



Advocacy Card

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

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 Delegations⁴ 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 Uzbekistan 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 project in Uzbekistan is presented. Finally, recommendations are proposed to the actors involved in various degrees in the preparation of the Regional Strategy Paper: the EC office in Uzbekistan (Europa House), European officials in Brussels, 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>

⁴ In Uzbekistan, EC has no Delegation but is represented by the Europa House

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.⁵ 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.⁶
- ❖ 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."⁷
- ❖ 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.

⁵ "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 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 2007-2013.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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

As of 2007, EU assistance is provided mainly under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). The DCI includes the program "Investing in people" which has a gender equality sector aimed at the promotion of gender equality and women's rights. European development assistance is a valuable input to address different priority issues incorporated in the RSP for Central Asia for the period 2007-2013, as well as the key instrument to keep the government accountable and implement obligations taken by CEDAW, MDGs, and other international commitments. The overall support to Uzbekistan within the RSP during 2007-2013 is €32.8 million.

The RSP prioritizes stability, security, governance and energy diversification issues together with poverty reduction, education, human rights, migration, environmental issues, still giving no gender expertise to its problem areas or perspectives for gender mainstreaming to its initiatives. It is rather gender neutral than gender sensitive. In particular:

- Priority area 1/focal point 2 addresses environmental issues with a focal sector on water. It doesn't challenge gender disparity in water management, taking into account the country condition when all leading roles and positions in water management and distribution are kept by males, which accordingly leads to limitation of access to water for women-farmers and further worsening of their economic possibilities and status.
- Priority area 1/focal point 3 raises the issue of migration management. The strategy covers the issue of trafficking in women but does not look into how different patterns of migration affect

⁸ 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

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 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>

the gender order in the Central Asia region, which would be crucial to understanding the region, as well as to developing an appreciation of the gendered dimensions of migration in the post-communist world (e.g. the situation and status of left-at-home wives and children of migrants). It is clear that much work remains to be done to provide an adequate understanding of the role that gender plays in shaping the migration process.

- Focal point 4 of the same area on education does not reflect the strategy of gender mainstreaming. It doesn't propose gender analysis of the current state of affairs in education. The following problems should be taken into account in the RSP: the existing gender segregation in education, unequal access to higher education, prevalence of females in the "feminine" disciplines like education and health, and males in "masculine" spheres like industry and construction, transport and communication.¹¹
- Priority area 2 focuses on poverty reduction and increasing living standards. Everyone knows that the poorest are women and children. The term "feminization of poverty" is quite characteristic of Uzbek society as well. This priority area of RSP does not mention any gender specificities. It is of high importance that the following issues should be reflected in this priority area: issue of equal access both for women and men to resources and its management and distribution, income distribution, property rights of women, gender analysis of state budget for different sectors, including agricultural, trade and economy and social sectors. This priority area of RSP does not mention any gender specificities.
- Priority area 3 challenges the issues of the promotion of civil society, social dialogue, and human rights. Human rights violations are addressed in the RSP from the perspective of the human rights violation of different political opposition group members. Yet, the scale of women's human rights violations is much wider, e.g. according to unofficial data, 75 % of committed crimes take place because of violence against women, especially domestic violence.

IGPN'S ASSESSMENT OF GENDER ISSUES IN UZBEKISTAN

Major Gender Issues in Uzbekistan

Certain traditional practices exist in Uzbekistan that are discriminatory in character, humiliating women's dignity and bodily integrity, e.g. virginity control of brides, arranged and early marriages, control over reproduction, polygamy, etc. The problem is not recognized by the Uzbek state despite it having signed CEDAW. These traditional practices are being actively revived under the official slogan of reviving the national values which seemed to have been lost during the Soviet period. The mass media are spreading traditional stereotypes of the role of women in the family and society. The state doesn't address these issues, neither explicitly nor implicitly.

The problem of domestic violence is also not recognized by the state. The topic is a strict taboo and never discussed publicly. The current legislation does not admit violence against

¹¹ In the academic years of 2005-2006 in secondary professional educational institutions the number of female students in education discipline was 81.3%, and in health 79.8%. The same academic year the number of male students in the disciplines of industry and construction at higher education institutions was 81% and in transport and communications the male students were 83.5% of the total number of student. Pages 89 and 96 of "Women and Men of Uzbekistan: 2000-2005", statistical collection by the State Committee of the RUz on statistics, Tashkent, 2007

women. Still the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan (the official state machinery to improve the status of women in the country) started to work on establishing "centres for women's adaptation" with functions similar to those of crisis centres (the term "crisis centre", as well as "domestic violence", "gender" and "discrimination" are also strictly taboo). Currently, these newly established centres of social adaptation have no budget provisions from the state, thus their sustainability is hanging by a thread.

The major gender-based violations /women's rights issues are:

- Neo-patriarchy: traditional values continue to dominate in regulating everyday norms and rules which prescribe the subordinate status of women and determination of her main role as biological mother, housewife, unpaid domestic worker and caregiver.
- The re-Islamization of society, which has been accompanied by a resurgence of traditional patriarchal behaviors and norms.
- Extremely restricted possibilities for social grass root activism: since 2004, the major challenges for civil society activism have been the lack of opportunity and freedom for self-expression and criticism, lack of state funding, and administrative and legal obstacles to access foreign aid.

Gender Projects in Uzbekistan

In 2004, two projects were supported for women's economic empowerment and raising the status of women with disabilities through the Business Women's Association of Uzbekistan and the Association of People with Disabilities through the Institution Building and Partnership Program (IBPP). The current IBPP program sectors as mentioned in the Call for Proposals (announced in summer 2008), however, does not mention or prioritize gender and women's issues.

The European Commission is donating €3.5 million euros aimed at supporting maternal and newborn care in Uzbekistan. The program will be implemented in cooperation with UNICEF. According to the press release on the launch of the program, it mainly addresses the medical aspects of maternal and newborn care, but fails to challenge the gender and social aspects of maternal and child mortality, anemia, malnutrition, the prenatal preference of gender (males) of unborn children and violence against women, including domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the EU:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To appoint a Gender Focal Point in the EC office in Uzbekistan which has a solid women's human rights or gender awareness raising activism with the purpose of gender expertise and monitoring, mainstreaming gender into EU agenda in Uzbekistan
- To monitor gender aspect of EC's programs and activities
- To apply gender mainstreaming into the priority areas of the RSP, including poverty reduction, civil society promotion, education, water management and supply, SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) support and promotion
- To address other gender-related issues, most importantly the gender aspects of labor migration, the rights of women-migrants, the human rights of wives and children of labor migrants
- 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 push the Uzbek 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 adopt the Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities
- To institutionalize a Gender Studies course into the curricula of higher and secondary special education institutions with the status of state standard
- To give special attention to funds allocation to women's organizations and their initiatives aimed at addressing women's issues

Recommendations to the CSOs

- To lobby the national administration to break the taboo and silenced issues, including gender discrimination and domestic violence
- To lobby the national administration for the adoption of the Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities, the inclusion of amendments to the legal codes of Uzbekistan for the purpose of introducing the terms "gender-based discrimination" and "domestic violence"
- To engage in an active dialogue with the EC office in Uzbekistan
- To lobby the national government to challenge resolution #56 and the recent decree on the new parliamentary commission on the funding regulations of the CSO (this resolution prohibits acceptance of any foreign aid received from a donor outside the country and in fact gives no access to aid from donors inside the country)