

# Standardizing responsibility through the stakeholder figure Norwegian hydropower in Turkey

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*Abstract:* Through a multi-sited study of the Norwegian state-owned renewable energy corporation Statkraft, this article explores how the increasing embedding of corporate social responsibility in international guidelines impacts the way responsibility is handled when large energy corporations operate overseas. Focusing on one of Statkraft's projects in Turkey, we detail how standards are used to guide both operations in the field and external reporting, in the process distancing the corporation from its Norwegian origin. We argue that the application of standards results in much less standardization than is often assumed. "Stories" become as important for reporting as standards, and the elusive figure of the "stakeholder" plays an important role in holding together the heterogeneous field of corporate responsibility.

*Keywords:* corporatization, CSR, energy, hydropower, internationalization, neoliberalism, state, state capitalism

Oslo 1979: Facing strong opposition to the planned Alta power plant in northern Norway from the local Sami minority population as well as environmentalists nationwide, one of the Statkraft managers wrote in the agency's internal journal that he had "a strong belief in personal contact. We ought to pursue far more active information through, for example, schools, youth organizations, mass media, and other channels. . . . It also seems evident that our organizational structure is not adequately prepared for the demands presented by our surroundings. If we are to succeed, we must find ways to cooperate with watercourse user groups to a larger extent than we have previously" (Gunnes 1979: 5).

Istanbul 2015: Statkraft was hiring a new Turkish corporate social responsibility (CSR) officer for their large construction site Çetin in southeast Turkey—a project that confronted a variety of challenges, including political conflict among impacted communities. In reviewing candidates, they were looking for someone familiar with international standards: "We already have a guy who can drink tea with the locals."

Why would even the most everyday interaction with local realities in rural Turkey in 2015 require knowing international standards, while management had not considered international standards when searching for new ways to do things in Norway back in 1979? In the short



timespan from the mid-1980s to around 2000, Statkraft went through momentous change, from being a Norwegian state agency to becoming a transnational corporation in pursuit of profit. This change also implied a shift from rule-based governance to state “expectation” that CSR practice should be guided by international standards.

These two vignettes are suggestive of two major trends during the last couple of decades: corporatization and internationalization of economic activity and the increasing degree to which the practice and language of CSR has become informed by and embedded in a multitude of international guidelines. These two trends are related. As governments lose control over capital, ameliorative soft governance is sought through international voluntary frameworks. How do these changes affect the way responsibility is handled by corporations? We pursue this question through a multi-sited study of Statkraft, a particularly “responsible” renewable energy corporation, owned by the Norwegian state. Being a fully state-owned company based in a Nordic corporate context raises the additional question of whether this makes a difference to the way the corporation relates to CSR standards and reporting. To what extent does the Nordic model inform Statkraft’s practice of CSR in Turkey (see Knudsen, Rajak, et al. this issue)?

This study focuses on Statkraft’s engagement in Turkey and the way in which they practice CSR. We have had longitudinal interaction from 2013 through 2018 (mainly but not limited to meetings) with staff at headquarters in Oslo, with local CSR staff in Turkey, as well as meetings with a range of persons who interact with Statkraft. Furthermore, we have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in local communities in Turkey and surveyed corporate and government documents, relevant internet sites of the corporation, and international performance and reporting standards. Taking a multi-sited approach to the application of standards in Statkraft’s work has enabled us to see beyond the tension between reality versus corporate

presentation and to explore the multifaceted nature of CSR within and at the fringes of the corporation.

While CSR was once considered to be voluntary acts of “doing good,” corporations now try to integrate social and environmental issues in risk management and decision-making systems, in performance standards, and in standardized reporting frameworks intended to ensure transparency and accountability (Shabana et al. 2017; Welker 2014). Critics—academics and activists—claim that, rather than securing transparency, the use of global standards, especially for reporting, tends to misrepresent or mask the way corporations perceive and act on local realities, to the extent that the standards organize, bureaucratize, and de-politicize the impact the corporation has on the world (see, e.g., Garsten and Jacobsson 2011). Taking the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as her prime example, Sally Merry concludes: “Indicators produce readily understandable and convenient forms of knowledge about the world that shape the way policy makers and the general public understand the world . . . and new opportunities for governance through self-governance” (2011: 92–93).

This critical argument comes with several interrelated assumptions that may be problematic. First, it is largely based on a Foucault-inspired critique of neoliberal governance techniques (see the commentary in the introduction to this theme section) that use overly broad brush strokes by incorporating into the narrative of a global neoliberalism ways of governance that have independent trajectories and are developed for aims other than “marketization of everything.” It may also make overly strong claims about the effect of neoliberal governance, such as the inducement of “self-governance.” Second, most of the literature on CSR, including studies of CSR as governance and in-depth ethnographic studies (such as Rajak 2011; Welker 2014) develop their arguments based on the assumption that corporations are privately owned shareholder firms. There is a certain Anglo-American bias to this literature that makes it hard to consider other possible “economic-institutional ensem-

bles” (Foucault 2008: 167). For instance, Nordic state-owned corporations do not necessarily conform to the Anglo-American model. Third, the argument pre-supposes that we accept that corporations are unitary, consistently apply international standards throughout their organizations, and that standards actually work (for a critique, see Welker 2014). What does the use of performance standards and sustainability reporting really “do” for the corporations? It has been argued that an important characteristic of standards is that they are “always already incomplete and inadequate” (Star and Lampland 2009: 14). Practitioners of CSR are often acutely aware of the tension between the complex reality they engage in and the standards that are assumed to guide their work and reporting. In keeping with this we will assume that the meaning, content, and character of CSR work is also contested and negotiated within the corporation.

Below we will first discuss how the Norwegian state manages its ownership of Statkraft, especially focusing on the evolving “expectations” for how the corporation should handle CSR. We show how Statkraft, at an overarching level, interprets these expectations in the context of increased international activity. Second, we outline Statkraft’s use of the performance standards of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and explain why the IFC-inspired focus on Project Affected People (PAP) by many Statkraft staff is considered a better way to pursue “environmental and social management” than classical CSR. Third, we detail Statkraft’s CSR work in Turkey through several case studies that show that the practice of CSR is flexible and pragmatic and often mixed with other agendas of the corporation. In doing so, we also show how Statkraft’s CSR work feeds into reporting and public relations. Drawing on the case studies, we argue that the application of standards results in much less standardization than is often assumed, yet, the elusive figure of the “stakeholder” plays an important role in holding together the heterogeneous field of CSR.

### **Statkraft: Internationalization and state expectations to CSR**

The corporatization of Statkraft was strongly interconnected with internationalization of the power sector. When the ministerial agency Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) split into several units in 1986, Statkraft became an independent economic entity. It was corporatized in 1992 and became a state enterprise. This was motivated by a desire to make the entity a more effective, modern, and competent actor in the recently (1991) liberalized electricity market in Norway as well as by shifts in Norwegian and European power supply systems (Skjold 2009: 228). In 2004, driven by the desire to operate more easily internationally (Meld. St. 22 2001–2002; Nilsen and Thue 2006: 371–373; Skjold 2015: 16), Statkraft became a limited liability, but unlisted, company. The state retains all shares, but the government has transferred judicial responsibility to the board and managers of the corporation.

Statkraft’s board had argued that “the state enterprise form is not known as a corporate form internationally” and that “the suggested reorganization allows Statkraft to present itself more clearly as a purely commercial actor in line with its most important competitors” (Prop. 53 2003–2004: 26). Internationalization was the keyword in the new corporate strategy in 2006 (Nilsen and Thue 2006: 397). Building on a strong tradition in hydropower in Norway, Statkraft is now considered Europe’s largest renewable energy corporation and has operations in Asia and South America as well.

The international expansion of Statkraft’s operations, especially outside of northern Europe, confronted the corporation with new challenges as regards responsible conduct and risk management, including violent local resistance (Skjold 2015: 212) or large-scale population resettlement (Laos). Its owner, the Norwegian state, provided only indirect guidance. Governments in Norway have been very concerned that the state manages its ownership “professionally.” Therefore, the Ministry of Trade, In-

dustry, and Fisheries, which “owns” the corporation, is expected to not interfere in daily operations, but rather express its “expectations,” which are to be interpreted and implemented by corporation management and reviewed by the board. The primary aim of the state’s ownership of Statkraft, as expressed in a white paper on state ownership, is that “[t]he company is to be run on a commercial basis and with the aim of delivering a competitive return” (Meld. St. 27 2013–2014: 108).

However, governments have since 2006 also expected that corporations under state ownership should take a leading role in safeguarding CSR (Meld. St. 13 2006–2007: 64), noting that if they do not “the state’s legitimacy could be weakened, for example as legislator and in matters concerning foreign policy” (Meld. St. 10 2008–2009: 18). The 2013–2014 white paper on state ownership is more specific in that it requires corporations that have overseas operations and in

which the state has significant ownership to sign up to Global Compact, follow the OECD responsible business conduct recommendations for multinational corporations, take up ILO’s core conventions in their business, and apply GRI reporting standards (Meld. St. 27 2013–2014: 83). The government’s specific expectations that Statkraft will conduct “responsible” business abroad is articulated in the public arena (see figure 1).

### Taking a leading role— with multiple models

The state’s “expectations” about responsibility are communicated to Statkraft’s board and management, but are quite general, so open to a certain degree of interpretation and negotiation. In conjunction with the publication of the white paper on CSR (Meld. St. 10 2008–2009), a Statkraft employee recalls discussions with fellow

## Samfunnsansvar – et konkurransefortrinn

Klare forventninger om at  
norsk næringsliv i utlandet tar  
samfunnsansvar

Økende bevissthet blant  
norske bedrifter

Statkraft tar ansvar i Tyrkia



Foto: Statkraft

NÆRINGSLIV OG HANDELSDEPARTEMENTET

**FIGURE 1.** “Statkraft takes responsibility in Turkey.” This slide is from a presentation by Monica Mæland, (Conservative Party) Minister of Trade and Industry, held at the Bergen Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 15 November 2013. The title reads “Social Responsibility—a competitive advantage” and states: “Clear expectations that Norwegian business abroad takes responsibility”; “Increased awareness among Norwegian firms”; “Statkraft takes responsibility in Turkey.” (Photo from signing of energy agreement between Norwegian and Turkish ministers, 2013 Norwegian State visit to Turkey—Turkish president and Norwegian king in the background).

employees about how to present CSR to the corporate leadership and how to implement the white paper's requirement of taking "a leading role within the field." Similar concerns were expressed when we had our very first meeting with a senior CSR manager in Statkraft in 2013; he stressed that "since Statkraft is owned by the state we are also partly Norway's ambassador. We are concerned about earning money in a decent way."

The explicit focus on CSR emerged in Statkraft around 2003, and then specifically within SN-Power, which Statkraft established together with Norfund (Norway's Development Finance Institution) to invest in high-risk hydropower projects in developing countries (Skjold 2015: 203–204). It was, and is, a widespread idea that while CSR was unnecessary in Norway since all relevant social and environmental matters were covered by law and regulations, operations abroad, especially beyond Europe, required more attention to issues such as local resistance, corruption, indigenous populations, and human rights. There was large overlap in personnel and operations between SN Power and Statkraft, and both recruited many non-Norwegians into the organization. Half of the approximately 15 interlocutors we have had in Statkraft in Oslo were not Norwegian, and many of the Norwegians have gained extensive international experience.

Through international experience and staff, Statkraft came to engage various internationally circulating models of CSR. While CSR seems at first to have been the preferred label, Corporate Responsibility (CR) has since 2010 been used by management and in annual reports as a strategic term to broaden the corporation's work on responsibility, taking the attention away from the "social" part of CSR to include environmental and economic responsibility toward owners (while the Norwegian term *samfunnsansvar*—societal responsibility—has been the overarching term all along) (Statkraft 2014). All new Statkraft employees receive a week's training in Statkraft's "code of conduct" together with other core principles. Environmental and Social Management (ESM) has become an increasingly important corporate term; the internationally more

widespread appellation Environmental and Social Governance is also used. From 2004–2010, non-financial parts in annual reports were called "sustainability" reports, and the title CSR is still in use, both in documents and the vernacular.<sup>1</sup>

The several ways of talking about, implementing, and reporting so-called non-financial matters within Statkraft became apparent to us in pursuing a multi-sited fieldwork across different locations, documents, and websites. It is a complex picture with standards and models coming from different places being used for different purposes. Those most frequently used in Turkey were the performance standards of the IFC and the reporting standards of the GRI—two of the most widely used standards in the private sector (Idowu et al. 2016; Shabana et al. 2017). In the following, we outline Statkraft's use of IFC performance standards (IFC-PS) and explain why this was preferred over classical CSR.

## Doing CSR with IFC Performance Standards

When we first visited the project site in Turkey in 2013, the CSR coordinator in Turkey gave a presentation about their work, including this slide:

### Principles

The CSR action for Kargı HEPP follows Turkish legislation, Statkraft's policies and good international practice.

- ▶ All affected people should be fairly compensated
- ▶ All affected people should be presented livelihood restoration options.
- ▶ Social impact mitigation in Turkey: Turkish law enforces cash compensation only.
- ▶ Statkraft approach to mitigation: Compulsory cash compensation accompanied by voluntary mitigation measures.

Statkraft presentation



FIGURE 2. Localizing IFC standards in Turkey.

We came to learn that the language and approach presented in the slide was taken directly from the IFC-PS. IFC, one of five organizations within the World Bank Group, works to stimulate development in developing countries through credits, especially for private sector

investments in large-scale infrastructural projects. Institutions receiving credit from the IFC are required to comply with IFC-PS and to report to and be audited by the IFC. “The Performance Standards . . . are designed to help avoid, mitigate, and manage risks and impacts as a way of doing business in a sustainable way, including stakeholder engagement” (IFC 2012: i).

Statkraft’s use of IFC-PS is voluntary. From at least 2009, the development of international projects in Statkraft’s portfolio has been informed by IFC-PS and is included in the policy document *The Statkraft Way* (Statkraft 2013). Statkraft employs IFC-PS even though they are neither bound by loans to the IFC nor required to by their owner. This praxis seems related to the fact that hydropower, more so than extraction of hydrocarbons, has been made subject to international standards. Scandals and resistance related to construction of large dams resulted in the establishment of the World Commission on Dams in 1998 as well as the World Bank’s establishment of standards for projects using IFC credit.

Statkraft’s first activity beyond Europe had the character of development projects, especially its operations through SN Power with funding from Norfund. Statkraft’s project in Nepal in the 1990s and SN Power projects in the 2000s (Skjold 2015: 212) received IFC funding, and they were thus obliged to follow IFC-PS and reporting guidelines. Although Statkraft no longer frames their projects abroad as being also development projects—considering them now to be business opportunities only—they continue to adhere to international IFC standards. The standards have been “lifted” from the development discourse into Norwegian state-speak about corporate responsibility. Government policy documents concerning CSR expect corporations to adhere to international standards. However, Statkraft considered UN Global Compact and OECD guidelines to be too vague to guide on-the-ground implementation of CSR, and preferred to follow the international trend by adopting IFC-PS, the most widely recognized and used performance framework (Statkraft 2011). Statkraft management also thought that it

was preferable to have consistent high-standard policies throughout the organization instead of following different local standards. Choosing to use IFC-PS, they replaced traditional CSR with a holistic and long-term perspective and plan for corporate responsibility, while also branding Statkraft as being a serious and responsible player in the international energy landscape. Yet, it also meant something in practice: Through experience, Statkraft found IFC-PS to be a useful tool when they encountered new challenges, such as relating to indigenous populations in a project in Chile (Fribert 2018).

As a voluntary user, Statkraft is in a position to negotiate how to employ IFC-PS. Although not following full IFC protocol, Statkraft staff are trained in IFC-PS methodology and use its language for internal communication. This is, however, embedded within a broader policy for Environmental and Social Management (ESM) in Statkraft. Furthermore, stakeholder management is seen to be of critical importance for ESM and, as will be discussed further below, has a wider framing than that provided by IFC-PS. Statkraft’s experience with a large resettlement program in their Theun-Hinboun project in Laos, where “participatory planning” had helped secure “stakeholder acceptance” (Sparkes 2014: 65), has been formative in their approach to “stakeholder management.”

The shift to IFC-PS in Statkraft was a conscious choice and reflects a position in Statkraft about what responsibility really implies. Most of the ESM people in Statkraft dislike the concept CSR, which they describe as signifying “corporate excuse, twisted branding,” and as philanthropy verging on corruption. Although realizing that CSR can be a useful term to build a reputation, they would typically assert that public relations and the socio-economic should ideally be “unmixed.” “In the field CSR proves to be utterly useless,” they contended. In place of CSR they stressed the value of IFC-PS and its emphasis on project-affected people, mitigation, and livelihood restoration.

This is congruent with a broader shift in corporate circles (Edgecliffe-Johnson 2019) to-

ward Environmental and Social Governance and is mirrored by one of the leaders of the IFC, who in conversation with us stressed that the social and environmental policies of corporations should be “rights-based” and not charity (which he thought characterized CSR). This take on CSR stresses, rather, that it should be integrated in the way corporations do business; those working with ESM in Statkraft have argued internally for having CSR included in the risk-management process, motivated in part by a need to legitimize spending money on CSR. The following section explores what ensues when the IFC standards meet local realities in a concrete project.

### “Statkraft takes responsibility in Turkey”

Statkraft bought a portfolio of three projects in Turkey in 2009, entering a power and electricity market that had been going through a radical liberalization and deregulation process since the early 2000s (see e.g., Harris and Işlar 2014). In the face of Turkey’s heavy dependence on imported oil and gas, a primary strategy of Erdogan’s governments has been to stimulate growth through the development of hydropower and other domestic energy resources. While the Turkish state remains the main driver for construction of hydropower, lack of domestic capital and competence has led to the invitation of foreign corporate investment in the energy sector. Statkraft is only one of many European corporations that started exploring this opportunity during the 2000s.

Statkraft’s construction on the run-of-the-river medium-sized power plant Kargı (located between Ankara and the Black Sea coast) started in 2011, and the power plant was put into operation in May 2015. The smaller power plant Çakıt in Adana Province did not require construction work and began commercial operation in June 2010, while the construction of the third project in Çetin located in the southeastern part of the Anatolian region began in 2012 and was expected to be Statkraft’s largest hydro asset

outside of Norway. Statkraft reckoned that they had invested in a safe market within a growing economy and expected that they would expand further in Turkey.

Terror incidents, falling prices for electricity, the Syrian refugee crisis, and political uncertainty made Statkraft put on the brakes, and when the project in Çetin became implicated in complex state-political-development processes and accumulated a composite of problems (technical, security, contractual, political) they halted construction and eventually sold the project in 2017 to a Turkish corporation, which has worked as Statkraft’s contractor in their project in Albania. Although starting with 10–20 employees, the local Statkraft staff working on CSR has, with the sell-off of Çetin and the shift to operation in Kargı, been reduced to only one person. We arrived when Statkraft was becoming uncertain about their strategy in Turkey, and, because we could not gain access to the field in Çetin, focused instead on Statkraft’s Kargı project.

Overall, IFC-PS has been the main framework for Statkraft’s CSR work in Turkey. At an overarching, national level, they have also supported World Wildlife Fund and Syrian refugees; at the local level, they have organized training and public awareness concerning traffic and reservoir security and provided community support. The project in Çetin involved other initiatives as well. Adhering to the IFC requirement that “(w)hen host country regulations differ from” IFC-PS, “projects are expected to achieve whichever is more stringent” (IFC 2012), Statkraft prepared social impact assessments (SIA) for their projects in Turkey (not required by Turkish regulation) (IFC 2015: 57). The Çetin SIA, prepared by international experts, was thoroughly informed by IFC-PS, elaborating, over a couple of pages, the details of stakeholder engagement and assessment using IFC-PS (Meadows et al. 2010: 21–23). The emphasis on IFC-PS is also seen in documents prepared for the Kargı project. The “Environmental and Social Management Plan for Operation (2016–2020)” was “produced in line with

*The Statkraft Way*” and the IFC-PS. Accordingly, the CSR work focuses, as we saw in Figure 2, on project-affected people (PAP), impact mitigation, livelihood restoration, and compensation. Yet, the concept CSR is also used in the report, and the CSR-budget/reporting format includes several non-IFC topics, including “public relations.” So, how is IFC-PS set to work in Kargı?

The main agricultural activity in the impacted districts Osmancık and Kargı is the cultivation of rice on irrigated banks along the river Kızılırmak. The Kargı hydropower project includes a relatively small reservoir in the district of Osmancık, from where a tunnel, short-cutting Kargı, transfers water from an outlet near the dam to a point further downstream where the powerhouse is located. The areas inundated by the dam are not very extensive,<sup>2</sup> and had mostly been used for intensive high-value rice cultivation. Downstream, and mainly in the district of Kargı, the major impact is related to reduced flow.

During construction, the primary concern for Statkraft’s CSR work was to compensate, according to Turkish law, for the loss of rice-farming land. However, compensation alone—based on state expropriation of land, a demanding and extensive process—was not sufficient to comply with the IFC-PS or *The Statkraft Way* guide for Environmental Management, which states: “Statkraft shall ensure that grievances from affected communities and external communications from other stakeholders are responded to and managed appropriately.” Therefore, Statkraft established a grievance mechanism, operated out of a liaison office in Osmancık, whereby they assisted the farmers with the expropriation process. Statkraft also worked to help farmers find new sources of income through livelihood restoration projects. Farmers were provided equipment and training in horticulture, greenhouse farming, honey production, and other agricultural activities that require less water. After hydropower production started, the focus of CSR shifted to include the downstream issue, which was framed by a legal requirement to provide enough water for rice farmers.

When we met with Metin, one of Statkraft’s CSR officers, in 2016, we were invited to join a meeting intended to stimulate livelihood restoration through beekeeping. Approximately 25 middle-aged and elderly farmers who had lost their rice farms to the dam attended. The beekeeping consultant engaged by Statkraft for the project talked about knowledge sharing and cooperation and explained that beekeeping “is quite difficult, but possible if you are willing to learn”: “at first we will hold your hand, guide you through it; then we let go of your hand, help you when you need it; until, after a two-year period, our help is unnecessary.” The farmers seemed to be interested, and were keen to ask questions. The project was obviously considered promising, and Metin posted a “snapshot” (a photo with a short text posted on the internal web for those in Statkraft working in/with Turkey).

However, beekeeping was not a success. After only a year the project was discontinued. A few farmers continued the greenhouse project, but, otherwise, farmers, or PAPs according to IFC and Statkraft lingo, were not very keen on taking up the “livelihood restoration” opportunities presented to them by Statkraft. They preferred cash payments, which they could invest in property and/or their children’s education. Their attitude was related to the general economic and demographic structure. The agricultural sector in Turkey is increasingly marginalized, and the rural population is decreasing and aging. Most farmers in Osmancık and Kargı are over 50 years old, and, generally, their children have moved to larger cities in the west, particularly Istanbul. Although the beekeeping project was unsuccessful, Statkraft showed the ability to pragmatically extend CSR in various directions.

## **Pragmatic extension of CSR**

### ***A local initiative: Recycling***

When we returned to Osmancık in 2017, Metin was more keen to talk about a new initiative than the failed beekeeping project. He wanted



to show us the year's most successful environmental and social project: recycling projects at local schools. Statkraft had, on Metin's suggestion, initiated the projects in response to the problem with waste at the dam. In cooperation with local authorities, Statkraft trained two schools how to recycle. Pupils learned to gather plastic, paper, and metal and toss it all into a bin in the schoolyard. A recycling company gathered the waste once a week, sorted and weighed it, and reported back to Statkraft. For each ton collected, the school got a used Statkraft laptop computer.

We went with Metin to the schools to deliver laptops. The primary school had managed to collect eight tons of waste, while the secondary school had collected two tons. Both schools wanted to continue the project after it was scheduled to be discontinued one month later, but Metin informed them that "there are unfortunately no more laptops to deliver." The principal argued that they did not care about the laptops only the project, because it had positive ripple effects in the local community, creating awareness about recycling and climate. After tea

and small talk with the principal about the value of the recycling project for the children and the local community, Metin called the main office in Oslo, which confirmed that the schools could keep the bins. When we left the schools, Metin was happy: "This is a very successful project. The schools are taking responsibility—making the project their own."

The recycling project is more in line with the typical way for Turkish corporations to contribute to society. Some locals voiced opinions, such as: A "large foreign company like Statkraft" should invest more in "social projects" or "social funds" (*Osmancık Haber* 2013); and "I have not seen any social support from Statkraft" (conversation with local farmer). The concept "social support/projects/funds" here indicates a different approach to corporate responsibility than that practiced by Statkraft. Philanthropy remains the dominant form of CSR in Turkey and "most business groups in Turkey have an associated foundation" (Ararat 2008: 277) typically supporting "society," especially education, religion, and health. In Turkey, moral standards for the appropriate or expected behavior of



**Mutual benefit.** As part of an environmental programme to raise awareness about recycling, schoolchildren from Osmanlık collected paper and plastic. Delivering it to the recycling station provided revenue for the school and the pupils were also rewarded with used PCs from Statkraft.

**FIGURE 3.** Good Neighbors. From the article "Recycling Knowledge," Statkraft's magazine *People and Power* 2 (2017): 37.

business owners and leaders are strongly connected to ideals and practices of patron-client relations.<sup>3</sup>

A good example of how this Turkish framework for charitable giving informs the way large Turkish energy firms perform their responsibility to society can be found in the CSR prize of an annual Istanbul energy conference. In 2018, the prize was awarded to an energy utilities company that had successfully provided clothing and food for pupils at village schools and supported sports and Ramadan meals (*Beyaz gazete* 2018). In the Turkish context, this is not usually “rights based,” but considered a human duty, a moral obligation embedded in interpersonal relations. While Statkraft tries to embed ethics in systems and international standards, in Turkey, people tend to prefer to see ethics as embedded in persons and interpersonal relations. To the extent that “impact management” is considered anyone’s responsibility, it would be in the government’s implementation of state regulations. It is also notable that the Nordic model for a corporation’s interaction with its environs is not activated. For instance, relating to or involving unions was totally outside of the scope of Statkraft’s approach in Turkey.

In addition to the livelihood restoration projects, Statkraft also undertook what is regarded as classical CSR work, or locally as “social projects.” Although the CSR personnel were ambivalent about it, they established community development funds (included in their CSR budget), which were used for a variety of purposes, such as funding for Ramadan meals. They realized that some such activity was needed to build and sustain good relations. Supporting schools—as Statkraft did in the recycling project—is also the kind of thing corporations are expected to do in Turkey. Unlike the livelihood projects, this initiative received a decent degree of local press coverage. Thus, the Turkish understanding of corporate responsibilities increasingly came to inform the CSR work of Statkraft. CSR became “localized” (Welker 2014) or “domesticated” (Knudsen 2015) as the recycling project emerged as a local success.

The cases discussed above relate primarily to the area directly impacted by the dam where it inundated rice fields near Osmancık. Another way in which Statkraft has pragmatically extended and adapted CSR work to fit new situations and agendas emerges as we turn attention to the downstream issue.

### *Rice cultivation in Kargı*

Early autumn is a busy period for rice cultivators in Kargı. Most open spaces are covered by rice spread out for drying. In 2016, we dropped in to visit our acquaintance İsmail at his camp and threshing ground. Learning that he was away on an errand, we were treated to a simple meal, including rice—from their own production—which they eat every day, year round. İsmail’s wife, an elderly woman, complained about her bad back and pain in her legs. Still, she was compelled to work; they needed money to marry off their grandchild.

İsmail arrived on his motorbike. He was tired and morose. Long days and hard work for an old man. His 50-year-old son was more talkative. The son operates the harvester they bought a few years ago and is paid three *hak* (“rights,” one *hak* equaling two bins each 6 kg of rice) for each acre (*dönüm*) that he harvests for others. Like many other families, their extended family works together to cultivate both their own fields as well as the sharecropped (*yarıcılık*) fields of more wealthy farmers. As is common in Kargı, their plots are small and widely dispersed, making the operation of the harvester cumbersome and costly. The rice cultivators desire a reorganization and consolidation (*toplulaştırma*) of their fields, but that is difficult to achieve without political will.

For many, rice cultivation has developed into a side income. Most rice cultivators are middle-aged or older. Young people are leaving Kargı, and the population of the small town risks falling below 5,000, which is the threshold for being a municipality in Turkey. Although concerned about the dam constructed by Statkraft, rice cultivators find that they have enough

water. Many farmers related that, when water stopped flowing a few years back, they called Statkraft and the water flow resumed. They are more concerned about the costs of pumping water from the Kızılırmak up into the canals and their fields. There are also other costs involved: seeds, fertilizer and pesticides, guards, and more. Many complain that “the state does not support us any longer. We are not given a guaranteed price for the rice.”

Interacting with a broad cross section of the society of Kargı, we tried to elicit the history and structure of the irrigation system in the district. Nobody seemed to really know. There are many institutions involved: state water works (DSİ); the Kargı municipality; village heads; rice-farming cooperatives; the district office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Livestock; the Agricultural Credit Cooperative; the Kargı Chamber of Agriculture, among others. Ownership of and responsibility for maintaining the irrigation structure is unclear. Do the state water works or the cooperatives own the channels? There is no overview of where water comes from and where it goes. There is no overall plan for irrigation and cultivation except for some limited measures administered by the state-organized District Rice Commission.

### ***Surveying irrigation, enlisting stakeholders***

Statkraft is under contract with the state water works to release enough water for the 700 downstream farmers, mostly smallholders, to continue irrigation of their rice paddies during the May to October cultivation season. The contract stipulates the amount of water to be released as well as the periodicity. To help ensure that farmers received enough water for irrigation, Statkraft organized and funded refurbishment of water-intake weirs. Beyond this, the CSR consultant’s regular monitoring of water flow and agricultural activities convinced corporate leadership that it could be useful to make a detailed survey of the irrigation system and water use in Kargı. An international consultancy was contracted. The work basically in-

involved walking up all channels, weirs, and the like, and mapping them into a Google Earth template program to produce a detailed digital map of the irrigation system.

According to Statkraft personnel, “stakeholder mapping” was undertaken, and stakeholders were consulted in the process. The instrumental and managerial approach to “stakeholders” is demonstrated in this excerpt from an internal Statkraft presentation: “Engaging with stakeholders from the start (before operation) enables a proactive cultivation of relationships that can serve as ‘capital’ during challenging times.” During our fieldwork in Kargı it emerged that almost no one (except two leading local officers) knew about the irrigation survey and even familiarity with Statkraft was limited. İsmail was relatively well-informed about Statkraft, but he and his fellow villagers knew nothing of the survey when we met him in late 2018, after the survey had been completed, which was striking given that he is a village head and village heads are identified by Statkraft as being among their primary stakeholders. A few meetings had been organized before the survey took place, but they did not focus on the survey. Only after a draft of the digital map had been produced did the CSR officer and an expert from the consultancy firm perform what they called “ground truthing,” that is, checking their findings with local farmers, thus clearly serving Statkraft’s rather than stakeholders’ interests.

Statkraft’s primary objective in doing the survey was, we were told, to “know the system better.” The detailed knowledge gained about the irrigation system enabled them to start renegotiating the contract with the state water works with a view to becoming obliged to release less water during the irrigation season, in effect meaning that more water is retained for Statkraft to produce electricity and income. Although the project was not funded through the CSR budget, but from “assets,” it was managed by CSR personnel. It is a “win-win situation,” a CSR officer told us. He thought it was natural that they, who were involved with stakeholders and community relations, handled this: “It

is oftentimes the case that we have overlapping interests with other sections in the corporation.” That Statkraft considers the survey of the irrigation system to be CSR activity demonstrates the flexible pragmatism of the corporation when it comes to implementing standards, and also the perceived importance of community and stakeholder relations for making things work locally (see Welker 2014).

## Reporting CSR

Like performance, reporting CSR also involves a pragmatic approach. Although external reporting is not met with any significant sanctions, Statkraft is obliged to conform to the language of GRI for reporting purposes. Managed primarily by a small section at headquarters, the GRI standards do not travel very far or deep into the Statkraft organization, and are distinctly different from the IFC-PS language. Working for external reporting in Statkraft, therefore, involves considerable internal translation work to produce not only indicators, but also stories in which “stakeholders” figure prominently.

Stories are, however, not only reputation-management material. They may also become important ingredients in Statkraft’s reporting processes. Reporting in keeping with the law on accounting requires, according to the Office of the Auditor General of Norway, an annual report, a sustainability/CSR report, and quarterly results, but can include information from the corporation’s web pages (OAGN 2016–2017: 151). According to personnel in the Statkraft CR division, stories in their magazines are considered to be “realistic” field reports, and are used as the backdrop for annual reports and further CR strategy development.

The consideration of field reports as “realistic” depictions of CSR in practice makes internal reporting key to CSR officers. When Statkraft decided to keep only one of the two local CSR officers, they retained the one who was best at reporting. One of his superiors stressed that “quality in reporting is essential.” Reporting, he

maintained, is a skill that takes time to acquire, and Statkraft observes a strict reporting cycle. For instance, the plan for Environmental and Social Management in the Kargi project (2016–2020) prescribed quarterly reporting on content and spending for a range of matters. Once a year the CSR officer is also asked to submit a standardized risk assessment form. This reporting is not guided by GRI standards, but works within an ESM framework.

Although internal reporting follows certain templates/formats, there is room for individual initiatives, such as the recycling project. As Metin left the meeting with the principal with whom he had discussed the future of the recycling project, he remarked, “I must report to Lysaker [Statkraft’s headquarters in Norway].” His next step was to gather photos and documents from the schools and prepare a presentation for the next CSR performance meeting in Lysaker. The recycling project, like the beekeeping project, was circulated internally as a “snapshot,” but subsequently picked up for publication in the online *Statkraft Stories Collection* and the Statkraft magazine *People and Power* (Statkraft 2017c).

The Kargi irrigation survey also traveled up through the organization to be included in Statkraft’s Annual Report 2017 where a photo that had started out as an internal “snapshot” about ground truthing was displayed among “Highlights” with the caption: “Continuous dialogue with stakeholders was upheld, like in Turkey where downstream impacts were discussed with local farmers” (Statkraft 2017a: 3). The Kargi irrigation survey is presented as “a mitigation programme to improve irrigation systems downstream of the intake dam” (Statkraft 2017a: 30). The major motivation for the survey—the potential for making more profit—was underplayed, while the alignment with IFC-PS framework (“mitigation”) and degree of interaction with stakeholders was exaggerated.

While “stories” travel up through the Statkraft organization and figure in external reporting, the formal framework for Statkraft’s external reporting is GRI in accordance with

the expectations of the Norwegian state (Meld. St. 27 2013–2014: 83). GRI was established in 1997 as an independent international organization and has become the dominant framework for sustainability reporting. In order to simplify and ensure relevance of reporting, GRI established the “materiality” (i.e., essential) principle, which implies that organizations are expected to address and report on matters that are central to its impact on society and environment. The latest version of GRI standards, G4, “guides companies in how to identify their major sustainability impacts, and then enter into a dialogue with key stakeholders—which they define themselves—to answer the question: ‘What are the material aspects, and to whom?’” (GRI & Robecosam 2016: 8). Thus, it is left to each individual organization/company to design how it will organize stakeholder processes and identify material aspects. Process, not indicators, are imposed by GRI on Statkraft.

Statkraft started following the GRI recommendations several years before the state made it a requirement. In 2015, they undertook the materiality analysis, primarily by arranging workshops with key persons within Statkraft and with only limited input from stakeholders. Involved staff were asked by colleagues from the CR unit to assess different “aspects . . . based on how important it is for Statkraft’s ability to meet corporate strategies and goals, and retain our ‘license to operate.’” After categories and content were negotiated internally, the materiality assessment identified six aspects that were most “material,” related to environmental issues, safety, human rights, and anti-corruption (Statkraft 2015). The materiality analysis is meant to give structure to further CSR work: “Statkraft has developed ambitions and goals towards 2020 for the six material topics, and Statkraft’s corporate responsibility report is structured according to the identified material topics” (Statkraft 2017b: 32).

Reporting to GRI does not really involve any content and review thereof by GRI—it essentially means submitting a GRI-structured report for publication on GRI’s website. The

2017 CR report includes four pages that essentially only list what has been reported by and to whom (e.g., the Statkraft board), organized by the categories and standards used by GRI.<sup>4</sup> The reporting recommendations by the state are not supported by any sanctions, and leave Statkraft to decide how to involve stakeholders in materiality assessment and reporting. In their daily internal work those responsible for reporting in Statkraft do not consult stakeholders directly, but rather organize in-house studies of stakeholder perspectives and interact with Statkraft staff who can provide useful “stories” or other relevant information for their reports. They consider this robust enough since stakeholder engagement is integral to all phases of Statkraft’s projects. Thus, Statkraft is very much at liberty to design the process and content of reports. Given the limited content and sanction relating to the use of the GRI standards, “stakeholder” perspective and “stakeholder” involvement stands out as a central legitimizing figure for Statkraft’s approach to CSR.

### Managing stakeholders

What emerges from the discussion of the application of different standards above is the ubiquity of the figure of “stakeholder.” It is one of the few concepts that has purchase across the different standards and models that Statkraft employs or relates to when enacting responsibility. However, that does not necessarily imply that its meaning is the same within different contexts. “Stakeholder” is a particularly open and negotiable concept with no clear denotational value—it is detached from larger structures of power, politics, and economy, which Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke (2000) call “the dangers of localism.” “[T]he weakness of stakeholder theory lies in the underspecification of the organization/stakeholder relation in itself” (Friedman and Miles 2002: 15). It is precisely this underspecification that makes the frequent deployment of the term “stakeholder” across a variety of contexts and for different

purposes possible and useful for Statkraft and gives a semblance of their CSR work being cohesive and unitary. But, there is a huge difference between a property-less peasant in Kargi (e.g., not being entitled to membership in a cooperative) and the state water works (“our most important stakeholder”). Beyond this, the underspecification of the stakeholder concept also facilitates the enactment of multiple versions of the same stakeholder at different places in the corporation: the irrigation project stakeholders engaged by the CSR officer in Kargi are very different from the irrigation project stakeholders who figure into the 2017 Annual report.

Although it is commonplace today to use the term stakeholder in a wide range of contexts, including environmental management and development projects, the concept had its roots in business and management science in the early 1980s (Grimble and Wellard 1997; Jones and Wicks 1999). But the management literature and its adoption by businesses has largely been insensitive to framing issues. Who defines the issue? What definition of stakeholder is to be employed? Which actors are affected by or have an interest in the topic? What is the “mandate” for stakeholder involvement? Every decision about who is entitled to be considered a stakeholder is, in the end, political. Company control of reporting processes means that the corporate perspective will dominate and stakeholder dialogue can be transformed into the ultimate legitimating tool, since stakeholders carry legitimating authority in “participatory” processes (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Questioning the content of a report becomes more difficult if an organization can say that it has consulted stakeholders when preparing the report.

The contrast between the minimal involvement of “stakeholders” and lack of local consultation, on the one hand, and the profiling of “stakeholders” in external communication by the corporation, on the other hand, shows that, sometimes, the real concern about “stakeholders” is at the corporate level—in reports and reputational management. The local stakeholder is an important legitimating figure in CR

reporting and in corporate communication. The CSR consultants have an important position in this, doing in effect not only work directed at the community, but also upwards within the corporation.

While Statkraft’s use of “stakeholder” may seem to be political, it does not have the “deep” effect “neoliberalism as governance” approaches sometimes assume. Few readers of Statkraft’s CR report actually understand the indicators used, and hardly any of Statkraft’s “stakeholders” realize that they are “stakeholders” and sometimes even “PAPs.” They are not covertly guided toward self-governance (see Merry 2011) through internalizing Statkraft’s use of standards and indicators. Statkraft does not organize the world of stakeholders through indicators—the indicators hardly organize things internal to Statkraft. That the indicators are produced is more important than what they actually reveal, since their existence is sufficient to fulfill reporting requirements. Therefore, the stories told in the report or in the Statkraft magazine are just as important as the indicators for conveying Statkraft’s responsible approach.

## Conclusion

CSR is many things in Statkraft. A multi-sited approach has enabled us to see that responsibility is engaged by different people with different agendas in a range of different places across the complex, geographically distributed corporation. CSR is transformed and transmuted and set to do different kinds of work. It is sometimes compartmentalized—in organizational structure, reports, and the like—sometimes merged or cross-fertilized with other activities. At other times CSR is seen as embedded within core activities (e.g., within risk management), or considered the responsibility of management and the board. There are several distinct, yet overlapping, communities of standardization practice (Star and Lampland 2009: 7) within Statkraft, and the transition from “doing” CSR (in line with IFC-PS) to “writing” CSR (accord-

ing to GRI standards) is therefore blurry and involves translation work.

In Statkraft there are many different reasons for a move toward standardizing CSR work, but there are likewise many causes for the partial implementation of standards, be it flexible adaptation to local expectations (recycling), in-house pragmatic mixing of CSR and other agendas (such as in the irrigation project), or a consideration of what resources are “reasonable” to spend on aligning with international standards that are frequently upgraded. Heterogeneity of the CSR field is probably also reproduced by people wanting to hold on to their jobs and who are defending and expanding their turf. All the translation work going on within the corporation, between different standards and for reporting—much of it for internal purposes only—is very costly in terms of effort; not all find it meaningful. Reporting is demanding for Statkraft, not because it puts limitations on the way in which staff manage their projects, but because of the translation work and internal mobilization necessary to produce stories, categories, and numbers that satisfy the externally defined standards and perceived needs for corporate communication.

CSR work is not as standardized as it may appear from the outside and as many analysts seem to assume (Merry 2011).<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps precisely the ability within Statkraft to keep CSR in “suspense”—or rather keep in suspense the ambivalences and dissonances concerning standardized CSR—that makes it useful and powerful. Standardization is thus partly a “make believe” standardization, and work related to CSR standards is characterized by flexible pragmatism. It is precisely because people in corporations are pragmatic and flexible that standards seem to be working, just as James Scott (1998) argued was the case for high modernist states’ standardizing schemes, and Susan Star and Martha Lampland (2009: 4) have argued is generally the case in people’s dealings with standards: “work must get done.” Corporations may be less rigid than high-modernist state bureaucracies. Pragmatic flexibility is ac-

tually encouraged by persons in relevant senior or CSR positions in Statkraft who, taking a reflexive stance, do not find it problematic that there are many ways of doing and talking about CSR within the organization: “Those working in the field must themselves find the concepts that are most natural for them to apply”; “CSR will always be framed by local politics and culture”; “Our use of ‘CSR’ is pragmatic—we are looking to getting things done.” The pragmatic approach is even articulated in the CR report: “Statkraft has a decentralized approach to stakeholder management” (Statkraft 2017b: 9). That the border between CSR and other activities becomes blurred is even considered appropriate—that means that CSR has become integrated with other concerns and agendas in the corporation. Especially when it comes to reporting, it may be more important for the corporation to “be seen to be making the world legible” (i.e., transparent) rather than actually doing so.

Although Statkraft employees may stress that they act as “ambassadors” of Norway in their foreign operations, and the ministry stresses that it expects Statkraft to be responsible when operating in Turkey (see Figure 1), there is not much trace of the Nordic model in the way Statkraft works in Turkey. The way they enact responsibility is informed by international standards, particularly those of the IFC and the GRI. Thus, the concept of “stakeholder,” for example, has come into Statkraft’s vocabulary through interaction with international standards and experience from managing international projects. Statkraft has never used the concept in its domestic activities. The “other” of Statkraft in a domestic context has not been standardized as “stakeholder.” As a state agency in Norway, the work of Statkraft had been embedded in regular political and bureaucratic procedures and a complex sociopolitical landscape consisting of citizens and households, users, municipalities, other state agencies, unions, and various other organizations. There its activities were “already” political and not easily framed as Statkraft versus stakeholders. But, operating away from home, Statkraft has needed both CSR and

stakeholders—little of which has been explicitly informed by the Nordic model. However, the Norwegian state has not requested Statkraft to be “Nordic” when working abroad. They are tasked primarily with doing business. If one can argue that reference to universal norms for responsibility may be typical in the Nordic societal model, then one may perhaps also say that it is “Nordic” to expect corporations to be particularly responsible by requiring them to adhere to international standards and frameworks.

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### Notes

1. In this text we will, for consistency, continue to use CSR as an overarching analytical term, even when Statkraft employees would have preferred another term.
2. According to a Statkraft internal document, there is a loss of 4,271 *dönüm*/acre of land, of which more than 3,000 *dönüm*/acre are first class agricultural land.
3. For an elaboration and discussion about CSR in Turkey, see Knudsen (2015).
4. See GRI: Empowering Sustainable Decisions, <https://www.globalreporting.org/standards> (accessed 28 July 2020).
5. See Welker (2014) and Sydow (2016) for more nuanced studies of CSR and standards.



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