



Advocacy Card

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

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 Azerbaijan firstly provides an overview of EU's commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. Secondly, the Country Strategy Paper for Azerbaijan is examined in the context of the EU's commitments to gender equality. Next, an assessment of major gender issues in Azerbaijan is presented. Finally, recommendations are proposed to the actors involved in various degrees in the preparation of the Country 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 THE COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER FOR AZERBAIJAN

Preface to the CSP

The Country Strategy Paper (CSP) is the EC's main programming tool which sets the policy objectives and priorities of the EC's assistance to a particular country over a given period of time. The CSPs consist of five main sections: EC cooperation objectives; the partner country's national policy agenda; assessment of the political, economic and social situation; assessment of past and ongoing EC cooperation; and the EC response strategy. Gender equality issues should be reflected in each section of the CSP.⁷

The CSPs are drafted on the basis of a dialogue between the EC Delegation and Brussels, the Member States' embassies, government ministries and civil society in the country.⁸ 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 the Mid-Term Review of CSPs. The Mid-Term Review process presents an important opportunity to address the mainstreaming of gender equality in the 'first generation' of CSPs and to examine the adequacy of the treatment of gender issues section by section, as indicated in the EC's Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in EC Development Cooperation.⁹

Analysis of the CSP from a Gender Perspective

Reference to gender is made in the EC's response strategy: "Gender will be mainstreamed as far as possible, as a cross-cutting issue, into the design of programmes relating to all the key issues mentioned in this document." (p. 19) In an analysis of Azerbaijan's social development, gender indicators concerning life expectancy and maternal mortality are provided. (p. 14)

Taken as a whole, the CSP pays only minor attention to gender issues. The document does not mention gender issues with regards to poverty reduction, employment, HIV/AIDS problems, trafficking in human beings, etc. In contrast, a lot of space in the CSP is given to the environment which in the EU's development policy is also considered a cross-cutting issue.

DIALOGUE WITH THE EC DELEGATION¹⁰

IGPN has made inquiries concerning the Mid-term Review of the CSP; however, no concrete information has been provided either by the Delegation or desk officers in Brussels. The officials of the Delegation replied that unfortunately, as the Delegation in Azerbaijan has just recently opened, there is no staff member in place yet to follow gender issues, and they are thus unable to reply to IGPN's specific questions.

⁷ Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in EC Development Cooperation, *European Commission*, 2005, p. 34, http://www.iiav.nl/epublications/2004/toolkit_on_mainstreaming_gender_equality.pdf

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 39

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

IGPN'S ASSESSMENT OF GENDER ISSUES IN AZERBAIJAN

In 1991, Azerbaijan gained independence from the dissolved Soviet Union, and since then has been coping with the process of economic, political, and social transition. Gender equality and women's rights have continued to gain in importance throughout Azerbaijan. Both the state and the civil society in Azerbaijan recognize that gender equality is an important pre-condition for further development.¹¹ However, despite the equality of men and women declared in the Constitution and other legal documents, including the recent Law on Gender Equality, there is still considerable gender inequality in many spheres of social life, politics and the economy.¹²

For fundamental changes and the achievement of gender equality, complex changes on policy level and strong control mechanisms over policy implementation are necessary. For example, although a draft law on domestic violence was presented to parliament nearly two years ago, the law has not been adopted. Problems with the law on domestic violence have been criticized in the progress assessment by the EC. Besides the law on domestic violence, amendments to other laws which affect women's rights are essential. For example, due to early marriages, young girls, who get divorced from their husbands, most of the time remain without financial support, as they lose everything in the divorce.

Concerning the institutional level, in 2000 the President issued a Decree on the State Women's Policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan and at the same time, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the National Action Plan on Women's Issues (2000-2005) and ordered the selection of gender focal points in all government institutions to bear the responsibility of promoting gender equality.¹³ Furthermore, there is a State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs in Azerbaijan, but as it is clear from its title, it doesn't specifically deal with gender issues. There is not a specific state entity that deals with the promotion of gender equality and women's rights in Azerbaijan. Women's rights NGOs are much more active in this regard. There are approximately 30 more or less active women NGOs. However, the lack of financial resources and the increasing number of NGOs makes competition among women's rights NGOs high.

Since 2007, preparation works have been launched for the establishment of a special Council under the President of Azerbaijan with the purpose of supporting NGOs. The budget of the government support is 1.5 million AZN for 2008. This move has had an impact on international donors' interest in funding the projects in Azerbaijan. Yet, there is a belief among the civil society organizations that although quite a number of NGOs received grants from the first round of the call for proposals from the NGO Government Support Council under the President, its work will lack transparency and fairness. Furthermore, among the NGOs that received this funding, there are very few organizations that specifically work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Since the beginning of 2008, the European Commission announced several calls for proposals among NGOs on different issues. It is of high importance that the EC allocate some of its budget specifically to gender issues in countries like Azerbaijan, where women's rights are violated widely. It is crucial to have gender equality not only as a cross-cutting issue, but also to take specific measures with the aim of women's empowerment.

¹¹ For more information see Azerbaijan Human Development Report: Gender Attitudes in Azerbaijan: Trends and challenges, UNDP, 2007, <http://www.un-az.org/doc/nhdr2007gendereng.pdf>

¹² Azerbaijan Human Development Report: Gender Attitudes in Azerbaijan: Trends and challenges, UNDP, 2007, p. 84 <http://www.un-az.org/doc/nhdr2007gendereng.pdf>

¹³ Ibid., p. 18

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the EU:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To integrate gender issues into all stages of country programming and project cycle (formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation)
- To apply gender mainstreaming into the priority areas of the CSP
- To strengthen the EC's internal gender capacity (Gender Desks and Gender Focal Points)
- To follow the twin-track approach, and besides having gender equality as a cross-cutting issue, encourage specific projects on women in calls for proposals
- To help ensure the financial sustainability of women's NGOs
- To increase the transparency of political dialogue with civil society in partner countries
- To push the government of Azerbaijan 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 organize widespread public awareness campaigns (public TV/radio programs)
- To establish a specific state entity with the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment

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 advocacy and lobbying activities
- To engage in an active dialogue with the EC Delegation in Azerbaijan
- To provide shadow reports to the government reports on gender equality commitments
- To monitor gender issues in the EC's development cooperation
- To advocate for the inclusion of projects that specifically target gender issues, apart from having it as a cross-cutting issue
- To raise public awareness of gender equality and keep the public up-to-date concerning the developments in this field (to serve as a link between the government, EU and the general public)

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