

KAZAKHSTAN

Uninterested in gender issues



Society continues to reject the idea of gender equity and tends to see the programmes which promote it as an inevitable part of international politics. Without the active participation of the President and the Government and without national laws in this area, it will be difficult to maintain the efforts of women's NGOs.

Centre for Gender Studies

Svetlana Shakirova

Of the eight Millennium Development Goals, Kazakhstan is most likely to achieve Goal 3 ("Promote gender equality and empower women"), even though it is maybe one of the hardest to achieve.

Assessed against the universally accepted indicators, Goal 3 Target 4¹ has already been achieved in Kazakhstan: there is no quantitative gender disparity in primary and secondary education, and there are no access problems for girls to any level of education.

Another indicator, the proportion of women in Parliament, is far less encouraging since Kazakhstan ranks 85th among 185 countries.²

Kazakhstan has over 15 million inhabitants and there are over half a million more women than men in the country. Over 30% of the population, mostly men, do not live to the age of 60. Women constitute almost 70% of the population who receive pensions, and one in five women-pensioners is a mother of four or more children.³ One fifth of youths (18 years and under and mostly male) have not completed their secondary education. One sixth of the population, predominantly families with many children, single pensioners and the rural unemployed, live in poverty.

One out of every 12 people in the country is unemployed, and there are more unemployed women than men. The salary gap is 0.6 and women's contribution to GDP is 2.1 times less than men's. The average size of a state pension paid through the unified solidarity system is KZT 7,575 (about USD 57) for women, which is less than men's and 7.6% less than the national average, KZT 8,198 (USD 62).⁴ The gap between women's and men's savings in the pension funds is much larger and amounts to 30%.

1 Goal 3, Target 4: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015".

2 Inter-Parliamentary Union, www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

3 Living Standards and Poverty in Kazakhstan. Statistical Monitoring, Almaty, 2004, p. 21.

4 *Ibid.*

TABLE 1

Human development indicators, disaggregated by sex					
INDICATOR	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Average life expectancy (years)	65.5	65.5	65.8	66.0	65.8
Women	71.0	71.1	71.3	71.5	71.5
Men	60.3	60.2	60.5	60.7	60.5
Gender gap in years	10.7	10.9	10.8	10.8	11.0
Proportion of employed women among wage workers (%)	47.6	42.2	45.2	45.0	45.0
Ratio of women wages to men wages (%)	67.6	61.5	58.7	61.7	61.7
GDP per capita (USD)	4,293	4,488	5,220	5,870	6,527
Women	3,152	2,683	3,284	3,797	4,223
Men	5,521	6,429	7,305	8,104	9,008
Gender gap (USD)	2,369	3,746	4,021	4,307	4,785

Source: Living Standards and Poverty in Kazakhstan. Statistical Monitoring, Almaty, 2004.

Low women's participation in politics and public administration

Women are insufficiently represented at high levels of decision-making. There are 11 women in Parliament, that is, only 9.5% of the total number of members of Parliament. Women constitute 17.1% of regional delegates. At the decision-making level, women make up 18.3% of people holding political appointments in the central management structure, which is two times higher than the 2001 figure.

Currently, women are not represented in the highest level of political leadership: no woman holds the position of president, prime minister, vice-prime minister, governor or national bank chairperson.

Of the 15 ministers in the Government, four (27%) are women. This is below the level of Scandinavian countries but higher than Russia (where there are no women among 17 ministers) and other countries in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Women are not sufficiently involved either in the activities of political parties, especially in terms of leadership. During recent elections to the House of Representatives, women were placed fifth or below on most party lists. The proportion of women employed in state executive bodies is 58.5%. Women lead 24% of all enterprises and organizations in Kazakhstan.

Gender related Development Index (GDI)

During 1999-2003, there was positive growth in the GDI in all three dimensions - life expectancy, access to education and GDP per capita.

In the index, a gap in life expectancy in favour of women is compensated for by an even larger gap in income levels in favour of men. In 2003, life expectancy for men was 11 years less than for women (60.5 and 71.5 years, respectively), while the average nominal wage of women in all branches of the economy was only 60.8% of men's, and GDP per capita was 2.1 times less for women (USD 4,200 and USD 9,000, respectively).

The Human Development Index and GDI both improved during the same period (1999-2003) indicating progress in the human development indicators for both women and men.

Social and economic changes during the past decade were characterized by two opposite views of the roles of men and women in the society - the conservative and pro-equality views. The transition period from the communist regime delivered a hard and as yet uncompensated blow to women's status in society and the labour market by significantly changing the gender composition of leadership, political posts, wage employment, unemployment, etc. Women have lost the social protection and the social status they enjoyed during the previous regime, and have become responsible for the economic survival and socio-psychological

preservation of the family. This however has not led to changes in gender ideology in society.

But it would be wrong to say that men benefited from the historical change in the structure of society. Men's conditions deteriorated in health status, life expectancy, mortality from cardio-vascular disease, education potential, employment opportunities for people over 40-45, labour migration from rural to urban areas, and uncertainty about the future. Every third man and almost half of women have incomes below the subsistence minimum (33.2% and 44.9%, respectively).⁵

The social price of the transition has been very high for both men and women and will hardly be compensated for soon.

Regional disparities

Economic growth in Kazakhstan is gender-imbalanced. Women's access to and control over economic resources is still minimal. Rapid development of the mining industry and the financial sector has primarily benefited men.

The gap in men's and women's wages is widest in regions with high gross regional product per capita, mainly where the mining industry is concentrated. In regions dominated by oil-and-gas industrial activities, there are significant disparities between the proportion of people below the subsistence minimum in urban and rural areas. In high-income regions, there is also a large gap between female and male unemployment, in favour of men. In Astana, the figures are 13.0% and 4.25%; in Aktobe, 13.3% and 6.0%; and in Atyrau, 12.2% and 7.1%. In Astana, women's prevalence among the unemployed is due to the high demand for men in construction, transport, communications and service industries. Men benefit more from economic growth in dynamically developing regions.

It is not clear what the impact is of foreign direct investment (FDI) on women's status, quality and stability of employment, re-training, income growth, social protection and labour conditions. Forty-six per cent of FDI is in oil and gas extraction, and only 10% is invested in the processing industry, half of which in metallurgy. This industry is dominated by men. The female-dominated clothing manufacturing and food industries and other female sectors are recovering more slowly.

Regional aspects of poverty are closely related to gender. High rates of economic growth in oil-rich regions only widen the gender gap in income levels and unemployment with respect to rural areas. Men and cities benefit from economic growth while women and villages are left behind.

A national plan without funding

During the transition period the Government demonstrated its commitment to gender equality. The former Family and Women's Affairs and Demo-

graphic Policy Council was established under the President of Kazakhstan in 1993 and women's empowerment has been gradually evolving since then. In 1998 the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs was created.

To implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Government adopted the National Action Plan on Improving Status of Women (1999). The Government estimates that 80% of the plan had been implemented by 2002. The Concept of Gender Policy in Kazakhstan adopted in 2003 for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), continues the ideology of previous National Action Plans and has no targeted financing.

Since 2004 the Commission has been developing the Gender Equality Strategy for 2005-2015. It includes measures for achieving gender equality in the areas of legislation, social policy, political and social life, economy, health protection, information policy, culture, education and science, as well as counteracting trafficking and violence against women and children.

An unresponsive government

At the executive level however there is still a lack of understanding or only a formal acknowledgement of the importance of a gender-oriented approach to development programmes.

The first attempt to introduce gender planning was made in the Perspective Plan of the Government for 2001-2005, in a section called The Participation of Women in Development. Gender indicators are also included in the Strategic Development Plan up to 2010⁶ as well as in the Concept of Gender Policy (2003) developed for the achievement of the MDGs. The wording of the latter, however, is vague: "Special programmes that take into account women interests will be integrated in the national and regional investment programmes".

Attempts by the donor community to help introduce gender analysis and assessment into the country's large-scale development projects has gradually started to yield results by expanding the political field of ideology and gender equality policy.

Experts note that official acknowledgement of the importance of gender policy is often met with unconscious resistance on the part of people who implement national programmes such as civil servants and managers. Official government documents and addresses often contain concepts such as "woman-mother" and "hearth-keeper," which emphasize the traditional domestic and reproductive roles of women in society. Gender policy is imposed from above and is still perceived as an unavoidable aspect of international policy. It is seen as an obligation the country holds as a UN member and as a "democratic, secular, law-abiding and social state",⁷ rather than a concept relevant to Kazakhstan.

For example, Kazakhstan was the last CIS country to ratify the Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1998, but the first to ratify its Optional Protocol in 2001. Although fast to join numerous international conventions and agreements, the Government is not quick to adopt national laws. Without national laws the political promotion of the gender concept is highly problematic.

Pending legislative projects

In the past years, the Government has resisted the introduction of two laws: On Equal Rights of Women and Men in Kazakhstan and On Counteracting and Preventing Domestic Violence. Both draft laws have passed an international peer review and were repeatedly discussed at the meetings between the Government, international organizations and experts, and women's NGOs.

To date the efforts of the Commission in promoting new and amending existing laws have been insufficient. The status of the Commission and its weak influence on the country's policy provide no grounds for optimism. As pointed out in a report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe "without active involvement of the President and the Government, it is very hard to raise interest in gender issues"⁸

The main gender policy initiatives and decisions stem from the President, while the Commission only undertakes their implementation with the help of international funding and expertise, regional administrative resources and ideological support from the women's movement. Without international funding and the human capital of women's NGOs, the State's gender policy would become economically and ideologically bankrupt.

To explain the slow progress in the status of women, the Government points to a "lack of understanding of the nature and importance of gender issues among the general public"⁹ The Government and the Commission also remain undecided about their stand on gender quotas recommended by Article 4 of the CEDAW. Concealed aversion to gender equality on the part of the executive branch, inhibition of vitally important laws, lack of support of gender quotas, weak institutional status of the National Commission, absence of direct financing of gender programmes are all factors that hamper the achievement of gender equality in the country.

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5 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *National Human Development Report 2000* Kazakhstan. 2001, p. 24.

6 Second Periodical Report of the Republic of Kazakhstan. "On implementing the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women". Draft. September 2004, p. 14.

7 Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Article 1, p. 1.

8 Gatterer, E. *Gender Analysis of Parliamentary elections to Mazhilis (House of Representatives) in Kazakhstan*. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (unpublished). 19 September 2004 p. 17.

9 Second Periodical Report of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *op cit*, p. 10.



women members than the statutory 33% of all seats. Again, “the Southern states are faring better in promoting leadership compared to Northern States.”³⁵ In some states there are all-female Panchayats doing commendable work, especially in the field of primary education. However there are serious impediments to women leaders’ work due to illiteracy, patriarchal traditions and restrictions resulting from the social structure. Some of the problems emanate from the reluctance and lack of confidence of governmental officials at higher levels. Fiscal decentralization is the most commonly experienced problem faced by Panchayats.

The new Panchayati Raj institutions have brought women into local governance institutions but political empowerment is unable to flourish because of male-dominated political process, institutions, social structures and norms.

At higher institutional and decision-making levels women’s representation remains extremely limited. A recent ranking of countries according to the percentage of women in national parliament placed India 93rd on the list of 185 countries.³⁶ In the *Lok Sabha* (House of the People) there are only 45 women out of 543 parliamentarians, approximately 8.3%. Out of a total of 242 *Rajya sabha* (Council of States) members, only 28 are women, a mere 11.6%.

Conclusions

In spite of definite improvements in the status of women since independence, the picture remains bleak. This is especially true with respect to poverty, employment, health care and education. Social and political empowerment has indeed taken place but in the absence of complementary economic empowerment, women remain impoverished and excluded. Development agencies advocate the “creation of an enabling legal, social and economic environment (as of utmost importance) for achieving poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment goals”.³⁷ ■

35 *Ibid.*

36 Inter Parliamentary Union. “Women in National Parliaments”. 28 February 2005.

37 United Nations. “Poverty in a Globalizing World at Different Stages of Women’s Life Cycle”, 19 November 2001.

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Gender inequality is one of the structural socio-cultural causes hampering development in Kazakhstan. This inequality stems from the legacy of past historic periods along with factors such as a traditional culture with weak democratic values,

paternalistic relations in society, peculiarities of economic activity, dependence on mining industries, weak infrastructure, regional disparities, and unsustainable use of environmental resources. These causes lead to insufficient participation of women in different sectors of society, their exposure to various risks, and a growth in discrimination and sexism.¹⁰

Kazakhstan has the potential to achieve gender equality by 2015. The issue now is how this potential will be developed and used, how deep the institutional and cultural changes in the society will go, and whether new threats to equality might arise. ■

10 *Kazakhstan: Achievement, Issues and Prospects. A Perspective by the United Nations*. 2004, p. 50.

LEBANON

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Conclusion

Lebanon is still far from completing its commitments to the CEDAW due to the large number of violations of women’s rights, both in law and in practice. Even the legal amendments made to reduce gender bias need monitoring mechanisms to ensure their proper implementation. Reducing poverty and poverty feminization are not yet a priority for the Government.

This absence of governmental will combined with an infrastructure which does not cater to women’s needs and rights, assigns non-governmental organizations (NGOs) a major role in this respect. NGOs have made significant efforts in the enforcement of international conventions in Lebanon. The national action plan focused on women’s empowerment through services and activities provided by NGOs, such as private and micro-credit, education, and training.

Although the NGO sector was responsible for much of the progress made in this field, its work remains controversial. In general, the work of NGOs is a micro-effort focused on specific communities. Many NGOs are religious institutions and provide welfare in the form of charity to the mothers, daughters or sisters of men on religious grounds and not as women in their own right. Also due to the large number of NGOs in Lebanon, their efforts are scattered and often overlap. This is compounded by the fact that the priorities of many NGOs are imposed by their funding institutions and are therefore not based on prevailing needs.

Welfare and charity are simply not enough to create sustainable change. Structural changes are required which no actor can undertake alone. The State, which is the only legislator and guarantor

of responsibilities and rights, must provide a suitable environment so that the private sector, civil society organizations, the media, and men and women, can realize their share of responsibility and create incentives that will enable women to change the reality around them and to actively claim their rights as equal human beings. ■

NETHERLANDS

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Conclusion

In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015 we must learn from the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The UN MDG Review Summit is the arena for deciding on the relevant issues which have cropped up during other world conferences. The Netherlands is a key player in the preparation phase of the MDG Review Summit and therefore CSOs call on the Government to become a true leader. The emphasis must lie on the following:

- The seven strategies on gender must be incorporated. CSOs demand that these strategies also be integrated into Dutch policies, including those on development cooperation.
- In education world leaders should focus more on countries where girls do not go to school and on situations in which girls are restrained from attending school due to child labour and HIV/AIDS, for example.
- HIV/AIDS has created an unprecedented situation, which needs a strong response. Socially sensitive subjects related to the disease must be openly discussed.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights must be incorporated into MDG 5 as a new target.
- World leaders should counteract neoconservative forces which promote the ABC Approach and resist abortion, thus hindering the success of MDG 5.
- There are still inadequate funds available to meet the MDGs and therefore the many countries who do not yet meet the set goal of 0.7% ODA should do so as soon as possible. ■