

Everyday life is another question

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Oil and budget surplus

Kazakhstan owns more than half the discovered and about 80% of projected oil resources in the Caspian Sea. However, developing Kazakhstan's oil is more important for political and socio-economic development of the country than it is for the world hydrocarbon market. On the global scale, Kazakhstan's oil is not very significant. It is estimated that by 2010, oil production in this region will constitute only 3-4% of the world's oil market, while Middle East oil will prevail as usual, with 25-35% depending on the market conditions.¹

It is taken for granted that oil revenues will promote political stability and national unity, reduce ethnic tensions, increase living standards for all population groups, and strengthen the authority and political position of the ruling circles.

Foreign companies produce more than 80% of Kazakhstan's oil. The oil and gas sector is the principal taxpayer, contributing to budget saturation. *"In the first half of 2001, oil companies paid 79% of the total tax and fiscal payments from mineral resource companies in the country; USD 19.2 million was spent by oil companies directly in the social sphere and on local infrastructure; taxes worth USD 25.9 million went to social programmes."*² Oil revenues are paid to the National Oil Fund and comprise USD 1.1 billion. A special development bank was established to manage the funds.

The year 2001 (excluding the last two months) was auspicious. Because of oil trading, the country has an 11.7% budget surplus, ie, a KZT 51.5 billion (USD 350 million) surplus in a budget of KZT 489 billion (USD 3.3 billion). This surplus goes to the Development Bank and is allocated to defence (considering the military situation in Central Asia), law enforcement and investment projects.

Despite the budget surplus, the government has not responded to proposals by ministries and independent bodies to increase targeted aid to the poor, lower the pension age, and compensate the nuclear victims of Semipalatinsk. As has been the experience in Venezuela, Nigeria, Iraq and Iran, huge oil profits do not mean huge benefits to the whole nation, but rather the opposite - accelerated stratification and impoverishment of society. As a result of corruption and the growing disparity between poor and rich, oil and gas revenues are not being used to maintain social stability.

Gender policy: everyday life is another question

A progressive gender policy is being implemented. A national policy to improve women's status has been developed (1999). Its main priorities are involvement of women in public life, equal rights in the labour market, health, and combating violence in family life. A National Action Plan has been developed to improve the position of women. The draft law "Regarding Equal Rights and Opportunities" is under consideration in Parliament. Women constitute 54% of employees in government policy-making agencies. There are 150 registered women's NGOs in the country, and there is even a women's party – the Democratic Party of Kazakhstani Women. In 2002, a credit line worth USD 1 million is earmarked for women's businesses.

For the first time, gender aspects have been integrated into *economic* planning. The national poverty and unemployment reduction programme for 2003-2007 takes into account gender poverty aspects. There is other evidence that gender policy is quickly being mainstreamed. Gender education is being institutionalised in schools and universities, and gender education of civil servants is becoming a reality.

How these policies affect the everyday life of ordinary women and men is another question. The answer paints a gloomy picture.

Diminishing access and control of resources

Women's access and control of economic resources is minimal. Trade liberalisation directly affects the labour market, causing deepening horizontal and vertical occupational segregation.

In Kazakhstan, women are concentrated in such sectors as health care and social services (83%), education (77%), hotels and restaurants (75%), and finance (66%). Males predominate in construction (81%), agriculture, hunting and forestry (77%), fishing and fish farming (74%), mining (75%), energy (72%), transport and communications (67%), processing (64%), and public administration (60%).

Seventy-six per cent of senior officials and their deputies in local governments are men. Women hold 54% of the jobs in central and local governments, but constitute only 9% and 11% of political officials in local and central governments respectively. The most visible male predominance is in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (84%), Agency for Investments (65%), and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (62%). Regionally, southern provinces maintain a stronger traditional gender culture and political officials are predominately male: Southern Kazakhstan (70%), Zhambyl (60%) and Kyzylorda (58%).

1 Jaffe Emi. "To unveil the treasure: Power sources and future of Central Asia and Kazakhstan". *Central Asia: Human Development Prospects, 2010*. UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS, 1999, p. 30.

2 "Oil sector as the key for economic stability." Interview with B. Elemanov, Kazakhstan's First Vice-Minister for power, energy and mineral resources. *Continent*, No. 18 (56), 2001, p. 18.

The jobless rate among women 60%, and female unemployment is persistent. Women constitute 60% of registered unemployed.

Is women's week nine days long?

According to estimates of Kazakhstani statisticians³, women do three times the housework of men, and the time women and men spend bringing up children is nearly equal. If we sum up the total hours women spend on housework, we find that women put in two days more per week than men. Thus, women have less time for resting, eating and sleeping, not to mention personal development and professional advancement. In 2000, the gap in male-female leisure time averaged about 15 hours per week in urban areas, while in rural areas it was about 22 hours.⁴

60.4% of male salaries

In 2000, average monthly female salaries and wages were 60.4% of corresponding male salaries and wages in all spheres of the economy. This is explained by the fact that women are concentrated in the low-wage sectors of the economy, with men holding the higher-paid positions within those sectors. Women are either not admitted to the high-wage sectors and high-paid positions ("glass ceiling" phenomenon), or they are forced out of them.

In other words, growth and stabilisation of the economy and financial market has been more positive for male incomes. According to some estimates, approximately 44.9% of women and 33.2% of men have incomes below the living wage.

The Poverty Reduction Programme targets increased jobs in the production sector, although women are historically engaged in processing activities. Women are retrained in the framework of traditional employment, and women do not switch to men's jobs. Women's business sectors (food processing, dairy, garment-making) are not a high priority and are under-funded by the government.

Specific gender differences are barely considered in social security programmes. Women with low incomes are entitled to maternity and child benefits. No other payments depend on the gender of a beneficiary.

"Female" micro-credit

According to data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 1.8 million people received targeted social assistance from local budgets in 2000. The average monthly benefit was KZT 3,391 (less than USD 24). Approximately 63% of benefit receivers are women. In 2001, KZT 8,813 million (about USD 60 million) in local budgets was allocated to targeted social assistance.

The NGO "Microcredit" was established to implement the government's micro-credit programme. It provides credit up to an amount of USD 400 at an annual rate of 5% for up to 18 months. According to data presented by the National Commission for Family and Women's Affairs under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, more than 20,000 micro loans totalling KZT 630 million (approx. USD 4.5 million) were awarded in the last two and a half years. Two-thirds of these were granted to rural female entrepreneurs.

Micro-credit programmes are widespread among NGOs. Many large organisations specialise in micro-credit. The Kazakhstani Community Credit Fund, with offices in Taldykorgan and Shymkent, awarded 20,000 loans totalling USD 4.7 million since late 1997 to support small entrepreneurs. Eighty-six per cent of their clientele are women. Loans are awarded on the basis of a group guarantee with no collateral. Group members confirm applications for credit, admit new members and settle disputes among their members. Disbursement of the first credit line takes 10-15 days, and further credits are awarded as soon as previous loans are paid off. As a result of the Fund, about 500 enterprises were established and 900 jobs created in Taldykorgan and Shymkent. Most of these enterprises were set up by women with two and more dependents.

Micro-credit programmes for women constitute a common strategy to deal with female poverty. Unfortunately, these programmes foster employment based on roles traditionally considered as "feminine" and their inclusion in "non-traditional areas". Women sew garments, quilts, bedspreads, raise poultry, open small shops, develop Kazakh handicrafts, etc.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) poses another problem for the quality and stability of jobs created under the micro-credit programmes, in terms of its impact on training, income, social security, and working conditions. FDI favours the male dominated oil and gas industry, while reconstruction of sewing, food and other women's enterprises is going slowly.

Kazakhstan has an external debt of USD 2.9 billion⁵ plus USD 684.4 million in government-guaranteed loans (April 2000), with annual repayments of over USD 126 million. The debt has a high social cost, particularly a hidden cost on women. As a result of the hardships they suffer, many married couples and single women delay indefinitely the birth of a second or even a first child. ■

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3 M. Amirkhanova. "Modern status of gender statistics in Kazakhstan." Kazakh Statistical Agency, 1999.

4 "Males and females of Kazakhstan." Kazakh Statistical Agency. Almaty, 2001.

5 According to the Human Development Report 2000, UNDP, total external debt of Kazakhstan amounted to USD 5.714 billion in 1998.