Gas Policy, 2013	Yes
	The Petroleum Act, 2015	Yes
Host communities in Mtwara and Lindi	CSRE policy	No
	The Equinor Book	No
	Equinor's human rights policy	No

to a large degree on the national regulations in the host countries, the interests and qualifications of the sustainability staff at the various levels, and, possibly, perceptions about risk. In the coming sections, we will present the social investment projects that the company carried out in Tanzania in the period 2014–18.

The gigantic natural gas reserves in Tanzania are located off the coast in the southern part of the country outside the regions of Mtwara and Lindi. These regions fare very poorly in terms of socioeconomic indicators compared to Northern Tanzania. The overwhelmingly Muslim population is commonly stigmatized by outsiders for ostensibly lacking interest in development, while the southerners themselves feel that they have been neglected and marginalized from development (Ahearne and Childs 2018; Kamat et al. 2019). In 2013, the government decided that onshore gas that was extracted by a Chinese company in Mtwara should be piped to the industrial areas around Dar es Salaam rather than processed locally. Violence erupted in Mtwara, resulting in at least six deaths (Ahearne and Childs 2018; Must 2018; Poncian 2019). Although the violence was directed against the government and not the company, the situation was a clear sign to the petroleum companies that the local population was frustrated and that the companies could potentially be the next target. The great majority of the people who participated in the riots were young men (Kamat et al. 2019; Must and Rustad 2019).

Sponsoring Surgery for Lymphatic Filariasis

Equinor's main social investment in Southern Tanzania has been support to the treatment of lymphatic filariasis, a neglected tropical disease (NTD). The disease is caused by a species of filarial worms that are transmitted by mosquitoes; it can lead to the abnormal enlargement of body parts, such as the scrotal area (hydrocele), and cause immense pain, disfigurement, and social stigma (World Health Organization 2020). In Tanzania, lymphatic filariasis is associated with fishermen.

As mentioned above, the great majority who participated in the 2013 protests against the planned gas pipeline were men. A study from Indonesia found that "local governments were very sensitive to unrest, and companies were therefore inclined to carry out CSR projects that had the potential to curb social unrest" (Wanvik 2014: 288). Based on this, one can speculate whether the company's motivation to sponsor men's health was linked to the 2013 riots. When we aired this possibility for Equinor Tanzania, however, the staff argued strongly against this interpretation. They emphasized that their motivation for the project was that, while there were many projects addressing malaria and HIV in the region, none dealt with lymphatic filariasis, and Equinor wanted "to do something different," "something that could change peoples' lives," where "the outcome would be very visible." As one interviewee put it: "Those who receive the surgery will never forget Statoil!"

The top management of Equinor Tanzania expressed some ambivalence about carrying out this form of philanthropic social investment. In interviews, they said that local expectations and requests for community support were extremely high, that they tried to communicate that Equinor is not a development agency but a business venture, and that they had not yet had any return on their investments in Tanzania. However, as had other Norwegian state-owned companies operating abroad (see chapter 10), Equinor adapted to the local perceptions of CSR and trusted their local sustainability staff's advice when they said that a project helping patients suffering from lymphatic filariasis would be very well received locally and contribute to a social license to operate.

By 2018, a total of 640 men had had been treated for the disease. On its web page, Equinor uses the gender-neutral term "persons" when referring to this number with no indication that this is an illness that, situationally, only men suffer from. In addition to creating general goodwill among the local population and thus a social license to operate, the company states that the program "provides a platform where we can engage with the regional government and local stakeholders" (Equinor 2020d). A senior Equinor manager readily admitted that the company rides "the wave of goodwill" created by the surgeries.[7]

In 2014, when the treatment of lymphatic filariasis project was conceived, there were no government policies focusing specifically for CSR in Tanzania. However, in 2015, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals published "Guidelines for Corporate Social Responsibility and Empowerment in the Extractive Industry in Tanzania," which they state would act as "soft law." The policy states that the ministry and local authorities "have the responsibility to guide and supervise the implementation of the CSRE programs" (United Republic of Tanzania 2015a). The guidelines thus mandate that all CSRE projects must be planned together with local authorities. Referring to the guidelines, a senior female staff member with the regional authorities in Lindi told us that they had informed Equinor that they needed to support a health project for women in addition to the project on lymphatic filariasis. The two parties agreed that, from 2019, Equinor would start supporting fistula repair for women. Obstetric fistula is "an abnormal opening between a woman's genital tract and her urinary tract or rectum" and the condition is a result of obstructed labor (World Health Organization 2022). Like lymphatic filariasis, obstetric fistula is a condition that entails stigma and that the underresourced public health system in Southern Tanzania has been unable to handle adequately. This example indicates that a change in policy—making the role of local government in the planning of CSR projects mandatory—contributed to a process in which Equinor expanded its support in the health sector to include health services for women. Equinor has continued funding the public health system to carry out these two forms of surgery in the period 2019–22. In the following section we turn to Equinor's support to business training for youth.

Creating (Male) Heroes for the Future through Business Training

Neoliberalization and structural adjustment reduced job opportunities in the public sector in many countries in the Global South, and self-employment and entrepreneurship have been launched as one of the main measures against poverty. Business training and microfinance projects have been promoted by both corporations and NGOs, the great majority of which have targeted women based on the idea that entrepreneurship can lift women and their families out of poverty (Calkin 2015a; McCarthy 2017; Roberts 2015; Tornhill 2016). It is therefore somewhat surprising that Equinor's efforts to stimulate entrepreneurship in Southern Tanzania made no attempts at targeting women as a group. On the contrary, the project has benefitted men almost exclusively.

The business competition was a localized version of Equinor's branding tool Heroes of Tomorrow (HoT), which supports "talented young people in sport, culture and education, helping them to become the Heroes of Tomorrow" (Equinor 2020b). In Tanzania, Equinor adapted HoT to focus on entrepreneurship. One reason for this was a wish to link the program to Tanzania's emphasis on local content in the oil and gas industries. On the Equinor Tanzania web page, the program is presented in the following way:

> The programme was established in 2014 and by 2016 more than 250 youth in Mtwara and Lindi were trained on entrepreneurship through this initiative. The first round of the competition had five winners while the second round saw 10 youth from Mtwara and Lindi emerging as winners. By 2018, more than 15 new businesses have been established in Mtwara and Lindi thanks to this programme. (Equinor 2020d)

By referring to the gender-neutral term "youth," the company conveniently hides the fact that, in both 2014 and 2016, all of the finalists were male. Lack of gender balance in the competition appears to be the result of a lack of gender sensitivity both among the Equinor staff involved and in the consultancy firm that Equinor hired to organize the competition. The consultancy firm was given responsibility for advertising the competition, to perform the first round of selection, and to train the shortlisted candidates. From more than four hundred applications, the consultancy firm selected forty candidates who were offered a six-day business management training course to improve their proposals. We do not have the exact figures for the male-female ratio among the contestants, but a picture of the HoT training in 2015 published by the consultancy firm (Darecha 2020) shows that, out of the approximately forty-eight people present, only four appear to be female. A list of the forty candidates was handed over to a panel of male and female experts chosen by Equinor from local businesses and academia.

By outsourcing a central part of the project to a consultancy firm that apparently lacked adequate knowledge of the local context and ways to involve women,[8] Equinor repeated the mistakes that some of the MNCs in the mining sector of Tanzania had made (Selmier, Newenham-Kahindi, and Oh 2015). However, rather than reflecting critically about what could have been done differently in order to involve more women, some of the Equinor staff blamed women's limited participation on cultural aspects in Southern Tanzania:

> There are some cultural aspects that make women feel that they should not go in front and show their abilities. This was the main problem in Mtwara and Lindi where girls are forced to get married at a younger age, so very few were able to "fight" in the competition where men were in big numbers. Very few women signed up for the competition and therefore their chance to win was already minimized.[9]

The argument made by the Equinor staff that cultural factors make involving women difficult is not uncommon. When women struggle to succeed for whatever reason (for example, due to poor markets) after having attended economic empowerment programs, blame is placed on cultural restraints "rather than material conditions" (Tornhill 2016). However, two other actors in the region have demonstrated that it is possible to design projects that benefit girls or involve women. In a project that aims to improve local communities' capacities to hold local authorities to account for the revenues from gas, Oxfam Tanzania has involved the same number of women as men by recruiting animators through the Village Assembly and by setting as a criterion that at least half of the participants must be female.[10] And Songas, a company processing onshore gas in the Lindi region, has earmarked two out of three scholarships for girls (Mwakyambiki, Sikira, and Massawe 2020). These two examples show that it was not characteristics of the local communities that hindered the inclusion of women in HoT: it was poor design. The examples also demonstrate the importance of working with the right partners.

The managers of Equinor Tanzania were uncomfortable with the fact that no women have been among the fifteen finalists during the two rounds of competitions. They explained to us that for the next round, they would introduce a system of female role models to inspire more women to participate. The role model idea was introduced at the award ceremony in 2016, where two young women, who had competed but were not among the top finalists, were presented with token awards by Norway's female ambassador to Tanzania. The ambassador held a speech in which she encouraged the two women to carry out their business ideas. The event was covered by local television channels and other news media. Improving image is one postulate for corporate engagement in CSR and branding (Aluchna

2017:16). Since journalists were covering the awards ceremony and a promotional video was produced,[11] the special awards to women probably served not only to present women as role models but also to improve the gender balance on stage and thus the company's visual imaginary. At the same time, the Equinor management, both at the headquarters level and at the country level, appeared to be genuinely concerned about the lack of gender balance in Heroes of Tomorrow. After the two first rounds, the competition has not been organized again.

Much of the criticism that feminist scholars have directed toward the so-called economic empowerment programs of MNCs, such as Coca-Cola and Nike, are relevant for Equinor's business training as well (Calkin 2015b; McCarthy 2017; Tornhill 2016). Equinor presented entrepreneurism as a solution for young, jobless people, but there are limited markets in Mtwara, particularly now that the offshore gas investments have been postponed. Moreover, the great majority of the participants in the two rounds of business training and contests were students at Stella Maris University, many of whom had come to Mtwara to study.[12] Not only did this project benefit almost exclusively men, but to a large degree it also benefited men from the more privileged parts of the country. There is great frustration in Mtwara and Lindi that the few job and business opportunities in the region are seized by "outsiders" (often Christians from the northern parts of the country).

The male-dominated business training in Tanzania stands in great contrast to the way that social investments are talked about at the headquarters level of Equinor in Norway, where we were told that the company pays "a high attention to gender issues," gives "extra attention to vulnerable groups," and asks "how women and men will be impacted." The manager at HQ level described these strategies as "affirmative action, making sure that women's voices are heard," and linked the company's concern with gender directly to Norwegian ownership: "Coming from Norway and being a Norwegian company helps."[13] To substantiate and illustrate this point, Equinor's project in Brazil—which targets poor women—was given as an example of Equinor's focus on women, despite the fact that Equinor did not design the project. The project in Brazil won Equinor's internal award for best safety and sustainability project globally in 2016 (Statoil 2017a). As seen in chapter 6, there is reason to believe that the project's success is closely linked to the fact that it is designed and implemented by a consultancy firm that is very professional and staffed by women who genuinely care about the women whom they are hired to help.

Table 7.2. Overview of Equinor's social investments in Tanzania 2014–18. © Siri Lange

Regulation/ motivation	Project investment	Partner(s)	Direct beneficiaries
Local content requirements (National Natural Gas Policy of 2013 and the Petroleum Act of 2015)	Higher education in geosciences and petroleum engineering (national level)	Norwegian and Tanzanian universities	Men (70–90 percent)
Social license to operate, mitigate risk	Treatment of lymphatic filariasis (local level)	Ministry of Health Regional hospitals	Men
	Business training for youth (local level)	Consultancy firm, Stella Maris University, Mtwara Regional Library	Men (approximately 90 percent)

As can been seen from table 7.2, Equinor's social investments in the period 2014-18 benefited first and foremost men. However, in Equinor Tanzania's information brochures from the same period (distributed in Tanzania in 2016 and 2017), women are overrepresented. For example, the brochure *Tanzania Gas Project—From Discovery to Gas Sales* has a front page showing Tanzanian schoolgirls wearing T-shirts with the company's logo. In the brochure, there are pictures of fifteen Tanzanian females and eight males. Another brochure, titled *Sustainability* in English and *Sisi na jamii* (We and the society) in Swahili, has a smiling African woman wearing a helmet with the company logo on the front page. This brochure has pictures of eight women and five men. The picture representations indicate that Equinor, just like many other corporations and organizations, seeks to showcase women as the beneficiaries of the company's social investments.

Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked the gendered aspects of Equinor's CSR as it is presented at the corporate level and enacted through the company's social investments in Tanzania. Feminist research has criticized global corporations' rhetorical support to gender equality for their own gain (Calkin 2015a). Our findings demonstrate that companies in the oil and gas sector differ in important ways from the kind of companies that feminist research has focused on up to now: global companies that manufacture products for markets in the Global North.

Equinor anchors its CSR in the term *sustainability*, and the company states that its ambition is to "contribute to sustainable development."[14] This is a bold ambition for an oil and gas company in an era of intense public focus on climate change. The company's sustainability reports and web pages have therefore focused on rebranding itself as a climate-friendly energy company. In contrast to companies like Nike and Coca-Cola, which have designed their CSR to appeal to consumers in the Global North and claimed to empower women and girls in the economically disadvantaged parts of the world (Calkin 2017; Moeller 2014; Roberts 2015; Tornhill 2016), the main stakeholders for companies operating in the extractive sector—those who have the power to make an investment profitable or in the worst case a gigantic loss—are government authorities and project-affected communities. Considerations of risk are therefore central to all decisions that the company makes.

One of the main interests of this chapter was to investigate the ways in which guidelines and regulations at global and national levels influence the CSR of oil and gas companies. It has been argued that state ownership of an MNC can have important consequences for its CSR (Frynas 2009) and that companies' strategic decisions, "such as CSR and gender issues reporting, are clearly influenced by the institutional context of the country in which the company is located" (García-Sánchez, Oliveira, and Martínez-Ferrero 2020:370). Based on this, our hypothesis was that Equinor, the majority of which is owned by a state that has gender equality as one of its main trademarks, would be concerned with gender equality in its social investments. However, as seen in the introduction to this volume, state ownership plays a limited role since the Norwegian state does not formulate its own regulations for state-owned companies operating abroad but requires companies to comply with international frameworks. Gender equality is not central in the global CSR initiatives that the company has signed on to nor is it anchored in the company's documents and policies on sustainability.

Each country office is given complete autonomy when it comes to designing community investments, but in line with Equinor's focus on compliance, they do so in accordance with legal regulations. As seen in chapter 6, Iselin Strønen's findings from Equinor's social investments in Brazil offer important lessons on the role of national laws and guidelines when compared to our findings from Tanzania. Brazilian law requires petroleum companies to have projects that support marginalized groups in host communities. A government body monitors the projects, while the projects are designed and implemented by consultancy firms in collaboration with the funders. In Tanzania, by contrast, there is no governmental body to oversee CSR in the extractive sector and no law that requires oil and gas companies to support local communities. The only legislation that regulates the companies' CSR is the Petroleum Act, which requires companies to hire and train local staff. Equinor's main social investment is directly linked to this legislation, and since engineering is a field dominated by males, the majority of the beneficiaries have been men. Our study also indicates that Tanzania's soft law on CSRE (the CSRE policy) helped local authorities secure support for a project that targeted women's health. Future research is important to help us examine the ways in which host governments can alter the power asymmetries between transnational companies and themselves (Hayk 2019; Scheyvens et al. 2016).

In this study, we were also interested in the role of local partners in the design and implementation of social investments. Again, a comparison with Equinor's project in Brazil is relevant. As seen in chapter 6, in Brazil, progressive intellectuals, civil society organizations, and social movements constitute a historical counterforce to corporate and elite power. The consultancy firm that implements Equinor's award-winning project is inspired by "the tradition of popular education and critical pedagogy" in the country, and Strønen concludes that the project has indeed had "a transformative effect on many of the women's lives" (Strønen 2020: 50). In Tanzania, Equinor carried out business training in collaboration with a local consultancy firm that appears to have been completely gender blind, resulting in a situation where very few women participated in the training and no women were among the top fifteen finalists. Women's organizations at the national level in Tanzania have been skeptical of collaboration with petroleum companies because they fear the reputational risk (Wyndham and Lange 2019). A national law on CSR and a national regulative body, as in Brazil, could perhaps have contributed toward making such collaboration less risky for the CSOs and could have contributed to a more equal power balance between them and the corporations.

In line with the ideals of transnational business feminism (Roberts 2015), Equinor's sustainability reports present gender-disaggregated data as recommended by international CSR frameworks, such as the gender balance among staff and in leadership, but the reports do not emphasize gender equality in its social investments. Although the company links its activities to the SDGs, it does not present itself as a development actor, a development expert, or an expert on gender equality and empowerment, as some other MNCs have (Roberts 2015: 224). However, Equinor has in common with many other MNCs (Calkin 2015a) the tendency to use women and girls as its public face. By using a gender-neutral language in their reporting on social investments in Tanzania, referring to the male beneficiaries as "persons" and "youth" and by overrepresenting girls and women in their visual communication, Equinor—which is owned by a country that has gender equality as one of its trademarks—manages to a certain degree to disguise the fact that in the period 2014–18, the company's main beneficiaries in Tanzania were male. As of November 2022, Equinor had yet to make its final investment decision, and social investments at the local level have therefore been kept to a minimum in recent years. However, based on the discomfort that Equinor managers revealed to us when discussing the lack of gender balance in their local projects, there is reason to believe that the company will make efforts to redesign its social investments to benefit women as well as men if the plan to build an onshore plant for liquefied natural gas (LNG) is carried out.

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Notes

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1. The first author carried out eight field visits to Tanzania (Dar es Salaam, Lindi, Mtwara, and Mwanza) and visited three different Equinor branches in Norway (Bergen, Oslo, and Stavanger). Interviews were conducted in English, Norwegian, and Swahili. As part of her master's thesis (Wyndham 2018), the second author conducted interviews in Dar es Salaam and Stavanger in October and November 2017 together with the first author. All interviewees have been granted anonymity.
2. Since we focus on projects that were set up specifically as social investments, we exclude Equinor's sponsorship of the 2015 annual meeting of one of the umbrella organizations for CSOs in Mtwara. We also exclude a project on safety training for fishermen that was a requirement linked to an environmental impact assessment (EIA) as well as projects that the company has sponsored as part of their former consortium with Shell.
3. "The reporting framework provides a comprehensive, standardized format for companies to voluntarily disclose information on how they promote gender equality across four distinct areas: company statistics, policies, community engagement and products and services" (https://www.bloomberg.com/company/press/2019-bloomberg-gender-equality-index/).
4. *Enhet i kampen for kvinnenes frigjøring*.
5. A substantial part of the budget goes directly to Norwegian universities to pay for the salaries and travel expenses of the Norwegian professors.
6. Lange, observations in class and interviews with lecturers, December 2018.
7. Lange, interview in Dar es Salaam, 14 October 2016.
8. The owner and head of the "social enterprise firm" Darecha hails from and grew up in Dar es Salaam; http://www.africanleadershipacademy.org/staffulty/young-leaders/julius-shirima-tanzania/.
9. Lange and Wyndham, interview in Dar es Salaam, 24 November 2017.

10. Lange, interview in Lindi with representative for Lindi Region Association for NGOs (LANGO), 6 December 2019, and in Dar es Salaam with representative for Oxfam Tanzania, 11 December 2019.
11. The award ceremony can be watched approximately forty-three minutes into the forty-seven-minute-long promotional video for HoT in Tanzania: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3andv=sWTmTBNTEfYandfeature=emb_logo.
12. Lange, interview in Mtwara with headmaster and lecturers at Stella Maris, 28 November 2019.
13. Lange and Wyndham, interview, 13 September 2017.
14. https://www.equinor.com/en/how-and-why/sustainability/recognition-and-awards.html.

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