

# Advance of Factory Farming in Ukraine: Women and the Environment

## Social and gender impacts of agro-industrial facilities on women in rural areas

*Ukraine plays a key role in the future global agricultural sector. This is fostered by the availability of black soils and a favourable business environment. Ukrainian lands are increasingly leased to large and extensive high technology farms that are export-oriented. It is therefore vitally important to ensure that the interests of local communities are respected and addressed appropriately.*

Ukrainian rural citizens deserve decent living and working conditions. The environmental impact of agro-industrial facilities, which is also associated with economic and social issues, should have a minimal effect on rural communities. Recently members of rural communities have intensified their social activity because of their willingness to participate in decision-making regarding conditions and development of their communities, and their opinion must be heard.

In 2015, the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine in cooperation with the Department of Sociology of the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' conducted a study of the social and gender impacts of agro-industrial facilities on rural communities in Ukraine. The aim of the study was to identify potential impacts of agro-industrial complexes in Ukraine on social and gender aspects of rural communities' life. In fact, social and gender aspects are essential to sustainable development of rural communities. However, they are under-explored, in particular, within the context of possible environmental problems caused by agro-industrial complexes.

The study was conducted using a gender-based approach, which takes into account different needs and situations which men and women are subject to because of their social roles. The gender-based approach ensures fairness and equality, efficiency and sustainability, improves the level of trust in the government, receives support from international organizations, and facilitates the improvement of quality of life. In particular, a social and gender-based review of indicators was developed, relating to the analysis of social infrastructure, housing conditions, employment and working conditions, participation in public life, basic demographics, etc. The study covered three companies and their neighbouring communities: 1) **pig farms** in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast (Danosha Company); 2) **a mink farm** in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (Agroprominvest

Company); 3) **poultry farms** in Vinnytsia Oblast (MHP Company). The study was mainly targeted at women living in rural areas. The study used two methods: desk research and ethnographic field study. In the desk research, the information was gathered from online resources, statistical compilations, and reference guides. The ethnographic study included onsite visits to the villages and research of the everyday life of rural communities, their living, social and gender issues as interpreted by women and men living there through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations. The respondents included the residents, men and women, of villages; local activists, men and women; representatives of state bodies and businesses.

The needs of rural women are not fully recognized at a national level. The state target programme on development of rural areas for the period until 2015 does not take into account the needs of women as a separate target group. However, it is internationally recognized that rural development largely depends on the involvement of women in rural areas in crops

Changes in the Ukrainian agricultural sector are to a significant degree driven by international financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and International Finance Corporation (IFC), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the European Investment Bank (EIB) that consider Ukraine as a key global food supplier.

For instance, Myronivskiy Hlibprodukt (MHP), which operates Vinnytsia poultry farm, is supported by the IFC, the EBRD and the EIB. The Danosha pig farms were supported by loans from the EBRD and IFC. Research about the social and gender impact of agro-industrial facilities can therefore serve as a basis for international lenders for the development and implementation of gender policies that will influence both individual projects and lending programmes for the country.

and livestock breeding and non-agricultural activities.

## Status of Women in Rural Areas in Ukraine: General Trends

Ukrainian women living in rural areas face problems resulting from gender inequality and other problems commonly experienced by rural residents. Women lead about half of the households in rural areas and most single-parent families in rural areas are families where the mother is the sole parent. However, these same rural households face challenges related to inadequate economic security, underdeveloped infrastructure, poor medical care, etc.

According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 7.5 mln Ukrainian women live in rural areas. The size of an average rural household exceeds that of an urban household (2.7 persons compared to 2.5 persons in 2014). However, this numerical advantage of rural households is due to older people, men and women aged over 60, not children.

Rural areas lack favourable conditions to reconcile motherhood and family responsibilities: in the past decade, many pre-school institutions were closed, and working in rural areas put women under permanent stress - they almost do not rest and have no care about their health.

According to the representative survey about rural women in Ukraine in 2014, 48% of rural women have no health care

International and Ukrainian legislation on women empowerment, including in rural areas, is adequate but to certain extent has declarative character:

The UN General Assembly's Resolution on Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas recognizes that women in rural areas play an important role in the development of agriculture and rural areas, improvement of food security and poverty eradication; exercise important functions related to taking care for children, senior citizens and ill persons;

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) outlines measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in rural areas (decent medical care, participation in collective activity, the right to a dignified life, etc.);

The Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements as ratified by Ukraine puts a priority on integrated rural development and recognizes 'the particular needs of women, children and youth in sustainable, healthy and secure living conditions';

The Constitution of Ukraine rules out any privileges or discriminations, including those based on gender and place of residence;

The Law of Ukraine on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men ensures equal rights to, and opportunities for, employment and career development; employers shall provide working conditions that would allow women and men to engage in labour activities on the equal basis, provide them with the opportunity to live their family life alongside employment.



In Ukraine every third woman lives in the rural area

There are 7.5 million women in rural areas in the country



**48%**

women in the rural areas do not have health care facilities at a walking distance and as many cannot afford certain medicines or paid medical services



**30%**

complain of poor access to dental care



**29%**

believe that they cannot afford necessary medical care in case of illness connected to surgical intervention or long-term treatment

facilities at a walking distance from home and as many cannot afford certain medicines or paid medical services, 30% complain of poor access to dental care, 29% believe that they cannot afford necessary medical care in case of illnesses requiring surgical intervention or long-term treatment.

## Results of the Study

The study found that companies generally try to maintain a policy of corporate social responsibility (e.g., supporting villages in improving conditions of communal facilities, providing decent working conditions, supporting sports activities for employees, building apartment buildings and dormitories for employees, etc.). However, the officially

declared policy is not always implemented properly. Moreover, in some cases villagers find it inconsistent.

When social aspects of rural communities' life are considered, it is reasonable to argue that the priority social problems faced by rural communities are related to the lack of necessary infrastructure: kindergartens, hospitals, good roads, etc. In rural areas, even if a man and a woman earn an equal wage, the housework and childcare are traditionally "female area of responsibilities", while men can be involved in these activities only occasionally.

Rural areas lack favourable conditions to reconcile motherhood/fatherhood and professional development. At the same time, it is women who undertake housework, in areas which lack appropriate infrastructure. Therefore, it is women who primarily need kindergartens and other appropriate infrastructure, such as transport facilities.

**'Women in rural areas do all housework, while men leave their homes to earn money'**, - a 60 year old female respondent in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, said.

**'For example, a daughter of my friend has now not worked for three years because no one can stay with her children'**, - a woman living in a village in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast said.

Agro-industrial companies differently address these needs of women in their corporate social responsibility policies. Today large Ukrainian companies seldom or never have their own kindergartens. None of the three villages of Lany, Delieve and Vodnyky in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, where employees of Danosha Company live, has a kindergarten. Although the company has announced plans to build a kindergarten at the enterprise. Vinnytsya poultry farm maintains two communal kindergartens in Ladyzhyn city.

Social and gender aspects of life in rural communities are related to rural infrastructure and living conditions. For example, the impact of industrial livestock production relates to the problem of reduced access to drinking water in villages, which primarily affects women since they are engaged in household work, and when they lack adequate access to water it complicates this activity. In addition, rural residents may suffer from heavy vehicles driving central streets, almost constant odours, cracks in buildings, etc.

Children are another vulnerable group. According to activists from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, the mink farm will most severely affect children, because they are the most susceptible to deterioration of the environment.

**'I am concerned about whether my children will be healthy. This is the main reason why I have joined this**

**battle'** (a woman activist who opposes the construction of the mink farm in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast).

Sometimes the women or men who were surveyed have conflicting visions as to the impact of Danosha pig farms Company on the rural area:



*Conversation with women residing in a village in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, NECU, 2015*

'The stench is terrible, now you do not smell it, but during summer it is hard to breathe', - a 65-year-old woman living on a village in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast said.

**'If it was not for Danosha no one would clear up the roads in winter, that is true'**, - a 50-year-old resident of a village in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast said.

Notwithstanding that women in rural areas are actively involved not only in reproductive, but also productive (paid) work and social activism, rural residents have a streak for established (rather patriarchal) gender stereotypes. In particular, the role of women is interpreted as more related to traditionally 'feminine' traits (empathy, communicativeness, ability to establish relations) than with leadership and managerial skills.

Women in rural areas have limited opportunities to get a formal paid job. The service sector (cashier, secretary of a village council) is the sector where women are predominantly employed. Men dominate among employees in other sectors.

At agro-industrial facilities, which are large employers, the following problems can arise related to working conditions: signs of age discrimination - the preference is given to young workers, practice of extra-work hours, over-time work, penalty schemes, difficult working conditions, difficulties with the creation of independent trade unions and night-work for women. This is a list of potential concerns raised by the men and women living in villages near Vinnytsya poultry farm and the activists campaigning against this industrial facility.

In addition, there is a problem with access to leisure activities. Mothers have to stay home with young

children. For example, in the village in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, where the study took place, the local bar is the only leisure-related place. This raises another problem - alcoholism, which affects mainly men. Moreover, this problem can be either the cause, or consequence of unemployment. 'Not all men here are hard-working. For example, one did something and that's it, a moment later he's already drunk ... there is no work, there is nothing. If he had a job, he would probably not drink alcohol', - a woman living in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast said.



*A house and a land plot for small farming and cattle grazing, the village of Shulhivka, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, NECU, 2015*

On the one hand, agro-industrial facilities can provide jobs for men and women living in rural areas. For example, in the case of the Dnepropetrovsk Oblast, women and men explain their positive attitude to the farm by referring to the possibility that young people will be able to stay in the village. Since the farm will pay taxes to the budget of the village, people expect improvement of the village infrastructure.

On the other hand, agro-industrial facilities may affect small farming (where women are also engaged) that can hardly compete with industrial facilities in manufacturing agricultural products. For example, the industrial mink farm in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast occupied pastures, depriving women of basic earnings. Concerning employment alternatives for men and women in rural areas, the activists have a clear and reasoned position - they seek to develop the economy of the village in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast through cooperatives, rural tourism and small-scale farming where villagers can be employed.

Recommendations to companies, *inter alia*, include:

- introduce the practice of establishing kindergartens at their enterprises;
- promote raising awareness among employees' about their labour rights;
- improve/change communication with local communities regarding potential impact of the company's activities on the environment and take into account views of local residents;
- improve methods of allocating funds to social projects in a way to ensure the transparency of fund allocation to the urgent programmes requested by communities, and their proper monitoring;
- introduce regular reporting by companies;
- consider all risks that will be borne by local farms mostly led by women;
- employ primarily residents of local communities without age and gender discrimination practices, provide decent pay and working conditions;
- consider infrastructure conditions to reduce negative impacts, for example, on roads that are used by companies; use alternative/bypass roads;
- introduce awareness raising/training practices for the management and employees of the companies that receive loans from international financial institutions about the social and environmental requirements of such institutions for the projects' implementation.

In turn, rural communities and activists should be more actively engaged in communications with the companies. It is also necessary to involve women in public activities and incorporate gender accountability into the performance of organisations.

It is clear that men and women living in rural territories in Ukraine should have many opportunities to participate in decision-making, employment and achieving decent living conditions.

The study was completed with the support by NECU within the framework of the course "Gender and Economics" of the Department of Sociology, National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" (NaUKMA), winter-spring 2015. *Project Leaders on behalf of NECU:* Vladlena Martsynkevych, Natalia Kolomiets. *Project Leader on behalf of NaUKMA:* Tamara Martsenyuk, PhD in Sociology, Associate Professor, the author of the course 'Gender and Economics'. The study was conducted with the participation of students of the course 'Gender and Economics'. The full list of the study authors and detailed study report are available at NECU website: [www.necu.org.ua](http://www.necu.org.ua)



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The publication was prepared with the support from the UN Democracy Fund. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of NECU and does not represent the position of the UN Democracy Fund or other donors.

Not for sale. Committed by: NECU. Number of copies printed: 100  
Printing House: Print Quick, Dmytro Viktorovych Popov