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GENDER PROBLEMS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. Kazakhstan is a Central Asian Republic that gained its independence in 1991 after being a part of the Soviet Union for 73 years. It is the ninth largest country in the world, sharing a border with Russia to the north, China to the east and Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to the south. Kazakhstan is rich with the natural resources and 85 percent of its exports are oil, base metals and gas. The government of Kazakhstan has taken certain steps for the past several years to address the issues of gender equality. For example, in 1998 Kazakhstan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Many Central Asian families, meanwhile, have strong prescribed gender roles. Women are subservient and often fall victim to violence and abuse from husbands and in-laws. Moreover, demographic issues are linked with gender problems, because if women are secured, the level of birth rate also can increase, which may lead to overall rise in the population. So gender problems are interlinked with demographical goal of a rise in the number of population in Kazakhstan.

Key words: genders, female roles, Central Asia, Kazakhstan.

According to old Kazakh proverb "a frog-headed [stupid] man is better than a golden-headed [intelligent] woman." It is tempting to suggest that the proverb reflects the overall attitude toward women in Central Asia. Gender stereotypes and discriminatory legislation continue to hinder women's ability to pursue careers in politics, business, and many other fields. Nonetheless, hope remains. For example, an unprecedented number of women have taken up seats in Kazakhstan's new parliament. The Soviet state introduced equal gender rights and formal equality under law, including quotas. Many parents who received Soviet educations encouraged their daughters to study and pursue professional opportunities. All that changed in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Women began losing ground as traditional gender stereotypes returned in the newly independent Central Asian republics. Many Central Asian families, meanwhile, have strong prescribed gender roles. Women are subservient and often fall victim to violence and abuse from husbands and in-laws. The main role in husband family plays his mother “apa”, and she will determine how well or a bad could be new wife’ (kelin) life. It’s widely spread that youngest ot single son has to live with his parents even after marriage. Traditionally it prevents a good care for seniors, parents but this could cause a huge generation conflict in a family. Older generation were born in Soviet time and have different values compare with youth.

The focus of gender studies are cultural and social factors that determine society’s attitude towards men and women, the behavior of individuals in connection with belonging to a particular gender, stereotypes of male and female qualities – all that takes a gender perspective from the field of biology to the sphere of social life and culture. The gender studies in the field of pedagogy and teaching methodologies are of particular relevance and research capacity, because in these areas of knowledge gender studies have a strongly marked applied character and can be directly applied in practice. That is why issues such as the possibility of implementing gender mainstreaming in education, the role of secondary and higher schools in the process of gender socialization, training of teachers and lecturers taking into account the gender component, as well as taking into consideration gender differences of students in their education deserve great attention, liveliest discussions with the purpose of their thinking and solutions in today’s society [1, 2].

Islam's Role

Rebuilding nationalism in post-Soviet Central Asia also meant a revival of Islam. Islamic scholars such as Sheikh Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, based in the Uzbek capital Tashkent, say Islam grants equal rights to women and men. "One of the longest surah [chapter] of the Koran is called 'Women,'" Yusuf says. "In this and some other surah, Allah stated that women are equal to men as human beings. In some aspects, they are even greater than

men; and women are holders of all human rights. As Hadith [the second major source of Islamic rules after the Koran] say, our Prophet, may peace be upon Him, also stated women's greatness and demonstrated in practice how to respect women." Nonetheless, many women find it difficult to find support among their male relatives or religious scholars themselves. Gender stereotypes are rooted not only in religious traditions, of course, but also in lifestyles. Sedentary Central Asian women had to cover themselves in "paranja" as they stepped out of the women's portion of the house, whereas nomadic Kazakh and Kyrgyz women were free of veils, as they had to ride horses and work in activities, like herding, alongside men [3].

Financial Burdens

Burdened with stereotypes, Central Asian women have also had to cope with economic hardship, including unemployment and poverty. Many have had to become their family's main breadwinner. In some cases, this has opened up opportunities to pursue careers in business -- a field that so far has proven more welcoming to women than politics. Kyrgyzstan, where women have historically been politically active, is illustrative. Not a single woman took up a parliamentary seat or senior government post after the February 2005 parliamentary elections and the subsequent revolution that ousted former President Askar Akaev. In Kazakhstan Vice-president Dariga Nazarbayeva supports female participation in policy. But we have to mention that she also has a strong family background, her father is a current president of country.

The government recognizes that the underrepresentation of women in political office is a critical problem, and officials have spoken out in favor of increasing the number of women in government. Yet there have been only limited initiatives to remedy the situation, and women remain a minority among parliamentarians, ministers, and executive branch officials, including akims (representatives of the president) and heads of the akimat (the executive office of a municipal, district, or regional government). This raises questions about the extent to which women's views and concerns are reflected in policy making, given women's low levels of representation among decision makers. Meaningful participation of women should include their full involvement in planning, agenda setting, and implementation.

Concerning women's role in the political life of the country, the situation has not altered significantly for a ten year period. In 2001 the rate of women employed by the state was 55.2 percent compared to 56.6 percent in 2011. [2]. However, it is worth noting that the state employees include such professions as teachers and doctors, positions of which are historically dominated by women. In order to understand the real impact of women on political life, it is necessary to explore their number in the leading and administrative positions, which is 9.5 percent in 2011. This figure remains stable during past decade, with 9.6 percent of women having leading positions earlier in 2001. The number of women in the Majilis (lower chamber of the Parliament) has experienced a dramatic improvement due to the government's policy of expanding party lists for seats for women. Past elections showed that from 10.4 percent to 17.8 percent of women were elected to be the Majilis deputies. The figure for 2012 appears to be 24.3 percent which is an apparent progress. Despite such positive trend, the situation in the Senate, which is a higher chamber of the Parliament, is not so favorable. Only 4.3 percent of women hold the positions in the Senate, which represent two women – Senators in the last call of January 2012 [5]. Having observed the political engagement of women, several inferences can be drawn. First, the number of women – Senators may be low because of cultural stereotypes that men should work while their wives should take care of the house and children, therefore, not many women can be elected to a high ranking position. Secondly, it might be the case that women themselves choose not to devote their large amount of time to deal with governmental issues, driving by the thought that they should make a choice between career and family with mostly choosing the latter. Working as a Chairwoman in a Senator requires much time contribution and strong emotional self-control, and women sometimes make a decision not to pursue these kinds of positions.

One reason for women's under-representation in the business sector is their lack of knowledge, skills and financing, caused by poor access to education and credit. The evidence shows that increasing women's involvement in enterprise benefits the economy as a whole, and small and medium-scale businesses run by women are often more profitable than those managed by men.

International research, donor and development organizations are now doing more to address this issue and in recent years, a number of initiatives have been launched to boost women's role in the economy and public life. The CGIAR Consortium is no exception. For example, all CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs), must develop a clear strategy on gender. In Central Asia, where a high percentage of the population lives in rural areas, the CRP on Dryland Systems is focusing on creating employment opportunities for rural women as a way of increasing incomes and spurring economic development in the Action Sites in that region [4].

The extent to which women in Kazakhstan will benefit from economic growth depends greatly on how they are positioned in the labor market. Women are less active than men in the formal economy, and opportunities for them still mainly lie in the informal sector or in self-employment. This reflects the general expectation that women will be primarily responsible for childcare and unpaid domestic work. The labor market exhibits distinct gender patterns, with women overly represented in public sector jobs (e.g., health care and education) which offer the lowest salaries,