

## OVERVIEW: Women and Community Engagement in Infrastructure Operations

Because infrastructure operations can cause major changes—both positive and negative—to surrounding communities, both company and community are best served by a constructive working relationship. This *social license to operate*—“a community’s perceptions of the acceptability of a company and its local operations”<sup>3</sup>—is essential to smooth operations.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the community near an operation—depending on the type of infrastructure project—is made up of potential users or consumers of the service offered. Having the community’s trust as well as understanding its needs will ensure the highest chances of gaining not just the community’s acceptance of the project, but also its business.

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When a company fails to obtain social license, community opposition can ensue. This could lead to protests and other interruptions that may increase project timelines and costs and affect company reputation and stock price. Conversely, the consultation and collaboration required to obtain and maintain social license can create opportunities for companies and communities to work together, which can boost the potential for positive benefits for both groups and increase community usage of the infrastructure (such as transport systems or water and energy infrastructure). Effective community engagement and development programs are key. Increasingly, companies are investing considerable resources into in-depth community assessments as well as community development strategies and activities.

Social license implies the acceptance of the community as a whole. However, men and women often have different experiences with and perceptions of infrastructure projects, informed by their different daily lives, needs, and risks. Often, the benefits and risks from these projects are unequally distributed between men and women. Women, due to their often higher social and economic vulnerability, frequently suffer greater negative environmental, economic, and social impacts from infrastructure development than men, with reduced access to benefits, consultations, and compensation.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Boutilier and Ian Thomson, “Modelling and Measuring the Social License to Operate: Fruits of a Dialogue between Theory and Practice,” *Social License*, 2011. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Rory Pike, *Social License to Operate: The Relevance of Social License to Operate for Mining Companies*, New York: Schroders, 2012.

Women play important roles in every community. Their buy-in and support is critical to sustained social license to operate. Working constructively with women throughout the community engagement process is important to ensure that community benefits are equitably distributed, and that the infrastructure's design and operation is informed by a diverse group of community members to facilitate its usability and accessibility. It also helps catalyze broader community benefits and ultimately yields positive impacts on company bottom lines.

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Social license can be fleeting. Risks, perceptions, and trust must be managed and maintained over time. Continued communication and engagement with women and men in surrounding communities is key, and companies should pay attention to potential changes in attitudes and perceptions toward a project over time.

This Tool Suite identifies the ways in which men and women can be impacted differently by infrastructure projects. It shows how efforts to understand and address the needs and interests of both men and women can help stretch community investment dollars further for greater impact while enabling longer lasting and more robust social license, as well as helping companies better understand how to adequately meet the needs of community members as users.

Ensuring that both men and women are equitably involved in community consultations, negotiations, and benefit sharing is of such critical importance that it is a key tenet of IFC's Environmental and Social Performance Standards. These standards define IFC clients' responsibilities for managing environmental and social risks and help ensure that all IFC-supported projects assess and minimize risk to communities and develop effective social license. The Equator Principles, designed around the IFC Performance Standards and used by many global financial institutions, apply these principles to project finance. The importance of gender-equitable community engagement strategies and grievance mechanisms is highlighted specifically in Performance Standard 1, as well as throughout all of IFC's Performance Standards and the Equator Principles.

## Gender Dimensions of Infrastructure Project Impacts

In many communities, men and women have distinct roles and responsibilities, which can mean that men and women may be affected differently by infrastructure projects. Potential impacts can differ by sector, as well as by regional, country, and local dynamics. Additionally, different phases of a project can come with their own risks and impacts. For example, construction, operation, and closure have their own unique risks, while in energy projects generation, transmission, and distribution can have different impacts. Below are examples of local impacts that can be generated by infrastructure projects:

- Changes in the local economy:** Infrastructure projects can lead to the creation of new formal and informal jobs in a community, which may mean an economic shift from a subsistence to cash-based economy (especially in rural areas) and/or an influx of job seekers, who, due to the nature of the work, may be primarily male. Along with the potential land use changes brought about by an infrastructure project, this economic shift can reduce the prevalence and importance of subsistence roles and increase the importance of cash incomes. In communities in which women perform the majority of subsistence labor and men may be more likely to be hired for cash-generating work, this can prolong women's economic dependence on men. This change to a cash economy has been known to change spending patterns among male earners; for example, by increasing the portion of household income spent on alcohol and sex workers.
- Changes in the economy of the “sending communities”** (external or distant communities that are the source of male workers on the project): Especially in rural areas, when men leave to pursue employment elsewhere, women may suffer economic hardship because of issues such as legal barriers to land ownership.
- Unequal employment opportunities:** Due to discrimination, systemic lack of access to education and training, or cultural barriers that inhibit their engagement, women often do not have the same required training and employment opportunities in infrastructure projects that men find. In addition, workplaces may not accommodate the needs of women, who often bear the primary responsibility for raising children. For example, the company might not offer flexible schedules, family leave policies, or childcare support.
- Social and health problems, including domestic and gender-based violence:** The influx of a predominantly male workforce and increased access to cash income in project-affected communities can lead to higher rates of alcohol abuse, gender-based violence, prostitution, teen pregnancy (and the drop out of girls from school), and sexually transmitted infections. In cases where women are able to obtain cash employment from infrastructure projects, they may be subject to increased gender-based violence at home because of shifts in gender roles and domestic power structures, or in the workplace if male employees are not sensitized to working with female colleagues.<sup>5</sup>

- **Environmental degradation:** In many rural communities, women often have the primary responsibility for collecting water and food for the family. Negative environmental impacts from infrastructure projects could decrease the availability of clean water, wood, fuel, forest products, and agricultural land, which means women must walk longer distances to access these resources, deepening their time poverty<sup>6</sup> and increasing the risk of gender-based violence.

The list above outlines potential risks and vulnerabilities from infrastructure operations faced by women. In addition, women are often left out of key mechanisms for mitigating risks and creating benefits. This exclusion can occur in several ways:

- **Omission or limited access to consultation processes:** Women are often left out of formal community consultations, which can diminish their ability to actively participate in discussion and debate. This can be due to cultural factors (such as men assuming leadership roles or women not being comfortable or permitted to speak up in front of men), scheduling constraints (community meetings and consultations occurring when women are occupied with domestic responsibilities), or other factors. In addition, consultations are often held with heads of households or property owners, and women tend to be underrepresented in these groups. Women may lack access to information shared in such consultations, so they may not have opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns.
- **Unfair distribution of royalties and livelihood restoration opportunities:** Men or male heads of households might receive compensation on behalf of their families, but these funds might not reach the women family members, potentially perpetuating their economic dependence on men. Since women often are not the legal owners of land or property they occupy or use and typically have different economic roles than men, livelihood restoration and resettlement programs risk overlooking women's roles and needs, and therefore, often those of children. The result is that women and children could end up more vulnerable than they were before the project.

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<sup>5</sup> For more details on how to identify and mitigate this risk, see IFC's handbook on managing influx: [Projects and People: A Handbook for Addressing Project-Induced In-Migration](#), Washington, DC: IFC, September 2009, and the World Bank's "[Uganda - Transport Sector Development Project: additional financing - lessons learned and agenda for action.](#)" November 11, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Defined as working long hours with no other options while remaining cash poor. For more, see the glossary of terms.

When women are left out of a company's community engagement activities, and their interests, needs, and risks are not taken into account during project planning and development, the project risks perpetuating or even increasing negative health and safety risks such as:

- **Time poverty, work, and education:** Where women have to delay water collection or use of sanitation facilities or cannot use transport systems because of safety or other concerns, this can impede their daily activities, such as household duties or school attendance, and can be physically and psychologically damaging.
- **Waterborne diseases and gender-based violence:** Inadequate water and sanitation can lead to waterborne diseases that affect health and productivity, limiting women's availability to take part in productive and/or income-generating activities. Needing to go outside to collect water or use sanitation facilities also leaves women disproportionately at risk of violence.
- **Safety and gender-based violence:** Urban centers can be hubs of opportunity but can also pose significant risk of violence to women as municipal service users. Rapid urbanization has been linked to increased violence against women service users in transport, public markets, parks, and bathrooms.

## The Business Case for Gender-Equitable Community Consultations

Including women in community assessments, consultations, benefit sharing, and activities can help build social license, increase usage of infrastructure, and ensure that community investments are constructive and sustainable. Moreover, engaging with women and vulnerable groups as part of community consultations is a requirement of obtaining financing from various investors, including IFC.<sup>7</sup>

## Strengthening Community Support for Operations

As noted above, the experiences of men and women as they relate to infrastructure projects are often not the same. As a result, male and female community members may not offer the same level of support for or opposition to a project.

Women who are satisfied with a company's development impact have been known to play a constructive role in reducing conflicts. Conversely, women who are dissatisfied with the consultation process or proposed development impact of infrastructure projects have been known to oppose project development and lead resistance movements. Local women's NGOs in recent years have forged regional and international alliances to resist infrastructure and natural resources projects and are becoming a more confident and organized voice that should not be disregarded.

<sup>7</sup> For more, see IFC Performance Standard 1: Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts.


It is also important to note that some communities are home to matriarchal or matrilineal societies, meaning that companies with projects in such locations must pay special attention to the unique roles of women. In local communities, women often have a powerful voice in decision making. Failure to acknowledge this voice or to include women in formal settings can prove costly for companies.

### Women’s Participation in Consultations Enhances Efficiency


Ensuring women’s full participation can make the consultation process more efficient. A gender impact assessment conducted for a road project in Peru found that women’s participation in consultations increased project efficiency, transparency, and quality.<sup>8</sup> The company gave women the opportunity to express their transport needs in participatory workshops. Largely due to these consultations with women, 3,465 kilometers of non-motorized tracks were refurbished, connecting previously isolated communities to markets and services and increasing the economic rate of return of the project. The gender impact assessment also found that 77% of women traveled more frequently and 65% felt they traveled more safely.

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Even in communities where men have more visible decision-making power or infrastructure jobs and may be more visibly engaged with the operators, women often play an important behind-the-scenes role in making or moderating community decisions about project approval, strikes, or other collective action. In some communities, men may be the “face” of the negotiations with a company but may consult with their wives before coming to a decision—or they may consult with their wives afterwards and end up having to come back to the company with new feedback, causing delays that could have been prevented if women had been included in consultations from the beginning.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, [The Challenges of Enhancing Women’s Mobility: Examples from Road Rehabilitation Projects in Timor Leste and Kiribati](#), 2015

## Women's Participation in Consultations Increases User Engagement and Consumer Demand

As mentioned above, women and men have different day-to-day experiences and needs, and this has an impact on the way they can engage with and use infrastructure and services. Ensuring that women attend and participate in consultations and studies that inform the design of the infrastructure itself, and not just community programs and community engagement, will allow the company to develop a product or service that has the highest potential user uptake. In fact, ensuring that an infrastructure project best meets the needs of its wide variety of potential users is nothing new—it is really just human-centered design.

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Additionally, women and men often have different preferences or obstacles with regards to paying for products or services. Taking into account the financial capacity and needs of women can help companies create affordable and practical tariff structures for users (such as allowing users to make smaller and more frequent payments in locations closer to home, and/or use payment methods such as mobile money or smartphone apps).

Infrastructure operations may have varying levels of usage from community members immediately surrounding the project. While the project's impact may extend far beyond the immediate area, not making a point to understand and target the most local of potential users leaves potential profit untapped and key relationships undeveloped.

## Improving Sustainability through Inclusive Community Engagement

Research shows that consulting with women and men about community needs and investment priorities can lead to better outcomes. For instance, a study by Elizabeth King and Andrew Mason found that men and women often have different priorities for community investment: when women are consulted about their community's needs, they most often request vital programs or infrastructure related to health, education, and safety, whereas men are more inclined to ask for large infrastructure projects that may not meet the immediate and basic needs of the population.

Including both perspectives can help ensure both upfront community satisfaction and investments that support longer-term development as well as attract both male and female customers and users. Where communities are invested in helping companies meet sustainable development objectives, gender-equitable consultations can help ensure that community investment budgets support these goals.

The global evidence also shows that investing in women contributes to better family and community outcomes, in addition to the fact that the inclusion of diverse perspectives expands the range of viable options for community development and user engagement. “Societies with large, persistent gender inequalities pay the price of more poverty, more malnutrition, more illness, and more deprivations of other kinds,” King and Mason note.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, studies also show that in developing countries, women invest a significantly higher percentage of their income into their families relative to men. When societies have more gender equality, poverty is reduced and economies grow.<sup>10</sup> Companies that want to do measurable good in affected communities—which can itself help foster social license—need to ensure that both men and women benefit from community initiatives. Working with both men and women can help support this goal. For companies interested in contributing to sustainable and inclusive development in addition to building social license, an inclusive community engagement strategy is key.

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## Responding to Investor Concerns

Shareholders and investors are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of a positive relationship between infrastructure companies and affected communities, including the significance of community women as key actors. Given the range of issues that some companies have faced involving women’s rights—including serious cases of widespread violence against women—shareholders are beginning to pay more attention to the extent of companies’ gender-related due diligence.

Companies that can demonstrate a constructive and collaborative relationship with men and women in affected communities can help mitigate risks of operational shutdowns linked to community relations and strengthen overall investor confidence.

Increasingly, minimizing gender impacts and improving gender equality are considered smart business. More and more investors and financial institutions, including IFC, have incorporated gender considerations in their decisions about projects that they finance. Along with the growing recognition of the importance of gender in combatting poverty and achieving sustainable development, gender equality requirements have gained momentum,

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth M. King and Andrew D. Mason, [Engendering Development Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice](#), Washington and New York: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2001, 73.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, [“Good Practice Note: Integrating Gender into Country Assistance Strategies.”](#) June 2012.



and even more investors will likely implement new gender requirements or strengthen existing gender requirements as conditions for future project finance.

### Compliance with International Human Rights Frameworks as Best Practice

Human rights abuses related to infrastructure company operations or resistance to project development not only eat away at company-community trust and social license, but also can quickly tarnish a company's reputation. Some highly publicized cases in recent years have been related directly to the interactions between the company or its contractors and women from affected communities, while others have included the increasing numbers of murders of human rights defenders leading opposition to infrastructure projects,<sup>11</sup> such as the tragic killing of Berta Cáceres, an indigenous Honduran activist who successfully led to the halting of the Agua Zarca Dam project that had failed to consult the local indigenous Lenca people.<sup>12</sup> Growing recognition of the private sector's responsibility to uphold the human rights of host communities has led many companies to demonstrate their commitment by signing on to international human rights frameworks, creating a growing expectation that companies will also carry out related processes such as human rights impact assessments and grievance mechanisms.

### Conclusion

The evidence is clear that given women's and men's different societal roles and daily lives, the economic, environmental, and social changes that accompany infrastructure projects can impact men and women differently. Infrastructure projects have the potential to exacerbate gender inequalities and negatively impact women. They also can enable equitable opportunities for men and women to plan, participate in, and benefit from potential growth opportunities. To pursue gender equality is not to favor women; rather, it is an attempt to achieve equity and equal opportunity for all members of a community. Ignoring differences in gender roles—and therefore the ways in which men and women are impacted by and participate in infrastructure operations and decision-making—might actually worsen gender inequalities and development challenges within a community. It also represents a missed opportunity, preventing companies from engaging and attracting as many customers as possible.

Community engagement programs that acknowledge and incorporate the critical role played by women have increased potential to strengthen community development and enhance social license, bottom line, and investment attraction. Integrating gender into a company's community engagement policies and strategies is an important component to a gender-sensitive project—and is also good business.

<sup>11</sup> Global Witness, "[Defending Tomorrow: The climate crisis and threats against land and environmental defenders](#)," July 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Read more about Cáceres at the [Goldman Prize website](#).

## TOOL SUITE 3: Tools to Address Gender Equality in Community Engagement

What steps can your company take to ensure that you engage women and men in all aspects of the project cycle and community development initiatives, as well as ensure you are developing your project in a way that attracts the largest number of users?

Tool Suite 3 offers support as you consider the differing needs of community men and women as they relate to infrastructure project development, and as you seek to create equitable opportunities to access resources and opportunities related to projects and services. Many infrastructure companies likely already have access to guidance on overall community consultation and community development. As a result, this tool suite provides practical suggestions and examples of strategies to specifically address gender equality in community and user engagement. It also offers guidance on mechanisms to ensure accountability. This toolkit is meant to provide a comprehensive guide of options—companies should pick and choose tools, or portions of tools, to use depending on their current needs and capabilities. The tools can be used as rough guides, or can be followed verbatim, but should always be tailored to the specific context of the project and stage of operation.

TOOL	TARGET UNIT	GOAL
↓ <b>TOOL 3.1:</b> Road Map for Using Tools in Tool Suite 3	All Readers	Introduces how all the tools in this Tool Suite work together
↓ <b>ASSESS AND PREPARE:</b> Tools 3.2–3.6 offer guidance on conducting initial company self-assessments, integrating gender concerns into baseline and social impact assessments, and hiring an independent gender expert. These actions will help you determine the extent of your engagement with women and the impacts of projects on women. The tools also provide guidance on gathering the gender-disaggregated socioeconomic data that will serve as critical inputs to the other community engagement tools featured in this tool suite, as well as approaches to ensure that social impact assessments measure the disproportionate impacts the project may have on women.		
↓ <b>TOOL 3.2:</b> Rapid Gender and Community Engagement Company Self-Assessment	Community Engagement	Understand the extent to which the company-community engagement activities currently assess and address gender dynamics
↓ <b>TOOL 3.3:</b> Rapid Gender and User Engagement Company Self-Assessment	Community Engagement, Consumer/User Engagement	Understand the extent to which the company user engagement activities currently assess and address gender dynamics

↓ <b>TOOL 3.4:</b> Terms of Reference for Independent Gender Expert	Community Engagement, Human Resources	Ensure that community engagement teams have required gender expertise
↓ <b>TOOL 3.5:</b> Integrate Gender Concerns into Baseline Community Assessments	Community Engagement and/or Independent Gender Expert	Develop a gender-sensitive understanding of community dynamics
↓ <b>TOOL 3.6:</b> Integrate Gender Concerns into Social Impact Assessments	Community Engagement and/or Independent Gender Expert	Understand the gender dimensions of project impacts on impacted communities

↓ **ADDRESS:** Tools 3.7–3.14 are designed to help increase gender equality and women’s engagement in consultations, decision-making, community and user engagement, and emergency planning and response. They also provide direction on ways to minimize negative impacts by integrating a gender dimension into company-community engagement activities and guidance on activities that will empower and benefit women and bring the potential for strong returns on investment.

↓ <b>TOOL 3.7:</b> Facilitate Gender-Equitable Participation in Consultations on Infrastructure Operations	Community Engagement	Ensure women’s equal participation in consultations for design of infrastructure projects and community initiatives
↓ <b>TOOL 3.8:</b> Guide for Integrating Women into COVID-19 Interventions and Other Emergency Planning and Response	Community Engagement and/or Independent Gender Expert	Ensure the integration of women into COVID-19 interventions to ensure that planning and response are adapted to their specific needs and that their contributions are valued and taken into account. Can also be applied to other emergency situations.
↓ <b>TOOL 3.9:</b> Guidance Note on Gender-Responsive Livelihoods Restoration	Community Engagement	Ensure women benefit from livelihoods restoration programs
↓ <b>TOOL 3.10:</b> Ensure Gender Sensitivity in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation and Grievance Mechanisms	Community Engagement and/or Independent Gender Expert	Ensure women’s participation in participatory monitoring and evaluation and in grievance mechanisms for project-affected communities

<p>↓ <b>TOOL 3.11:</b> Design a Gender-Sensitive Resettlement Process</p>	<p>Community Engagement, Resettlement Specialist, and/or Independent Gender Expert</p>	<p>Ensure the resettlement process facilitates equal opportunities and minimizes disproportionate harm to women</p>
<p>↓ <b>TOOL 3.12:</b> Create Community Development Initiatives that Benefit Both Men and Women</p>	<p>Community Engagement in partnership with Independent Gender Expert</p>	<p>Ensure community initiatives are designed to reflect priorities of men and women in the community</p>
<p>↓ <b>TOOL 3.13:</b> Create Local Economic Development and Empowerment Opportunities for Women</p>	<p>Community Engagement in partnership with Independent Gender Expert</p>	<p>Develop activities that promote women’s economic empowerment</p>
<p>↓ <b>TOOL 3.14:</b> Guidance Note for Building a Women’s Entrepreneurship Community</p>	<p>Community Engagement, Procurement</p>	<p>Support companies in creating a vibrant women’s entrepreneur ecosystem</p>

↓ **MONITOR AND SUSTAIN:** Tools 3.15–3.16 offer guidance on setting benchmarks, measuring impact, and improving practice. This includes ways to ensure that women participate in transparency and accountability mechanisms, which can address potential concerns and help avoid problems altogether.

<p>↓ <b>TOOL 3.15:</b> Sample Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluating the Gender Mainstreaming of Infrastructure Companies’ Community Engagement and Community Initiatives</p>	<p>Community Engagement in partnership with Independent Gender Expert</p>	<p>Develop indicators to adequately measure and evaluate gender aspects of infrastructure projects and community initiatives</p>
<p>↓ <b>TOOL 3.16:</b> Community Scorecard Tool</p>	<p>Community Engagement</p>	<p>To gather community perspectives on, and empower community members to make changes to, gender issues. (Can be used to evaluate other issues, for employees, or to evaluate services, for instance, in the community.)</p>