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Gender, regulation, and corporate social responsibility in the extractive sector: The case of Equinor's social investments in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Multinational corporations have been criticised for their rhetorical support to - as opposed to substantive engagement with - gender equality in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in poor countries. Many host countries have started regularizing CSR in recent years, and there is great variation between countries and different sectors when it comes to the gendered dimensions of social investments. This article focuses on the factors that influence CSR in the petroleum sector, using Equinor in Tanzania as a case study. 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, means 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 in gender equality does not in itself lead to gender sensitive social investments. The main 'beneficiaries' of Equinor's social investments in Tanzania are men, but this fact is disguised by using a gender neutral language in CSR reporting.

Introduction

Global development institutions like 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 both to women as consumers, women as beneficiaries of social investments, and women as employees, managers, and members of boards. Feminist researchers have criticised this instrumental engagement with gender equality for being simply window dressing, and for disregarding the structural factors behind poverty and global inequality (Allison et al., 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 need, women as a group, and women's perspectives and needs are still missing from many CSR initiatives (Grosser & McCarthy, 2019: 1106; Kolk & Lenfant, 2018: 14). This is particularly true for the extractive

sector.

CSR was for many years regarded as corporations' voluntary contributions to society. MNCs in the extractive sector have been heavily criticised 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 where host countries introduce laws and policies to regulate CSR and to make the contributions mandatory (Hayk, 2019; Jayaraman et al., 2018; Wanvik, 2014). There has been limited research on the way in which the actors involved in CSR decision-making influence the processes and outcomes of CSR (Hayk, 2019; Knudsen, 2018; Scheyvens et al., 2016; Strønen, 2020). 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 article, we look at the different factors that may influence the gendering of CSR, focusing on the following three research questions: i) In what ways do guidelines and regulations at global and national levels influence the CSR of oil and gas companies? ii) How do oil and gas companies' perceptions of risk influence social investments? iii) How do

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local partners influence programs at community level? We use Equinor, a Norwegian state-owned oil and gas company, and their social investments in Tanzania, as a case study.

Due to unresolved legal regulations of the petroleum sector in the country, the final investment decision has not yet been taken, but Equinor plans to build a plant for liquified natural gas (LNG) in Southern Tanzania, together with other petroleum companies. 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. 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 that is owned 67% by the Norwegian state. Norway is a country that has profited itself as a champion of gender equality, and in its foreign policy, Norway has stated explicitly that other countries can learn from its experiences (Selbervik & Østebø, 2013; Skjelsbæk & Tryggestad, 2020).

There is a certain “Anglo-American bias” to the literature on CSR (Knudsen, Rajak, et al., 2020), focusing on private companies from the English-speaking world. But the ownership of the MNC, i.e. whether the company is private or state owned, and the MNC’s geo-political 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 state-owned companies’ CSR and the gender policies of the states that own them.

A working hypothesis for this study was that Equinor’s CSR in Tanzania would reflect Norway’s self-proclaimed concern with gender equality. This is only partly the case. 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 Tanzania, Equinor’s social investments have almost exclusively benefited men. A comparison with Equinor’s social investments in Brazil demonstrate the importance of host country regulations and the qualifications and profile of local partners (consultancy firms and NGOs).

Methods

This study is part of a larger multiyear research project entitled ‘Energethics: Norwegian energy companies abroad: Expanding the anthropological understanding of corporate social responsibility’ (Knudsen, Müftüoğlu, & Hugøy, 2020; Knudsen, Rajak, et al., 2020; Müftüoğlu et al., 2018; Strønen, 2020). Data collection took place in Tanzania and Norway in the period January 2016 to December 2019 and focused on labour rights (Lange, 2020) and gender equality in social investments (this article).² In 2018, the company changed its name from Statoil to Equinor. For simplicity, we will refer to the company as Equinor throughout this article.

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 organisations at national and local level. We also examined the company’s

² 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 thesis, 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.

web pages and relevant Tanzanian and Norwegian policy documents. We focus on projects that were set up specifically as social investments by Equinor and that were initiated before December 2018.³

The article 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. This is then followed by 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 article analyses Equinor’s self-presentation as a corporation, demonstrates the way in which its most costly social investments in Tanzania was put in place as a result of legal requirements in the host country, and how perceptions of risk and the efforts to achieve a social license to operate have shaped the social investments at community level. The conclusion summarises 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 are markedly different from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by explicitly giving business a role to play (Hayk, 2019; UN, 2020). In the early 2000s, many corporations started linking their CSR to sustainability (Dashwood, 2012; Dolan & Rajak, 2016), and several scholars have argued that MNCs, particularly those that operate in the Global South, have co-opted the discourse of sustainable development (Gilberthorpe & Banks, 2012; Orock, 2013: 46; Spencer, 2018). One reason why MNCs may be attracted to link up to the SDGs are that the goals, in the words of Rochelle Spences, “do not challenge the structural causes of poverty, the patterns of wealth distribution and structural inequality” (Spencer, 2018: 79).

Companies in the food, drinks, and apparel sector, like Coca Cola and Nike, have had as a central part of their CSR a claim to empower 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, in 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 depoliticised by mainstream institutions (Calkin, 2015a: 304; de Jong & Kimm, 2017). While some feminists have argued that the co-optation of feminist aims have 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 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 (Roberts, 2015).

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 criticised for being merely symbolic, “legitimizing the business case for development”

³ Based on these criteria, we exclude a project on safety training for fishermen that was a requirement linked to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), projects that the company has sponsored as part of their former consortium with Shell, and Equinor’s sponsorship of the 2015 Annual Meeting of one of the umbrella organisations for CSOs in Mtwara.

(Roberts & 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). Berliner et al. have introduced the term “blue-washing” to describe this effect of membership in UNGC (Berliner & Prakash, 2015: 115). In an effort to link UNGC 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 up 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 & Rajak, 2011; Idemudia, 2014; Spencer, 2018). In the case of the extractive industries, this is linked to advice from the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s, which recommended that poor countries 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 put in place laws that regulate CSR and make it mandatory (Hayk, 2019; Jayaraman et al., 2018; Pandey & Mukherjee, 2019; Wanvik, 2014). In Brazil, special requirements for the petroleum sector were introduced in 2011, which mandate oil and gas companies by law to implement community projects. The process is organized by a sub-division 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 de Silva, and is still staffed by people who are concerned about civic and political rights (Strønen, 2020). 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 is in charge of Equinor’s social investment in Brazil is inspired by the “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 the 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 targeted women 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 & Burnham, 2016: 153), Equinor is very concerned with compliance. One reason is that corporations within the extractive sector have enormous up-front capital costs and therefore are very concerned with risk. MNCs face risk from national governments, which may withdraw concessions in case of non-compliance, or may change regulatory frameworks, including nationalization of the resources (Lange & Kinyondo, 2016; Sørreime & Tronvoll, 2020; Strønen, 2020; Wilson, 2015). MNCs also face risk from local communities in the form of social unrest (Dashwood, 2012; Davis & Franks, 2014: 32; Shapiro et al., 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 makes a twist to this, 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 analysing first, the role played by Equinor’s majority owner, the Norwegian state, second, the way in which Equinor presents its CSR at the corporate level, and third, the social investments that the company has carried out at national and local level 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 30 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% of the shares. Norway has a strong tradition for state feminism, and there is great consensus for gender equality. Skjelsbæk and Tryggestad 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” (Skjelsbæk & Tryggestad, 2020: 184). 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 (MFA, 2016), he argued that Norway could become a “superpower” within the fields of pro-gender foreign policies (Skjelsbæk & Tryggestad, 2020: 183).

While Norway flags gender equality in its aid programmes, the Norwegian government has decided to have a “hands off” policy when it comes to state owned MNCs like Equinor. Norway requires state owned companies to sign up to UN Global Compact (UNGC), apply the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards, adhere to the OECD responsible business conduct recommendations, and to “take up ILO’s core conventions in their business” (Knudsen, Müftüoğlu, & Hugøy, 2020: 61). Apart from this there is little interference in state owned companies.

Equinor’s self-presentation

The image of a young, smiling blond woman at 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 (Equinor, 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 in most companies’ boards, and the fact that “women remain under-represented at the most senior corporate level” (Gutiérrez-Fernández & Fernández-Torres, 2020). A number of financial instruments have been put in place to facilitate Gender Lens Investing (GLI) (Roberts, 2016). 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, says that in that year, 30% of the permanent employees were women, and that Equinor submitted “employees’ gender profile for inclusion in the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index⁴” (Equinor, 2020a: 55). The report also presents a graph which shows that more than one third of

⁴ “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/>.

leadership positions are 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 entitled "Equinor. This is what changed us" (Equinor, 2018b). One of the very first sequences of the film shows Norwegian women who in the 1970s march under a banner which says "Unity in the fight for women's emancipation" (*Enhet i kampen for kvinnenes frigjøring*). In her analysis of this commercial, Hesselberg 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 (Hesselberg, 2019: 36, 65). The reference to gender equality as national branding for Nordic countries is not uncommon (Jeziarska & Towns, 2018; Nickelsen, 2019). It should be noted that the film also shows a gay couple with a baby, and the wedding between a woman of colour 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 large discoveries of natural gas in Tanzania from 2012 onwards spurred a heated debate on 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 emphasises skills development of Tanzanians in the sector (URT, 2013: 14–15). The Petroleum Act of 2015 makes it mandatory for all companies within the sector to draft detailed plans for local content (URT, 2015b) and there are strict restrictions on the number of foreign employees that a company operating in Tanzania is allowed to hire (Kinyondo & Villanger, 2017; Lange & Kinyondo, 2016: 1102; URT, 2015b). In direct response to the local content requirements, Equinor initiated a programme to support higher education within the fields of geosciences and petroleum engineering, through a collaboration between universities in Tanzania, Angola and Norway (Statoil, 2017b).⁵ In the period 2013 to 2017, Equinor spent USD 2.3 millions on the ANTHEI programme.

In the batch of petroleum geoscience students who graduated in December 2016, there were eight men and only one woman. However, the company brochures that showcase the project show more smiling female graduates than male, and there is no gender disaggregated data on the company's web pages or in the sustainability reports, just a reference to the number of students. While it is harder to recruit Tanzanian female students to engineering compared to men, the picture representations give a skewed impression of how women benefit from the program, and demonstrates that Equinor, as many other corporations and organisations, seek to showcase women as the beneficiaries of their social investments.⁶

Tanzania has an Environmental Management Act (2004) which 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 that focused specifically on CSR.

⁵ The Angola Norway Tanzania Higher Education Initiative (ANTHEI). A substantial part of the budget goes directly to Norwegian universities to pay for the salaries and travel expenses of the Norwegian professors.

⁶ The gender balance is better in the master program in petroleum financing, where approximately 30% of the students are women. Observations and interviews with lecturers, December 2018 (Lange).

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 50-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 consistently 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 the words 'gender' or 'women' are not mentioned (Equinor, 2018a: 24).

Since gender is absent from the company's main policy document at global level, the incorporation of gender perspectives to a large degree depends 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 Table 1. In the coming sections, we will present the social investment projects that the company carried out in Tanzania in the period 2014–2018 (Table 2).

The gigantic natural gas reserves in Tanzania are located off the coast in the southern part of the country, outside the regions Mtwara and Lindi. These regions fare very poorly in terms of socio-economic 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 & Childs, 2018; Kamat et al., 2019). In 2013, the government decided that onshore gas that was produced by a Chinese company in Mtwara should be piped to the industrial areas around Dar es Salaam, rather than being processed locally. Violence erupted in Mtwara, resulting in at least six deaths (Ahearne & 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 they could potentially be the next target. The great majority of the people who participated in the riots were young men.

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. The disease is caused by a species of filarial worms which are

Table 1
Overview of stakeholders and relevant policy documents.

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

Table 2
Overview of Equinor's social investments in Tanzania.

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%)
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 (ca. 90%)

transmitted by mosquitoes, and it can lead to the abnormal enlargement of body parts such as the scrotal area (hydrocele) and cause immense pain, disfigurement and social stigma (WHO, 2020). In Tanzania, lymphatic filariasis is associated with fishermen.

One can speculate whether Equinor's motivation to sponsor men's health was linked to the fact that the great majority who participated in the 2013 protests against the planned gas pipeline were men (Kamat et al., 2019; Must & Rustad, 2019). 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). When we aired this possibility for Equinor Tanzania, however, the staff argued strongly against this being the case. They emphasised that their motivation for this project was that there were many projects addressing malaria and HIV in the region, but none on lymphatic filariasis, and that Equinor wanted "to do something different", "something that could change peoples' lives" and where "the outcome would be very visible". As one interviewee put it: "Those who receive the surgery will never forget Statoi!"

The top management of Equinor Tanzania expressed some ambivalence about carrying out this form of philanthropic social investments. In interviews, they said that local expectations and requests for community support were extremely high, and 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 other Norwegian state owned companies operating abroad (Knudsen, Müftüoğlu, & Hugøy, 2020), 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 gone through the surgeries. At its web page, Equinor uses the gender-neutral term "persons" when informing about this number and there is no information to show that this is an illness that in practice 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 programme "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" that is created by the surgeries.⁷

In 2014, when the NTD project was conceived, there was no government policies focusing specifically on 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 will act as "Soft Law". The policy says that the Ministry and local authorities "have the responsibility to guide and supervise the implementation of the CSRE programs" (URT, 2015a). The guidelines thus mandates that all CSRE projects must be planned together with local authorities. Referring to the guidelines, a senior female staff member of 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 should start supporting fistula operations. This indicates that a change in policy, making the role of local government in the planning of CSR projects mandatory, contributed to a process where Equinor expanded its support to the health sector to also include health services for women. In the following section we turn to Equinor's support to business training for youth.

Creating (male) heroes for the future through business training

Neo-liberalisation and structural adjustment reduced job opportunities in the public sector in many poor countries, 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, and the great majority of them 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 benefited almost exclusively men.

The business competition is 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 has 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 the finalists were male. Lack of gender balance in the competition appears to be the result of lack of gender sensitivity both among the involved Equinor staff, and in the consultancy firm that Equinor hired to organize the competition, in collaboration with Stella Maris University (first year), and the Regional Library (second year). The consultancy firm was given the responsibility for advertising the competition, to perform the first round of selection, and to train the shortlisted candidates. From more than 400 applications, the consultancy firm selected 40 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 48 people who were present, only four appears to be female. A list of the 40 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

⁷ Interview, 14.10.2016 (Lange).

involve women,⁸ Equinor repeated the mistakes that some of the MNCs in the mining sector of Tanzania have done (Selmier et al., 2015). However, rather than reflecting critically about what could have been done differently in order to involve more women, some of the Equinor staff to a large degree 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

Equinor staff argued that it was hard to involve women due to cultural factors. This is not an uncommon argument. When women struggle to succeed after having attended economic empowerment programs, for example due to poor markets, this is often blamed 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 setting as a criteria that at least half must be female.¹⁰ And Songas, a company processing onshore gas in Lindi region, has earmarked two out of three scholarships for girls (Mwakyambiki et al., 2020). These two examples show that it was not characteristics with the local communities that hindered HoT to include women, but poor design. The examples also demonstrate the importance of working with the right partners.

The managers of Equinor Tanzania are uncomfortable with the fact that no women have been among the 15 finalists during the two rounds of competitions. They explained to us that for the next round, they will introduce a system of female "role models", to inspire more women to participate. The "role model" thinking was introduced at the award ceremony in 2016, where two young women who had contested, but who were not among the top ten finalists, were presented with "certificates" by Norway's female ambassador to Tanzania. The ambassador held a speech where she encouraged them to carry out their business ideas and presented them with token awards. The event was covered by local television channels and other news media. Improving image is one postulate for corporations engaging in CSR and branding (Aluchna, 2017: 16). Since journalists were covering the award ceremony, and a promotional video was produced,¹¹ the special certificates to women probably served not only to present women as role models, but also to improve the gender balance at stage, and thus the company's visual imaginary.

Much of the criticism that feminist scholars have directed towards the 'economic empowerment' programs of MNCs like Coca Cola and Nike are relevant for Equinor's business training as well (Calkin, 2015b; McCarthy, 2017; Tornhill, 2016). Equinor presents entrepreneurship 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 who had come to Mtwara to study.¹² Not only did this project benefit almost exclusively men then, it to a large degree benefited men from the more privileged parts of the country. There is great frustration in Mtwara and Lindi that the few job opportunities in the region are seized by 'outsiders', often Christians from the Northern parts of the country. As Dolan and Rajak have pointed out, the "promise of inclusion for some almost invariably comes at the cost of exclusion, precarity or disempowerment of others" (Dolan & Rajak, 2016: 4).

The male dominated business training in Tanzania stands in great contrast to the way that social investments are talked about at the headquarter level of Equinor in Norway, where we were told that the company has "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 "fact", 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 this project. The project in Brazil won Equinor's internal award for best Safety and Sustainability project globally in 2016 (Statoil, 2017a; Strønen, 2020: 41). 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 which is staffed by women who genuinely care about the women whom they are hired to help (Strønen, 2020).

Conclusion

This article has unpacked the gendered aspects of Equinor's CSR as it is presented at corporate level and enacted through the company's social investments in Tanzania. Feminist research has criticised 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 produce 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 claim to empower women and girls in poor parts of the world (Calkin, 2017; Moeller, 2014; Roberts, 2015; Tornhill, 2016), the main 'stakeholders' for companies operating in the extractive sector – 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 make.

One of the main interests of this article 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 a 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

⁸ The owner and head of the "social enterprise firm" DARECHE hails from, and grew up in, Dar es Salaam <http://www.africanleadershipacademy.org/staffulty/young-leaders/julius-shirima-tanzania/>.

⁹ Interview in Dar es Salaam, 24.11.2017 (Lange and Wyndham).

¹⁰ Interview in Lindi with representative for Lindi Region Association for NGOs (LANGO) 6.12.2019 (Lange). Interview in Dar es Salaam with representative for Oxfam Tanzania, 11.12.2019 (Lange).

¹¹ The award ceremony can be watched approximately 43 min into the 47 min long promotional video for HoT in Tanzania: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=SWTmTBNTEfY&feature=emb_logo.

¹² Interview in Mtwara with Headmaster and lecturer at Stella Maris, 28.11.2019.

¹³ Interview 13.09.2017 (Lange and Wyndham).

¹⁴ <https://www.equinor.com/en/how-and-why/sustainability/recognition-and-awards.html>.

country in which the company is located" (García-Sánchez et al., 2020: 370). Based on this, our hypothesis was that Equinor, which is majority owned by a state that has gender equality as one of its main 'trade-marks', would be concerned with gender equality in its social investments. However, as we have argued elsewhere, state ownership plays a limited role, since the Norwegian state does not formulate its own regulations for state owned companies operating abroad, but require companies to comply with international frameworks (Knudsen, Rajak, et al., 2020). Gender equality is not central in the global CSR initiatives that the company has signed up 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. 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. Brazil requires petroleum companies by law 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 in contrast, there is no government 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 were 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 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. In Brazil, progressive intellectuals, civil society organisations, and social movements constitute a historical counterforce to corporate and elite power (Strønen, 2020: 43). The consultancy firm which implements Equinor's award winning project is inspired by the "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 which 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 organisations at the national level in Tanzania are sceptical to collaboration with petroleum companies because they fear the reputational risk (Wyndham & Lange, 2019). A national law on CSR, and a national regulative body, like the one in Brazil, could perhaps have contributed to 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 presents gender disaggregated data as recommended by international CSR frameworks, such as the gender balance among staff and in leadership, but the reports do not emphasise gender equality in its social investments. And 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, like some other MNCs have done (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

country that has gender equality as one of its trademarks - to a certain degree manages to hide the somewhat embarrassing fact the company's main beneficiaries in Tanzania are male.

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Declaration of competing interest

There is no conflict of interest. The authors have not received any financial support from the company under study and have no personal ties to any of its staff.

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