



Advocacy Card

Addressing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EC Development Cooperation with Kazakhstan

International Gender Policy Network

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has made commitments to promote gender equality and women's empowerment outside its borders. As stated in the "2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality Between Women and Men", "Gender equality is a goal in itself, a human right and contributes to reducing poverty. The EU is a key player in international development efforts and adheres to internationally recognised principles such as the Millennium Development Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). It has reaffirmed gender equality as one of the five key principles of the development policy in the European Consensus on development."¹ Although the EU's different levels of commitment provide developing countries with opportunities to address gender inequalities on their domestic soil, challenges remain to bring these commitments into effect.

Civil society organizations point at the gap between policy and practice: an overview of the European Commission's annual work, legislative programmes and policy strategy documents reveals a limited integration of gender concerns.² Furthermore, the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) and mainly women's groups in policy discussion and formulation lacks a clear mechanism, despite the obligation of EU institutions to support a political dialogue with them.³ As an active promoter of gender equality, the International Gender Policy Network (IGPN) intends to engage in a dialogue with the Commission's Delegations in the countries of Eastern Europe, South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in the matter of the upcoming revision of the country and regional strategy documents (Country Strategy Papers, Regional Strategy Papers) due to take place in 2009. The IGPN has taken the opportunity of the midterm-review of the country/regional strategy documents to highlight the weaknesses of development cooperation in terms of gender concerns, and to advocate for improvements.

Within the framework of this advocacy activity, the IGPN has prepared twenty two Advocacy Cards for individual countries linked with IGPN, and one common Regional Advocacy Card. The aim of this advocacy work is to remind the European and national representatives of their policy commitments. The Advocacy Card for EC development cooperation with Kazakhstan firstly provides an overview of EU's commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. Secondly, the Regional Strategy Paper for Central Asia is examined in the context of the EU's commitments to gender equality. Next, an assessment of the gender aspect of development cooperation projects in Kazakhstan is presented. Finally, recommendations are proposed to the actors involved in various degrees in the preparation of the Regional Strategy Paper: the EU officials, national government and civil society organizations.

¹ A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010, *European Community*, (COM 2006) 92 final, p. 9, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0092:FIN:EN:PDF>

² Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, p. 10
<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

³ For more information see Chapter 2 in Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007
<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- ❖ A commitment to gender equality is reflected in a number of politically and legally binding documents of the EU and EC (Treaty of Amsterdam, Maastricht Treaty, Charter for Fundamental Rights of the EU, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals).
- ❖ The promotion of gender equality outside the EU is outlined as the number 6 priority area of the **2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men** (Commissions' Communication). This priority is further detailed as follows: 6.1 Enforcement of EU legislation in acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries and 6.2 Promotion of gender equality in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), external and development policies. The key actions taken by the Commission will include monitoring and promoting gender mainstreaming and specific measures in the ENP, EU external relations and development policies, at policy dialogue and programming levels (Regional/Country Strategy Papers and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers); at implementation level, particular attention will be devoted to gender mainstreaming in the new aid modalities (budget support and sector programmes).
- ❖ In terms of the EU development cooperation policy, the crucial policy framework for promoting gender equality is the European Consensus on Development, agreed upon in 2005 by the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and the representatives of the member states, where gender equality is defined as a cross-cutting issue.⁴ Furthermore, the **2007 Commission Communication on "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation"** is the first step towards a coordinated European approach to promoting gender equality and empowering women through development cooperation.⁵
- ❖ Related to the 2007 Commission Communication is the document "Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States", also known as the **Council Conclusion**. One of the conclusions is the following: "The Council recognizes the Commission's and the Member States' specific responsibility to support developing country partners in eliminating discrimination and gender inequality by increasing visibility and accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation and to promote and engage in an enhanced political dialogue at all levels, including the highest political level, which incorporates gender equality explicitly as a central theme."⁶
- ❖ In line with these documents, the EU has supported a **twin-track approach: gender mainstreaming** (mainstreaming gender issues into all aspects of development policy) and **specific measures** aimed at socioeconomic and political empowerment of women.

⁴ "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting with the Council on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation, *Council of the European Union*, 15 May 2007, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st09/st09561.en07.pdf>

GENDER IN REGIONAL STRATEGY PAPER FOR CENTRAL ASIA

Preface to the RSP

The Regional Strategy Paper (RSP) is the EC's main programming tool which sets policy objectives and priorities of the EC's assistance to a particular region over a given period of time. The RSP for Central Asia covers financial assistance on both a regional level, and for each country individually, for the period of 2007-2013.⁷ The RSP consists of five main sections: EC cooperation objectives; the partner countries' national policy agenda; an assessment of the political, economic and social situation of each country; an overview of past and ongoing EC cooperation; and the EC response strategy.

The Central Asia strategy has been developed in consultation with the authorities of the partner countries of the region, and the Member States and other donors have been consulted during the drafting process.⁸ The EC Delegations in partner countries are responsible for the formulation, implementation and monitoring of development programmes at country level and for organising a dialogue with civil society organizations.⁹ In relation to gender issues, each delegation has a Gender Focal Point and assistance is also available from the gender desks in Brussels. Furthermore, there are various gender mainstreaming tools available to the European officials, such as Gender guidelines for Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) and Mid-Term Review of CSPs.

Analysis of the RSP from a Gender Perspective

The RSP mentions gender in one instance in Chapter 5 (The EC Response Strategy, p. 31): "Gender issues and environmental concerns as important cross-cutting issues for the region will be integrated, as far as possible into the design of programmes relating to all the key issues outlined above, notably in poverty reduction and educational /capacity building programmes." Several references to gender are made indirectly with regards to poverty reduction in line with the MDGs. Furthermore, the Country Analysis of the RSP (Annex 5, p. 50) mentions that agriculture (which is Tajikistan's most important employment sector), particularly the cotton sector, is characterized by child labour and unpaid women labour. Moreover, the Country Analysis makes a remark about gender equality as being among the government's priorities for achieving the goals of poverty reduction and MDG indicators. Nevertheless, in a 61-page-long document, these are the only statements that concern gender equality.

Although the EC's Roadmap specifies promotion of gender mainstreaming at policy, programming and implementation levels, this approach is lacking in the RSP for Central Asia. The RSP does not mention gender issues with regards to reduction of poverty, health issues such as HIV, education, etc. In contrast, environmental problems as another cross-cutting issue are defined in details as a key issue to be addressed. This may indicate that a gender specialist, unlike an environmental specialist, did not participate in the preparation of the RSP. Furthermore, the only indicator (Annex II of the RSP) related to gender equality is the "Women's percentage share of paid employment (MDG3)." Goal number 3 of the MDGs is to promote gender equality and empower women; to accomplish this goal, however, gender

⁷ Regional Strategy Paper for Central Asia for the period 2007-2013, *European Community*, p. 3
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, p. 70
<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

issues must be addressed in a broader context, and thus, indicators should be available for instance for the education enrolment of girls, poverty monitoring, etc.

DIALOGUE WITH EC DELEGATION¹⁰

According to the Delegation of the European Commission for the Republic of Kazakhstan, accredited by the Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Tajikistan, the mid-term review of the Regional Strategy for Central Asia will follow the established procedures. However, at this point and time the Delegation is not in the position to provide more detailed information since the revision process has no fixed schedule yet. Nonetheless, the Delegation stresses that gender equality is high on the EU's assistance strategy, adding that within the last couple of years the EC Delegation in Kazakhstan has financed at least 8 women's projects and at least in 6 more projects gender issues were mainstreamed.

IGPN'S ASSESSMENT OF GENDER ISSUES IN KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan's transition period since its independence in 1991 has been accompanied by difficulties in the realms of politics, economy and social services. Despite the steady economic growth since 1999, Kazakhstan remains a low income country, where women are especially vulnerable to poverty due to the patriarchal traditions of the Kazakh society. Women face discrimination in the labour market, earn less money and are responsible for the households and child care; other problems include low maternal health, domestic violence, low representation of women in politics, etc. In terms of gender relations, there is a rather strong resistance among men to the changing role of women in society. Both men and women have experienced psychological stress from the rapid social and economic changes: with their self-definition as breadwinner undermined by unemployment and the loss of economic security, men have tended to become abusive toward themselves, through excessive alcohol use, and their families, especially in the form of domestic violence; women have become discouraged and depressed as their time becomes stretched and their professional skills undermined by low wages and layoffs.¹¹ To a certain degree, gender concerns have been addressed by the Kazakh government and by international donors, including the EU.

In 1998, the National Commission on Women and Family Affairs was established by the Kazakh president Nazarbayev, followed by the creation of a National Action Plan to improve the status of women. Furthermore, there is a parliamentary group called Otbasy responsible for pushing for issues concerning family, women, health and vulnerable groups, and for drafting gender-related laws.¹² However, observers say that commitment of the government is more theoretical than practical. Commenting on the slow progress regarding the improvement of the status of women, the government refers to the "lack of understanding of the nature and importance of gender issues among the general public."¹³ According to a report from the Swedish agency SIDA, the implementation of the laws is limited in many cases by the lack of a mechanism to implement it – for example the laws have been passed by

¹⁰ Information in this section has been obtained through email communication of IGPN with the EC Delegation and desk officers in Brussels

¹¹ Country Gender Assessment: Kazakhstan, *Asian Development Bank*, p. 10, <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Country-Gender-Assessments/cga-kaz.pdf>

¹² Gender Projects in Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Ukraine, *SIDA*, 2005, p. 56

¹³ MDGs in Kazakhstan, *UNDP Report*, 2005, http://www.undp.kz/library_of_publications/files/1570-43657.pdf

the governments but the district courts are not adequately informed as to how to put them into practice.¹⁴ Swedish organizations have, along with other international donors, helped to address gender equality in their development cooperation with Kazakhstan.

The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has its regional office directly in Kazakhstan and supports gender issues in Kazakhstan through various projects. The EC Delegation in Kazakhstan functions as the central office for the region of Central Asia, working closely also with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In 2007, the EC financed the following gender-related projects: Creation of the City Net of NPO for Work with Senior Citizens, Amplification of the Struggle against the Trafficking of People in the Frontier Areas of the Almaty Area, Formation of a Female Rural Network of the Frontier Areas of the Almaty Area for the Protection of Human Rights, Women in Prisons, Strengthening Civil Society through Gender Policy Integration in Rural Cross-border and Conflict Prone Areas. In total, gender-focused projects consisted of 19.11 % of the total EC support in 2007. As for the EC projects, at the moment, there is no further information accessible to examine the impact of the projects in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the EU:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To integrate gender issues in all stages of country programming and project cycle (formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation)
- To apply gender mainstreaming into the priority areas of the RSP
- To strengthen human resources of Gender Desks and Gender Focal Points
- To increase the transparency of political dialogue with civil society in partner countries
- To follow the twin-track approach, and besides having gender equality as a cross-cutting issue, to encourage specific projects on women in calls for proposals
- To help ensure the financial sustainability of women's NGOs
- To push the Kazakh government to address gender concerns on the level of policy as well as practice

Recommendations to the National Government:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To address gender concerns on the level of policy as well as practice
- To give special attention to funds allocation to women's organizations and their initiatives aimed at addressing women's issues
- To give special attention to the rural areas of the country

Recommendations to the CSOs

- To lobby the national government to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment
- To build alliances among women's organizations in order to strengthen the impact of their lobbying and advocacy activities
- To engage in an active dialogue with the EC Delegation in Kazakhstan
- To provide shadow reports to the government reports on gender equality commitments
- To monitor gender issues in the EC's development cooperation

¹⁴ Gender Projects in Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Ukraine, *SIDA*, 2005, p. 56

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