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GENDER DIFFERENTIATION OR EQUALITY IN TRANSPORT PROJECTS: CASE STUDY ROAD SECTOR MODERNIZATION IN THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Abstract

Transport projects provide us with better, faster roads, save travel times, but also lead to occurrences of health and safety risks. Data shows that males are the group that are most affected by such risks. However, they become far less cooperative when confronted with this fact. At the same time, women are the group that is more likely to accept new methods or ideas concerning road projects. They are also more focused on road safety and concerned about associated community health and safety risks. Yet, women are far less involved in any kind of official interaction, and that is why their scope of interest is more likely to be neglected. The paper analyzes how transport projects affect differently women and men and presents recommendations to improve benefits for both genders.

Keywords: gender, equality, transport, roads, beneficiaries

POLNE RAZLIKE ILI JEDNAKOST U SAOBRAĆAJNIM PROJEKTIMA: STUDIJA SLUČAJA MODERNIZACIJA PUTNOG SEKTORA U FEDERACIJI BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE

Сажетак

Саобраћајни пројекти нам пружају боље путеве, којима ћемо се брже кретати, скраћују вријеме путовања, али исто тако доводе и до појаве здравствених и безбедносних ризика. Подаци показују да су мушкарци група која је највише под утицајем таквих ризика. Међутим, они постају далеко мање кооперативни када се суоче са овом чињеницом. У исто вријеме, жене су група која лакше прихвата нове методе или идеје које се тичу путних пројеката. Такође су више оријентисане на безбједност саобраћаја и показују већи ниво забринутости за повезане ризике по здравље и безбједност заједнице. Ипак, жене су далеко мање укључене у било какву званичну интеракцију и зато је вјероватно да ће њихов интерес бити занемарен. Рад анализира како транспортни пројекти различито утичу на жене и мушкарце и даје препоруке за побољшање користи за оба пола.

Кључне ријечи: пол, једнакост, саобраћај, путеви, корисници

1. INTRODUCTION

Social learning theory [1] defines gender as a self-perceived sense of maleness or femaleness that is learnt through socialization and education and is socially determined by society's expectations of the roles of men and women. Gender equality refers to equality under the law, equality of opportunity (rewards for work, equality of access to human capital, and other productive resources), and equality of voice (ability to influence and contribute to the development process) [2].

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) two laws prohibit any kind of gender-based discrimination, namely: the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination in B&H.

Despite this, the construction industry in B&H is the most male-dominated sector, same as throughout the world. Men dominate senior technical operational roles, while women tend to be in more junior support roles, safeguards, human resources, and marketing. Traditionally, construction activities fall into the categories of economy in which women have been prejudiced as lacking the skill, talent, and ability to make a successful career. The research [3] finds that women's careers are being stymied by rigid work practices, long hours and an expectation of total availability, lack of flexible parental leave (in practice), tolerance of sexism and accepted informal recruitment processes that favor men. Women at the top of the corporate ladder are conspicuous by their absence, hampered in their career journey by inflexible working environments, bias (unconscious or not), and perceptions of limited opportunities. This is not just a problem for women and their aspirations; it is a problem for the whole sector.

According to Construction News [4], half of all construction firms claim they have never had a female manager within their business - a shocking figure when gender diversity and equality is such a pressing issue. Furthermore, when asking the women who did work within the industry, 48% claimed they had experienced gender discrimination in the workplace, with the most common example of this (28%) being inappropriate comments or behavior from male colleagues. These are figures that prove that the industry still needs to enforce more regulations and ethics to change attitudes towards women in the industry and encourage equality. When it comes to on-site construction workers, statistics reveal that 99% of roles are filled by males. Another figure that highlights the lack of gender diversity within the industry. Despite the figures, 93% of construction workers believe having a female boss would not affect their jobs or would in fact have a positive effect by improving the working environment.

Since the launching of the United Nation's Decade for Women (1975-1985), the world has witnessed tremendous focus on gender equality and empowerment of women as means of increasing productivity and enhancing the socio-economic status of nations. The need for unbiased utilization of human resources has given research impetus to gender participation in various economic endeavors in both the developed and the developing countries. As part of the strategies particularly for the construction sector, the United Nations directed members' nations to [5]:

- Encourage enrolment of women in architectural, engineering and related fields;
- Assign professional policy-making and decision-making positions to qualified women graduates in the relevant fields;
- Provide women with construction, maintenance and management skills;
- Include women in related training and educational programs.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [6] emphasized the topic of gender and transport as a multifaceted one. Major differences exist in the basic mobility needs of women and men. These differences are grounded in the gender-based division of labor within the family and community. Transport can make a big difference in increasing women's productivity and promoting gender equality. Beside transport-related workers, most transport agencies, boards, and advisory committees at all levels are principally managed by males. In addition to its major contribution to economic growth, transport plays a crucial role in socially sustainable development by broadening access to health and education services, employment, improving the exchange of information, and promoting social cohesion. At the same time, various activities involved in construction, maintenance, rehabilitation, or improvement of transport infrastructure provide major opportunities for involvement and professional advance of female; thus, it is considered as a kind of tool for reaching equality.

The construction industry, and roads particularly for the past two decades, is the largest employer of labor in the Western Balkans region. Unfortunately, there has been no serious research into women participation in construction. The objective of the paper is not to report findings on the utilization of female resource in the construction industry and the road sector. To the contrary, the authors wish to highlight, based on the experience gained in B&H within the past few years, certain

activities and processes that can benefit from the participation of women in their realization - from project preparation, through communication with stakeholders, to physical realization itself and supervision over the execution of the works.

The intention is to offer decision makers at senior levels (both in public and private sectors) an opportunity to broaden their horizon towards adopting innovative strategies to human resource management in order to reverse the current trend of underutilization of female talent in the construction profession, and one of its major contributors - the road sector.

2. FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA CASE STUDY

B&H's transport infrastructure is rated as the poorest among Southeast Europe (SEE) and European Union-Central Eastern Europe (EU-CEE) countries by the World Economic Forum (WEF) [7]. In 2015-16, B&H scored 2.2 out of 7 on the WEF's Global Competitiveness Indicator (GCI) for quality of infrastructure, lower than the SEE average of 2.9 and the EU-CEE average of 4.5. The Logistics Performance Index (LPI) similarly rates B&H as having below SEE average infrastructure (2.55 out of 5 compared with a regional average of 2.65) and standards significantly below those of the EU-CEE. Transport infrastructure improvements are necessary for the country to take advantage of its geographical position next to the world's largest market and increase exports and export-related employment.

To answer this task, at least within its jurisdiction, the Public Company Roads of Federation of B&H (PC Roads FB&H) has initiated an overarching program of modernizing the main roads within the territory of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) to ensure appropriate road infrastructure by 2022. For this purpose, the Government of FB&H has ensured credit funds from International Financing Institutions (IFIs).

FB&H Road Sector Modernization Project (hereinafter referred to as the Project) comprises several small and mid-sized investment schemes including:

- Reconstruction of roads (construction of roads and lanes for low-speed vehicles, reconstruction/improvement of tunnels, bridges and carriageways),
- Interventions on improving road safety (reconstruction of crossroads and black spots),
- Institutional reforms, and
- Project implementation support (construction supervision and capacity building of the PC Roads FB&H).

The Project is being implemented mainly in poor peri-urban and rural communities with low population density. The social aspects of the Project were categorized as category A (as per the World Bank safeguards rating), mainly because of the large scope of land acquisition. Other than land acquisition, the Project's social impacts are expected to be largely positive. The Project is expected to have a particularly positive impact on the population of affected municipalities. The improved connectivity will facilitate closer access to jobs, services and stimulate trade, tourism, and linked services. The elimination of black spots on selected roads will reduce the severity of traffic accidents.

The Project's beneficiaries can be divided into two groups:

- Group 1: Citizens of affected municipalities and road users;
- Group 2: Staff working on the Project.

To fully answer the needs of both groups of beneficiaries as well as to harness local knowledge that can benefit the Project to the largest possible amount, the question of gender could not be disregarded neither through the Project's preparation nor through the implementation.

Moreover, to be able to monitor how the Project affects men and women project performance indicators, monitoring both groups of beneficiaries, have been gender desegregated.

2.1. THE QUESTION OF GENDER IN THE FIRST GROUP OF BENEFICIARIES

The first group of beneficiaries is monitored by the 'Number of Road Users' indicator. This indicator is being tracked by traffic counting devices scattered throughout the main road network in FB&H. Since the traffic counting devices cannot differentiate the gender of road users it was agreed to use the male to female population of B&H rate, which equals 49:51%.

When considering citizens of local communities and road users in B&H, it is important to consider that men and women have different needs. Women are historically more connected to the household, running family errands and in general are more prone to communicating lesser distances than men. Men, on the other hand, tend to travel greater distances and reaching further away from the household. That is why women are more affected by local traffic while conditions of transit traffic

take a bigger toll on men's life. Hence, females' interests are more expressed when it comes to topics such as road safety and everyday life impacts on local communities. Men, however, are more interested in allowed driving speed after the reconstruction, saving travel time, alternative routes, etc.

Moreover, it is known that men are more frequently involved in traffic accidents than women. Based on the Traffic Safety Basic Facts Study [8], 74% of road fatalities out of all traffic accidents in the EU were men. This means the road fatality rate of males in 2014 was more than three times the respective female rate. According to the same study, road fatalities gender differences are most evident in the age group 18-44, where the fatality rate of males peaks to 84% of all road fatalities. The EU related analysis of 2014 data on road users' types in fatal road accidents concluded that only 35% of female fatalities were drivers, compared to 70% of males. When comparing the given data of EU, road safety rates disaggregated by gender, country, and GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of same EU countries, we get the expected result. GDP and road fatalities are inversely proportional - the lower the GDP of a country the higher the number of road fatalities and the bigger the road fatality gender differences. Since B&H's GDP per capita (5,180.64 USD) is significantly lower than the EU (37,800.00 USD) it can be concluded that the above figures are even more extreme in B&H. This makes men, especially young men aged 18 to 44, in low-income countries [9], such as B&H, a vulnerable category considering road safety.

To appropriately address all questions concerning local communities, PC Roads FB&H organizes public meetings with affected communities for each of the 32 subprojects, usually right before the commencement of works. These public meetings are either very well (around 30% of all meetings) or very poorly (around 70% of all meetings) attended. Either way, all the meetings have the following in common:

- The moment the male vulnerability regarding traffic safety is brought up, men stop to cooperate and become far less friendly;
- Male to female attendees' ratio equals 80:20%;
- Only 1 in 10 women actively participates in the meetings.

In pursuance of mitigating the risk of neglecting women's opinion and overseeing their needs comprised in the Project, PC Roads FB&H organized special focus groups for women in the most affected municipalities. Those meetings were held during the Project preparation phase in order to be able to minimize potential risks and integrate solutions into operational implementation documents such as environmental and social action plans or even project designs.

The questions raised during these meetings were utterly different from the ones raised during classic public consultations. Women from local communities talked and asked questions about:

- Safety issues such as securing the construction site from children;
- Health and safety matters that can affect their community such as irresponsible disposal of construction waste inducing possible health issues;
- Labor influx and whether they would be safe from gender based violence;
- Their rights during the land acquisition process;
- Impacts during construction such as alternatives for school transportation and how the Project would affect the transportation of goods to grocery stores.

Furthermore, surprisingly, the question of male vulnerability considering road safety was raised during women's focus groups. The topic of future road safety measures has been discussed and mitigation measures have been suggested by women from local communities.

It seems as if different approach to different gender groups was an utmost success for the Project and helped the PC Roads FB&H's team in revealing different social, community health and safety, and road safety risks, as well as defining appropriate and tailored mitigation measures.

2.2. THE QUESTION OF GENDER IN THE SECOND GROUP OF BENEFICIARIES

The second group of beneficiaries is monitored by the gender segregated 'Job Creation' indicator.

The Project consists of 32 subprojects of which 20 subprojects are currently under construction, 7 have been already finished and 5 are yet to be started. For now, the Project affected 8 construction companies which have or had signed contracts, and 5 supervision consultancy firms (two consultancy contracts, as detailed below). Considering the whole group, for now 546 people were involved in the Project preparation and implementation (excluding the PC Roads FB&H's team and Project designers) out of which 482 (88%) are men and 64 (12%) are women. Although women usually tend to occupy subsidiary positions in construction projects and are less represented in engineering and decision-making positions, the Project employs 23 skilled/qualified women, which equals to 37% of all female workforce.

Furthermore, amongst the 546 people engaged with the Project, 97 were employed by selected contractors directly from local communities to contribute to the Project implementation. Only 7 of them are women and are all unqualified. The cause to this (at the first sight) shocking data is that most of the jobs offered by construction companies to local community members are hard physical jobs that women, historically and biologically, are not used to perform (like guards at the construction site, site labor, etc.). Instead, women from local communities are usually employed for either administrative tasks (such as assistants and secretaries) or less heavy physical work (such as cleaners or cooks).

To illustrate the different approach men and women have towards gender issues with the Project, the authors will present a real-life comparison of a male and female occupying exactly the same job position within the Project:

- Two supervision teams have been set out for the Project. Team A (comprised of 2 firms) supervises one subproject with major works in new construction, while Team B (comprised of 3 firms) supervises the other 31 subprojects;
- Both supervision teams have, amongst their staff, an appointed social specialist whose duty it is to monitor the above mentioned gender segregated social performance indicators and to report on grievances. Team A employs a man as the social specialist, while Team B employs a woman;
- During the course of the Project, it has been noted that the reports comprised by the Team B's social expert are more detailed, precise and sent in a timelier manner, while the reports sent by social specialist from the Team A are generally more sloppy and usually drafted without previous due diligence with mostly highly general statements;
- The same type of difference is also visible in the actual actions of these two specialists and approach to locals as well as to labor.

Although this case can very well be a random coincidence since it compares just two samples, it is the authors' opinion that women are generally more goal oriented and devoted to the objective of social and environmental responsibility which makes them a great solution for safeguard specialists, both social and environmental.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

Female resource presents about half of B&H's human resources, while at the regional level (Western Balkans) it is between 40 and 50%, depending on the country. For this reason, inclusiveness must be a priority for construction industry to which the road sector contributes significantly. It is irreparable damage to give up such potential, which is found in almost half of the region's population.

Females are in general rarely employed as labor, more frequently as administrative and engineering staff. However, administrative activity is dominant. This can be attributed partly to traditional belief that the discipline is strictly for men and partly due to inability of women to perform some tasks requiring physical exertion of strength. Major aspects of construction works are site based. Therefore, it is required that certain cadres of workers (site managers, project supervisors, foremen, craftsmen, and laborers) are physically fit to withstand rugged site conditions pervaded by noise, dust, and vibrations. This is in addition to lifting heavy objects, climbing, fixing components, and operating plants and equipment. Men are considered to be more physically fit for site conditions and the accompanying tasks, risk and health hazards.

Although tasks like construction progress evaluation, project supervision, setting out and site reconnaissance are less physically exerting and hence ranked next to indoor tasks, they still involve staying in the open sun for hours; a situation which many women professionals express inability to cope with as much as their male counterparts for biological reasons. Slightly different is the case of supervision activity in the field where females are usually employed as safeguards experts, contract and claim specialists, and to a lesser extent as supervisors for road or structural works.

The productivity of women can compare favorably with that of men in office related construction activities such as administration, estimating and tendering and preparation of working drawings, which involves less physical energy. In view of other consulting services, design as an example, females and males are mostly equally presented in the respective teams for delivery of technical outputs. It is clear that the well-being of their employees is paramount to the survival of construction consultancy companies because people are their only asset; thus, the proper conditions must be set to preserve the staff, and this may be the main reason why many of females decide to enter the world of consultancy companies instead of construction companies.

Still, men continue to predominate in decision-making in the sector. This means there is an unbalanced participation of women and men in planning, design, supervision, and construction related activities, and deciding on actions, which may affect both women and men practitioners and citizens.

Although marital status should not be and is least used for recruitment, some married women are reportedly reluctant to relocate to new sites far away from the headquarter. Again, the case for consultancy companies.

For optimal utilization of resources, gender equality, it is considered that women should be adequately represented in the construction industry which is the largest employer of labor in the country. Our changing environment requires nothing less than reshaping the way we grow and build. Gender diversity is good for business by increasing innovation, productivity, and profitability. However, without the right knowledge, many women will continue to believe that the construction is limited to working on a building site. Also, it is the fact that women are not part of any initiatives that will help them progress to senior position. This highlights the need for more programs to help encourage women to get involved, as well as greater advertising that current programs are available. However, the issue of women must be equally tackled at the level of younger girls and school leavers, as well as at the level of elderly women.

At the same time, it must be mentioned that females enrolling to engineering studies are aware they are entering the male-dominated field. Students are generally prepared for the realities of the profession, including male environment, working hours, compensations, as well as benefits in the form of insurance, bonuses, and advance in certain areas. At this moment, and in view of conditions prevailing in B&H, it is interesting to note the results of an interview with female students conducted by Powell et al. [10]. Students were asked about their changing behavior and any coping strategies that they had developed. An interesting comment was “it is actually a case of everyone else getting used to you rather than adjusting your own behavior”. That interviewee went further to imply that to act “too feminine” might affect how colleagues treat you, “as long as you don’t go out there thinking that you’re going to get special treatment, it’s all fine”. As if the interview was done with a female student or engineer in B&H.

Communication style is dominated by masculinities, with high levels of confrontation followed by appeasement in men-to-men conflict. Similarly to findings of Galea and Loosemore [1], the road projects in B&H showed lower levels of escalation of confrontation and aggression when females are involved, either within the technical teams or when there is an interaction with stakeholders and public.

The experience gained for the past few years, particularly during public consultations, safeguards development and monitoring, shows that engaging women as equally as men in planning and decision-making increases their practical experience and usually increases the capacity of public to understand the problem and reach feasible solutions.

The following quote from the recent interview with, Cristina Savian (CEO and founder of BE-WISE) [11], literally presents the situation of females in construction industry, as well as in the road sector in B&H: “In my 20-year career in civil engineering and technology, I have been often felt out of place, not only because I was the only woman around, but often because I was getting asked: Why do you work in civil engineering? Too often I was told I did not belong, because of the way I look, because of my funny accent and most of all because, I was often the only person in the room who had a different line of thought. This is what I learnt, do not allow anyone to tell you if you belong or not to this industry, you know if you are already.” This does not concern only females working for contractors or consultants, but also women as representatives of the society.

When dealing with the beneficiaries at the local community, it is clear that differentiation exists in respect to expected results of any project. Principally, women are more concerned with health, safety, and security, as well as with the local access to education, health and markets. Furthermore, specific focus groups for women revealed their real worries and expectations.

Finally, it is a well-known fact that monitoring and evaluation is an important management tool. In order to ensure progress and increase gender equality, specific gender related performance indicators are needed, e.g. number and percentage of female workers, number and percentage of female beneficiaries, including their structure by occupation and duties. Gender indicators track progress toward reducing gender differentiation in project implementation and business opportunities. Within this field, significant support comes from the IFIs and their approach to gender equality.

At this moment, knowing the level of development in respect to gender issues in general and particularly in the construction sector, but also following the experience from the road modernization in the FB&H, the authors may propose the following recommendations and forward actions:

- In view of the available resource and potential for different approach in comparison to the classic male view, it is necessary to continue promotion of the engineering profession among female population through actions within the high school and advertising for advance and specialization among elderly female engineers;
- Gender equality is hard to force or enforce. To the contrary, it must be understood as the feeling and relationship that comes through cooperation and time, and the efforts coming from the women must be praised and supported by their male counterparts;
- Certain elements of differentiation will always exist since the construction, and road business as its part, normally mean harder physical jobs that women biologically cannot perform. However, at the same time, when speaking about workers in the field, women can perform certain jobs (e.g. truck drivers, machine operators, and similar) as equal as men;
- Construction companies, as well as local communities and governments, should be encouraged to organize or promote courses for prequalification for women in order to make them more competitive on the construction labor market;
- Greater involvement and even better results may be expected in the field of consulting services, in particular design, supervision and contract management. More specifically, the safeguards field (environment, social, community and occupational health and safety, etc.), engineering reporting, and similar are the fields that can significantly benefit from the different approach and views expressed by women. This comes from the fact that women are, in general, more devoted and passionate in respect to set objectives, results and rules;
- Gender oriented focus groups provide a mean for grater inclusion of women in transport related issues in the environments such as B&H and can be utilized as convenient tool to support community health and safety and to provide better adherence to development goals at the local level.

4. CONCLUSION

Despite the existence of legislation that prevents gender-based discrimination, the construction industry continues to remain a male-dominant sector in B&H, as well as in the rest of the world. The presented shocking figures of 48% of women who experienced gender discrimination while working in the construction industry prove that the sector needs to enforce stricter regulations to change the attitude towards women and encourage not only equality but more importantly equity.

This paper, in its attempt of mainstreaming gender issues in the sector, presented the FB&H case study through the implementing agency's experiences during the project for modernization of the main roads in FB&H.

Presented case study shows that it is highly recommended to endorse different approaches towards men and women during the process of citizen engagement. Only by doing this can the project truly benefit from the largest possible amount of local knowledge which is needed to define and mitigate different kind of risks (social, community health and safety, road safety, etc.).

Furthermore, it showed that although women are, proportionately to their number in the industry, well represented in the administrative and engineering staff, while the labor portion of the work market is still, pretty much, a taboo in the sector, even though jobs that women can biologically perform do exist (truck drivers, machine operators, and similar).

Women represent 51% of B&H's population. The low-income economy of the country with tremendously high rate of emigration, cannot afford to give up on half of its possible employees in any industry due to obsolete principles of gender segregation.

Hence, the authors presented recommendations and forward actions which, if implemented, could significantly improve the female position in the B&H construction industry and open a completely new job market for women.

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