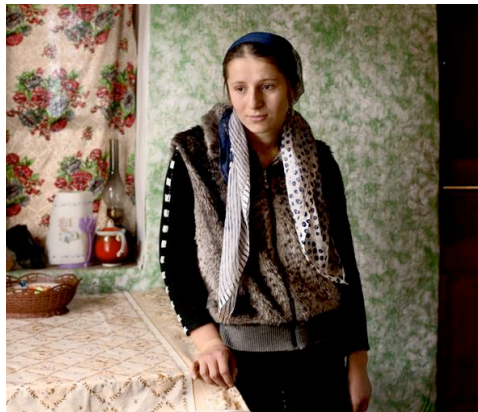


Table of Contents

- [Child brides](#)
- [Pervasive gender inequality in rural areas](#)

Child brides

WUNRN Newsletter (12.04.2017) - <http://www.wunrn.com> - Although the legal age of marriage in the country of Georgia in the Caucasus is 18, there is a long-standing tradition of girls marrying before then. The United Nations Population Fund has estimated that at least 17 percent of girls there get married before the age of 18. There are many reasons that these marriages still take place, including long-standing tradition, the will of the girl's parents and even kidnapping by a suitor.



Maca, 17, married at 16, is mother of a 6-month-old child and is now again pregnant. Like most of the young brides, she became pregnant immediately after getting married. Pankisi Gorge, Georgia. (Myriam Meloni)

Italian photographer Myriam Meloni, along with journalist Elena Ledda, took a journey to Georgia to meet some of these child brides. There, they encountered girls like Samaia, engaged at 16 to a man she had only seen once in her life. After marriage, many of these girls stop going to school because it is thought that education isn't needed for someone whose primary duties in life include bearing children and keeping house.

Georgia is trying to comply with human rights protection requirements from the European Union by abolishing provisions that allow child marriage. Until recently, there was a provision that allowed such marriages in "special circumstances" with the consent of a court. That was struck down in January. But tradition is strong in this country where having romantic relationships before marriage is taboo and traditional gender roles still reign supreme. So the marriages continue.

The existing data in Georgia, shows that up to 17 percent of Georgian women were married before the age of 18.

Pervasive gender inequality in rural areas

UN Women (15.04.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1TfW4Ui> - Rural households that are headed by women, suffer more from poverty than those headed by men. Social and cultural barriers, a lack of kindergartens, as well as the burden of unpaid housework, prevent women from developing their skills and from generating an income. Despite the clear gender inequalities, policies and strategies at the agricultural, regional and village level lack the necessary approaches to tackle these issues.

These are just some of the findings of a new study, the 'Gender Assessment of Agriculture and Local Development Systems', commissioned jointly by UN Women, the Swiss Cooperation Office for the South Caucasus (SCO) and the Regional Office for the South Caucasus of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). In Georgia, official data shows that the proportion of land operated by female farmers is 20%, compared to 80% operated by men (GeoStat, 2013) and women's economic participation rate stands at 57% compared to 77% for men (GeoStat, 2015). The study, therefore, aims to analyze agricultural and regional development policies, programmes and services from a gender perspective and looks at the extent to which rural populations, especially women, are benefiting from such these in six of the country's eleven regions.

Financial constraints and women's double work burden

The results of the study are grave: 90% of those surveyed reported experiencing financial difficulties, and 54% of households, where the main breadwinner is a woman, reported that they are hardly able to buy food; compared with 39% of those households headed by men. Women, however, work more hours than men in all regions except Shida Kartli; when work both inside and outside of the household is combined, focus group data indicates that women work between 2.5 hours (in Samegrelo) and 8 hours (in Kakheti) more than men, every day.

There is a gendered division of labor in agricultural value chains, where in most regions, women are concentrated in the animal husbandry value chain and men in the value chain for crops. However, when the two are combined, women engage in agricultural activities 80 days more per year than men, on average. Despite this, the prevailing stereotypes prescribe that women should stay at home and look after children; and their work is not being recognized.

Limited access to training, advice and services

Despite the fact that a large majority of the population surveyed are involved in farming, the study shows that there is limited access to agricultural education, and that only one in ten had heard of the existing extension services. With regards to knowledge of such services, there was a 20 percentage point difference between women's and men's awareness (with women being less informed than men). An absolute majority of those surveyed only produced agricultural products for their own consumption. Only 20% planned to engage in farming for income generation (of those 40% are women and 60% are men) and less than one percent are members of a functioning cooperative. According to data from the Cooperatives Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, women constitute 25% of the membership base of cooperatives.

Low rates of participation in local decision-making processes

Moreover, access to certain social services is a challenge. The study shows that 30% of the population lacks access to kindergartens, with the situation being most acute in the Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions, where more than half of the population lacks access. These are regions with a relatively high proportion of ethnic minorities, and

where there is already a risk of marginalization and isolation due to language and cultural barriers. Provision of social infrastructure is not only a social issue but an economic and political one as well. Access to childcare and other care services may greatly impact on a woman's ability to have time free for activities outside of household chores; for example generating an income, participating in local decision-making and development, or simply for leisure.

Despite clear development needs in the targeted regions, almost 90% of those surveyed indicated that they do not participate in local decision-making processes. In the target regions of the study, the average level of formal representation of women in sakrebulo (municipal councils) is 9%. Key informants indicated that women rarely participate in public discussions on community development issues (namely the Village Support Programme meetings, launched by the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure).

Promising initiatives and recommendations going forward

The study also makes recommendations at the policy, programme, services and grassroots level, and identifies a number of promising practices for increased attention and support. Some of the key recommendations include: Coordination and gender mainstreaming of national and regional strategies; collection of sex-disaggregated data; ensuring out-reach to women as beneficiaries of the services and programmes; support to gender advisors and gender-responsive budgeting at the municipal level. Among the promising practices identified are programmes that support women who are small-scale farmers to access markets, as well as initiatives to form local self-help groups of women and men that cooperate with municipalities to identify and address community needs.

Read the full report [here](#).