

Local Governance Academy of Central Asia
Development Policy Institute

CENTRAL ASIAN GENDER CONTEXT:

Recommendations for Transforming
Interventions to Achieve Gender Equality
in Rural Communities

Review of discussion workshop results

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, 2022

Central Asian Gender Context: Recommendations for Transforming Interventions to Achieve Gender Equality in Rural Communities. Review of discussion seminar results. LGACA, DPI, Bishkek. 2022.

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Challenge for parties interested in achieving gender equality in Central Asian countries today is to find ways to absorb universal values, and to do so it is necessary to answer a question of whether there is a specific, Central Asian regional model for strengthening women's participation in local development and governance, which includes region-specific accelerating factors for the process. This review has so far only been able to formulate some specific features of the regional gender context, based on an analysis of which recommendations are provided to stakeholders on how best to adapt, improve and disseminate working models to support women to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The review is addressed to government authorities at national and sub-national (local) government levels, civil society organizations, and development partners in four Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The review may contain controversial findings, but its purpose was not so much to provide unequivocal answers to all questions about gender equality in the region, but rather to raise relevant questions, without answers to which achieving gender equality in the region would be difficult. The review is also intended to serve as an impetus for organizing and conducting ethnogender studies in the region based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines knowledge from sociology, history, psychology, demography, art history, linguistics and other disciplines that directly or indirectly deal with gender behavior issues. From this point of view the review is also addressed to the scholarly and research communities.

The electronic version of the review is available in Russian and English on the LSG Best Practices Portal at www.myktyaimak.gov.kg and on the Development Policy Institute website at www.dpi.kg.

The original version of the review was written in Russian, therefore, in the event of a discrepancy between the Russian and English versions, the Russian version is considered correct.

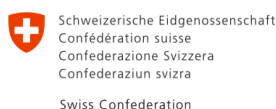
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This review was prepared within the framework of the Soft Gender: Regional Model of Women Involvement in Local Development and Governance in Central Asia project. The project was funded by the Small Grants Program of the Embassy of Switzerland in the Kyrgyz Republic. The overall goal of the project is to increase opportunities for women's participation in local development and governance in the countries of Central Asia. The opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in the publication represent the views and experiences of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Switzerland.

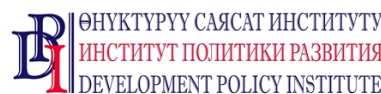
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Abbreviations

LGACA -	Local Governance Academy of Central Asia was established by the Union of Local Self-Governments of the Kyrgyz Republic (hereinafter, the LSG Union) and the Development Policy Institute (hereinafter, the DPI) with the aim of sharing experience and developing the capacity of sub-national level government officials, local council deputies, and local community leaders in Central Asian countries.
Discussion Seminar -	Seminar “Regional Model of Strengthening Women’s Involvement in Local Development and Governance in Central Asia” which was a series of consultative meetings of NGO representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
DPI -	Public Association “Development Policy Institute”, NCO from Kyrgyzstan engaged in local community development.
NCO -	non-commercial organization, main form of civil society organization applicable in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
NGO -	non-governmental non-profit organization, main form of civil society organization applicable in Uzbekistan.
CSOs -	civil society organizations (NCOs, NGOs, informal groups).
CA -	Central Asia.

About the Project

From November 2021 through April 2022 LGACA and DPI have been implementing the Soft Gender: Regional Model of Women Involvement in Local Development and Governance in Central Asia project. The project was funded by the Small Grants Program of the Embassy of Switzerland in the Kyrgyz Republic. The overall goal of the project is to expand opportunities for women's participation in local development and governance in the countries of Central Asia.

The key project activity was the “Regional Model of Strengthening Women's Involvement in Local Development and Governance in Central Asia” workshop, which was a series of consultative meetings with representatives of NCOs from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and took place between February 8-18, 2022 (total number of online sessions was 5 three-hour sessions). A total of 71 people took part in the seminar, including 13 representatives from Kazakhstan, 42 representatives from Kyrgyzstan, nine representatives from Tajikistan and seven representatives from Uzbekistan. The majority of the participants - about 72 percent - were women. Almost all of the participants, with a few exceptions, represented civil society organizations that specialize in community development.

Objectives of the seminar were to:

- Explore and summarize the factors contributing to women's involvement in local development and governance in the context of Central Asian countries;
- Compare practices of women involvement in local development and governance in Central Asian countries to find a universal working model of supporting women in the region (to identify working experiences and methods of strengthening women's participation in development and governance that demonstrate effectiveness in the context of the countries in the region);
- Identify and formulate objective limitations (if any) that impede strengthening women's participation, subjective factors and prejudices and to develop a set of recommendations to counteract them;
- Develop recommendations for stakeholders on how best to adapt, improve and disseminate working models for supporting women to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Provide local development stakeholders with good practices and engage Central Asian advocates of women's involvement in local development and governance in the Local Self-Governance Best Practices Portal and LGACA.

Brief Summary of the Review

All of the Central Asian countries whose representatives participated in the discussion - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan - have formal national policies and programs to achieve gender equality, all are working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but none of the countries is in the top 10 or top 20 countries in the rankings that measure the achievement of Goal 5, which sets the gender equality goals.

The challenge for those interested in achieving gender equality in Central Asia today is to find ways to absorb universal values, and to do so it is necessary to answer the question of whether there is a specific, Central Asian regional model for strengthening women's participation in local development and governance, which includes region-specific accelerating factors. In the process of formulating and establishing universal human rights, any regional context, any specific features and characteristics were "weeded out" so that participating countries could adopt and adapt the rights to their own conditions, their own context. The rights are formulated so as to be truly universal and applicable to every inhabitant of the planet, they establish a minimum of legal protection for an individual, which, in an ideal situation, can be expanded and supplemented by any country, but in the direction of expanding rights, not narrowing them. This is the strength of this system of values. But at the same time it is also a challenge, because communities that are very different in the context of their development cannot equally and equitably absorb universal values, are not always able to integrate them into their context without additional efforts. The ability to absorb is also reduced by the fact that support measures for the implementation of values are often based on uniform approaches and solutions, poorly adapted to regional contexts. All adaptation is often reduced to linguistic and conventional-cultural appearances, while the underlying psychological, historical, religious and other processes remain untouched and unaccounted for.

The review allowed to formulate only some specific features of the regional gender context: 1) specific hierarchy of values, the top of which is occupied by family interests rather than personal rights; 2) set of meta-codes of behavior, typical for Central Asian countries for centuries (sense of moderation, restraint in expressing emotions, a large number of taboo topics, adherence to traditions and customs, etc.); 3) substitution and negative connotations of the concept "gender" and negative image of NCOs ("gender=NCOs", NCOs=grant-eaters and foreign agents", "gender=LGBT", etc.); 4) political gap between declared and actual policies on gender equality in rural communities, due to both lack of mechanisms for policy implementation, and weak commitment to gender justice by managers themselves (public policy implementers, remaining members of local communities, do not understand, and in some cases do not fully share the values and directions declared in policies at the national level); 5) extent and vectors of the digitalization impact on the Central Asian gender context (the issue has been discussed only in the context of the impact of social media and Internet access, but in many other aspects remains open and requires directed study).

Another important observation is that the CA countries value their positive national established culture and apply a cultural and sometimes mental lens to issues of gender equality and non-discrimination. At the same time, the value of women as human beings is still perceived and associated with "her usefulness" or "her productivity" (women who do not give birth are still condemned and remain misunderstood by society; women's right to self-development, learning, is often recognized only if the skills and knowledge gained will improve the financial situation of the family).

Without taking into account ethnogender factors¹, it is impossible to achieve any significant improvements in gender equality. This research is especially relevant for the countries of Central Asia,

¹ Ethnogender research is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines knowledge from sociology, history, psychology, demography, art history, linguistics and other disciplines that directly or indirectly deal with gender behavior. The goal of ethnogender studies is to "show (and prove) The goal of ethnogender studies is "to show" (to prove) the real diversity and cultural self-sufficiency of various forms of gender

which have been significantly affected by three additional factors that primarily affect women: decreasing quality and accessibility of education, poverty, demographics, and the growing importance of Islam and the influence of Islamic civil society. The region has yet to properly articulate the specificities of the Central Asian gender context, and this review takes a step in that direction.

The civil society representatives of the CA countries who participated in the discussion noted the high degree of need for transformation of all methods of influence, intervention at the local (sub-national) level. Transformation is needed to take into account the Central Asian gender context and achieve real results. Ms. Ulziisuren JAMSRAN, UN Women Representative in Central Asia also mentioned this in her welcoming speech, noting that gender equality needs to be accelerated, approaches rethought and multi-levelled transformations. In order to identify the directions of transformation for all actors, actors of the process of achieving gender equality, the participants of the discussion seminar proposed and discussed four sets of recommendations addressed to the national and local levels of government, non-profit organizations and international development partners (the sets of recommendations are addressed to the process participants in all countries of the CA region). The review examines each set of recommendations in detail and provides an assessment of the level of relevance of each recommendation for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Most recommendations have a high degree of relevance and address acute problems, but country differences are still noted. The unanimous opinion of the workshop participants was on the relevance of the following recommendations:

- ***Support for research to define the framework of the Central Asian gender context and to find accelerating factors for achieving gender equality; assessment of women's economic contribution;***
- ***The need to introduce gender-oriented, inclusive local economic policies, including the transformation of approaches to gender budgeting towards the inclusion of active measures instead of passive interests (if we assume that the local level of government should take into account the interests of all groups in the community when planning local development)***
- ***The need for special attention of all actors to the development of “soft skills” of local communities, especially women to increase their self-esteem, self-confidence and access to economic opportunities; shifting the focus of NCOs, NGOs, development projects from political empowerment and participation to economic empowerment through the development of “soft” skills, including digital, legal and financial literacy;***
- ***The need to shift from a strategy of confrontation, struggle, opposition (for example, fighting stereotypes) to a strategy of creation and partnership, seeking mutual benefits;***
- ***The need to create public spaces for girls and women in rural areas, which will allow them to engage in additional education, self-development, socialization, exchange information, mobilize their energy to implement their initiatives, etc;***
- ***Organization of horizontal mutual information, mentoring and other non-material support for women deputies and women leaders;***
- ***Transformation of target audiences, inclusion of women and girls in particularly vulnerable (closed²) local communities, boys and young men in the priority groups;***

relations. The goal of ethnogender studies is “to show the real diversity (and prove the cultural self-sufficiency) of different forms of gender relations in the world, economic, genetic, political, etc.). Shalygina N. V., Snezhkova I. A. Formation and Prospects of Development Ethnogender studies in Russia // Vlast. 2019. Vol. 27. no. 4. C. 170-174. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31171/vlast.v27i4.6625>.

² There are differences in the understanding of the term “closed communities” between countries. Thus, “closed” or isolated communities can be understood as: LGBT communities, communities in remote regions, religious communities, communities of repatriated persons.

- *Transformation of methods and practices of impact: strengthening the targeting, comprehensiveness, sharing responsibility with the community; change of the funding model of support initiatives, including the transition to the funding of informal small groups at the community level, the use of large-scale in terms of coverage and low-cost forms of intervention;*
- *Finding and developing innovative solutions to create new positive stereotypes, traditions in contrast to the destructive messages of the media and social networks;*
- *Promote creation of horizontal networks and cross-sectoral networks; as well as a regional network for mutual development and knowledge management;*
- *Formation of gender skills of a wide range of experts and consultants on development, including sectoral NCOs, NGOs.*



Background

High levels of poverty, limited access to services, influence of traditionalism, share of unpaid domestic work, low quality and limited access to education and other factors constitute a set of conditions that form common stereotypes for Central Asian countries that limit women's participation not only in decision-making but also in self-development processes and even in income-generating activities. Huge numbers of women in rural areas of the region, due to socio-cultural constraints, spend their entire lives at home, working exclusively in households and raising children, producing (with the participation of men) new generations of women who are not aware of their potential and have no choices, and generations of men who do not recognize the contribution of rural women to development and the economy. All this negatively affects not only the women themselves, but also the societies and economies of countries that are losing productive forces due to conventional prejudice.

The countries of Central Asia, together with the global community, have made commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda recognizing that a fundamental condition for achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals is the promotion of gender equality. However, many efforts in this direction, including some development interventions based on declarative and "frontal" demands for gender equality are not successful, because they do not meet the support of both men and women themselves, who are not always ready to change their lives in accordance with the principles of gender equality.

At the same time, locally their own more sensitive and locally adapted practices of women's involvement in development are already being formed, such as Islamic progressive women's groups (the "Mutakalim" movement in Kyrgyzstan). Also relevant is the factor of a shared Soviet past and historical commonality, which is weakening but can still be used to work with older women.

For future measures aimed at reducing social denial of women's role in local politics and local development, as well as their contribution to the country's economy, it is recommended to develop a set of arguments based not only on internationally recognized norms of democracy and gender equality, but also on norms based on cultural perceptions of local communities that still deny and oppose the realization of women's rights to participate in local politics.

There is a need for development actors to identify, summarize and systematize the factors that contribute to strengthening women's participation in local development and governance, specific to Central Asian countries. These factors will help form a "soft" model of intervention to develop and promote gender equality, which will be a set of practices and tools that are painlessly applied in the CA countries and will be available through LGACA to all stakeholders and NCOs working to promote gender equality and nondiscrimination in the region, as well as to donors, international organizations and UN agencies.

In order to accelerate and make effective decisions to achieve gender equality, a deeper understanding of the specifics of the region is required in order to understand and take into account the existing objective limitations and subjective factors in the perception of gender equality, requiring any special approaches, methods of intervention. Although the proposed model of "soft" intervention for the development and promotion of women's initiatives may not be entirely new, the results of the project will be useful for stakeholders.

Limitations

Status of the document. This review is not a scientific article or study, but rather an attempt to explore a scientific topic by experts, consultants, and NCOs involved in community development. Further development of the topic requires involvement of scholars and researchers from various disciplines.

Lack of data. In the process of preparing and implementing the project, the executors realized that they were starting the discussion of the topic in conditions of lack of scientific, quantitative and qualitative research, which would not allow making unambiguous conclusions about the absence or presence of a regional model of gender equality, and describing this model in depth, in case the hypothesis of its presence is confirmed. Therefore, the conclusions and recommendations of the review are of debatable nature and should be developed in further research, necessarily with the participation of the scientific community.

Target audience. The discussion seminar and this review do not look at the population of the Central Asian region as a whole. The target population for discussion and recommendations is the rural population and rural communities. Due to obvious disparities in both living standards and gender equality, the findings of the review cannot automatically be extended to urban populations and urban communities, with the exception of small, remote cities where rural lifestyles predominate.

Discussion participants. The participants were mostly representatives of non-profit organizations, engaged in the implementation of practical initiatives to develop local communities. Representatives of government bodies and international organizations did not take part in the discussion. Therefore, the evaluation of the situation and recommendations of the review should be perceived with this factor in mind.





Concept of “Gender Context”

The concept of "gender context" arises from and is connected with the direction of science - ethnogender studies. Ethnogender research is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines knowledge from sociology, history, psychology, demography, art history, linguistics and other disciplines, which directly or indirectly deal with issues of gender behavior. The purpose of ethnogender studies is “to show (and prove) the real diversity and cultural self-sufficiency of various forms of gender relations in the world, the objective conditionality of their emergence and development under the influence of a number of regional factors (climatic, landscape, economic, genetic, etc.)³”. Ethnogender studies were initially focused on comparative studies of male and female behavior, as well as on the concept of biological determinism (the indisputability of the binary opposition of “masculinity” and “femininity” in socio-cultural processes). In a certain sense this was to become an alternative to the concepts of social construction of gender, which is based on the denial of understanding of biological sex as a natural given, which is the source of permanent behavioral, psychological, cultural and other differences between men and women⁴. Ethnogender studies then transformed into a symbiotic understanding of biological dichotomy and social construction.

Various countries conduct the ethnogender studies. In the countries of the former Soviet Union, the Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IEA RAS) leads in this respect, where in the early 1990s an ethnogender research sector (EGRS) was established. Research is being conducted at the Kazakh University of Humanities and Law, Emporia State College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (Kansas, USA), Mexico and other countries. Kazakhstani researchers, in particular, have proved the impact of ethnogender on the national security of the state⁵, identified problematic issues and some historical aspects of the development of ethnogender in different countries and the formation of a special political culture of public administration there.

Attitudes towards ethnogender studies vary depending on researchers' commitment to basic concepts of gender. However, a common conclusion of all researchers is that it would be a big mistake to ignore

³ Shalygina N. V., Snezhkova I. A. Formation and Prospects for the Development of Ethnogender Studies in Russia // *Vlast*. 2019. Vol. 27. no. 4. C. 170-174. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31171/vlast.v27i4.6625>.

⁴ Shevchenko, Z. V. (Uklad). (2016). Dictionary of gender terms. Cherkassy: Maker Chabanenko Y. Vidnovleno <http://a-z-gender.net/teoriya-socialnogo-konstruirovaniya-gendera.html>

⁵ Gulmira URANKHAEVA, Gulnar BAYPEISOVA, Samat SMOILOV, Aliya TOLYSBAEVA, Aizat MUKATAEVA, Assiya KENZHEBULATOVA. Some Aspects of Ethno-Gender Realization: Historical-Political Analysis, *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 83-92.

ethnogender types that have developed in different political and cultural environments. For example, ethnogender studies in the countries of the North Caucasus have identified the transformation of values and their influence on local communities: “If previously the system of adat (set of mountain laws) had a great influence, now the role of the Shariah law is increasing. ... In society there is an understanding that the gender equality in the North Caucasus, which is constitutionally guaranteed in the Russian Federation, is *filled with a different meaning*”⁶. On the basis of ethnogender studies, their authors suggest new ways of working with rural communities: “Rural women should be considered as a separate target group. At the same time, the diversity of population groups living in certain regions and their living conditions should be taken into account. Cooperate more closely with non-governmental organizations established in the regions, which do a lot of work with women. To organize gender research centers whose mission would be to contribute to the formation of gender consciousness in society, to promote gender approach in social and humanitarian sciences, to promote the development of gender curricula in the educational system in order to accumulate experience of using gender methodology in scientific and expert projects and in the implementation of gender educational programs”⁷.

“In most regions of Central Asia, the population is more familiar with women's issues than with gender theory. Men's judgment of this problem differs from women's. In other words, the questions of the attitude of “eastern” men to gender problems and the readiness of men in general to allow women to be on the same social level with them remain traditional? Traditionally, many are inclined to explain the difference in the social status of women and men and the inequality of their rights by biological reasons. But analysis of historical, ethnographic and cultural facts shows that social reasons, i.e. norms and traditions created (constructed) by society in the process of development, are no less important in contrasting the roles of women and men... Religious foundations, centuries-old traditions and ways of life... initially assume gender inequality in relation to the female population living there. These problems are exacerbated by economic hardship, which limits people's ability to achieve financial stability and, moreover, limits women's access within the family to control their own livelihoods”⁸.

Without taking into account ethnogender factors, it is impossible to achieve any significant improvements in gender equality. These studies are particularly relevant for the countries of Central Asia, which are significantly affected by three key factors that hinder the development of women in particular: decline in the quality and accessibility of education, poverty, growing influence of Islam and spread of its radical movements. These factors, coupled with the political and cultural background, form a certain regional gender context that needs to be studied and all interventions adapted to it. The region has yet to properly articulate the specificities of the Central Asian gender context, and this review takes a step in that direction.

⁶ Kharaeva L.F., Kuchukova Z.A. Gender and Ethnogender. - Nalchik: Print Center Publishing House, 2018.

⁷ See above.

⁸ Gender aspects of integrated water resources management. Report on research of representative households in the republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. Tashkent, 2005.

The Central Asian Gender Context: Specific Features



As defined by the United Nations, human rights and equality, regardless of gender are at the center of the global value system. In the process of formulating and establishing rights, any regional context and any specific features and characteristics have been “weeded out”. Rights are formulated in such a way as to be truly universal and applied to every inhabitant of the planet. This is the strength of this system of values. But it is also a weakness, because communities with very different contexts of development cannot equally and equitably absorb universal values, are not always able to integrate them into their context without additional effort. The ability to absorb is also reduced by the fact that international organizations involved in the implementation, “introduction” of values also try to apply universal approaches and solutions, poorly adapting to regional contexts in a deep, scientific sense. All adaptation is often reduced to linguistic and conventional-cultural external manifestations, while the underlying psychological, historical, religious and other processes remain untouched and unaccounted for. Proof of this is the lack of any ethnogender studies, for example, in the region of Central Asian countries, which would allow formulating the Central Asian gender context and increasing the effectiveness of any actions in achieving gender equality, taking into account regional specificities of the system of values and their hierarchy. The discussion workshop made it possible to identify some specific features of the Central Asian gender context.

Ulziisuren Jamsran, UN Women in Central Asia: “We are halfway to achieving or not achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Gender equality requires acceleration, rethinking of approaches and multi-level transformation. We need to piece together and understand the applicability of gender intervention practices in the Central Asian region to choose the most effective ones. We need to understand what does not work, what does not make sense to spend time and resources on. We need to better promote our partners in order to provide effective leadership in promoting equal gender rights.

Hierarchy of Values

Human rights place the individual at the center of the system of values and at the top of the pyramid. Without disputing this construction, it is still worth considering the hypothesis that for the countries of the region the interests of the family, public opinion about the family (“what people will say”) and continuation of the family as an economic guarantee for parents are at the center of the system of values. Proof of this is close kinship relations, the strength of family and kinship ties against the background of others, and others. Practice shows that the discourse about the value of family, the necessity of contribution to family both by men and women is well accepted by rural communities in any point of the region. At the same time, the discourse from the position of equal human rights in their absolute, idealized version is not accepted and absorbed by the communities to the extent we would like it to be. The priority of family values is also important because it is in the family that attitudes toward human rights are formed, and whatever the policy and official position of the authorities, the true attitude toward gender equality is formed in the family.

Given that in the hierarchy of values of the region (perhaps) the family has priority over equal rights of men and women, that it is in the family that genuine attitudes toward gender equality are formed, all interventions, especially at the level of local communities, should be based on family interests and cultural values, on recognition of the mutual contribution of both sexes to the creation and prosperity of families. In addition, many gender equality problems begin at the family level and have a much greater impact on the status of women in the community than it seems. Thus, the position of a married woman, the status of a daughter-in-law, was unexpectedly one of the decisive factors in the process of local elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, where local communities, despite all obvious merits, did not want to recognize the leadership role of a woman having the status of “kelin” (daughter-in-law), that is, a stranger, no matter how long she had already lived in this community. The number of relatives was also a significant factor during the elections (age was not the most decisive factor, although older candidates received more mandates).

An important aspect is the “utilitarian” value of a woman, which distorts her original equal position, a value that a woman “must prove”. In order to represent a “value” for the family and for society, a woman must: bear several children, as the birth of an only child is perceived as “born for herself”; earn as much as or more than a man in order to voice her opinion in the family or to exercise her rights; succeed economically in order to be able to participate at the decision-making level; work for decades to gain respect in order to be supported by her community, for example in elections; any action of a woman, must have some benefit for other members of her community, for example, in the elections. At the same time, the man acquires “value” up front: his voice with the family is strong, regardless of his earnings; he is supported in the community a priori; he does not ask permission to be absent from home and participate in public life, and so on.

Cultural Codes⁹

A more in-depth study of the extent to which cultural codes have already been transformed and in what direction they continue to be transformed in rural communities in the region is needed. However, practical observations suggest that the region still retains a set of meta-codes of behavior that have been characteristic of Central Asian countries for centuries, including a sense of moderation, restraint in the display of emotions; a large number of taboo topics concerning gender relations; adherence to traditions and customs; high degree of protection of information about everything that concerns the family, and others. In the context of transformation, the growing influence of radical ideas on the interpretation of Islamic values is added to the meta-codes, which begin to have a significant impact on centuries-old meta-codes such as respect for elders. The events of the fall 2020 in the Kyrgyz Republic, the ideological refrain of which in many ways became the confrontation of generations, the denial by young people of the role and contribution of the older generation, the demand to “make room” and the blaming of the older generation for the problems the country faced, were made possible precisely by the weakening of traditional values under the influence of radical religious ideas. It has been noticed that at the level of local communities, the word “gender” itself has acquired negative connotations (meaning), a distortion is observed in combinations of “gender and NGOs”, “gender and LGBT”, “gender and Western values”, which causes rejection as a symbol of an alien culture introduced from outside and having dangerous, destructive goals for communities and families. There is even an opinion that the discussion of gender equality is a threat to national security because it is associated with family planning, fertility reduction, and population decline (which does not actually happen, but on a domestic level, people associate reduction in the number of children in the family with the impact of the discussion of gender). Gender is also perceived as a threat of “the transfer of power into the hands of women, or the domination of women over men”. These distortions create a favorable environment for the flourishing of false values and stereotypes related to treatment of women as commodities, desire of girls to “sell themselves” through a profitable marriage, stereotypes of a “beautiful life without effort” at the expense of men, irrational consumption, denial of the value of education and independence, etc. False stereotypes are also formed about men who are “obliged to earn by any means”, “be physically strong”, and alike. Paradoxically, this trend is actively developing even in religious communities.

Political Divide

Negative connotation of gender equality is particularly dangerous, because on a sub-national level, public policy implementers as heads of governments, are unable to completely remove themselves from their environment and cultural codes, and often do not understand or share the values and directions declared in national-level policies. It is important to understand that the vast majority of local leaders are men, who without becoming sincere adherents and bearers of the messages embedded in national

⁹ Cultural code is a key to understanding a given type of culture; unique cultural features inherited by peoples from their ancestors; it is information encoded in some form that allows us to identify a culture. Cultural code defines a set of images that are associated with a set of stereotypes in the mind. It is the cultural unconscious - not what is said or clearly understood, but what is hidden from understanding but manifests itself in actions. The cultural code of a nation helps understand its behavioral reactions, determines the people's psychology.

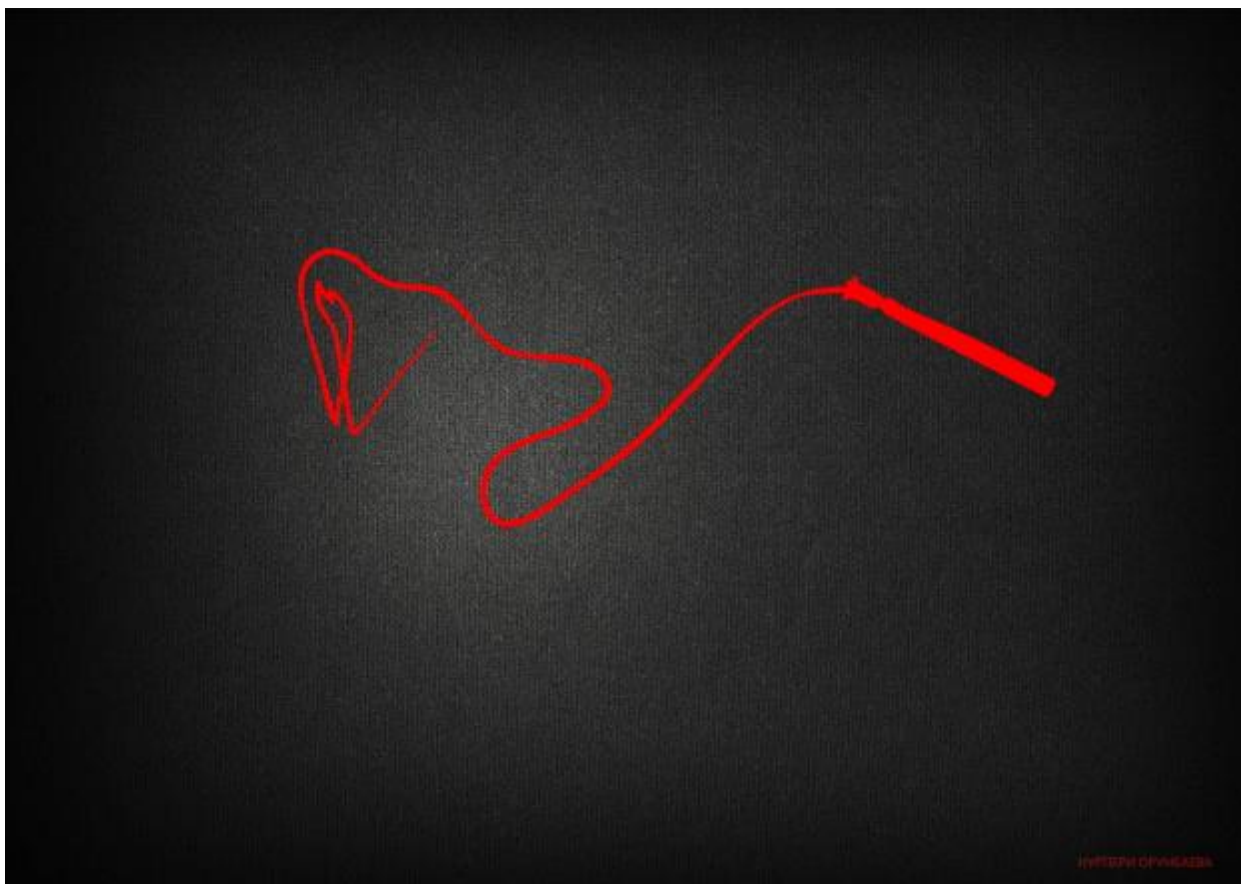
policies, by their silent rejection and subsequent actual inaction contribute to the perception of a distorted perception of gender equality. In this situation, it is naive to expect that any government policies and programs written in an alien language, using terminology that irritates communities, can have a significant impact on gender equality in rural communities. The situation is also exacerbated by the fact that the term “gender” is often used separately from the “equality”, which creates a sense of injustice in men and a preference for women alone in all government gender policies.

Digitalization

Issue of the extent and vectors of the digitalization impact on the Central Asian gender context remains open and requires focused study. It is only obvious that the increased availability of digital communications can reinforce both positive and negative trends (for example, the accelerated spread of negative stereotypes).



Recommendations



Recommendations for the national governments

Transformation of conceptual framework and language as a temporary measure

The official commitment of states in the region to universal values, including human rights and gender equality should be maintained, but more comprehensible and familiar to local communities' values, terms and concepts should be used for internal documents - programs, policies and instructions for use at the sub-national level of public policy implementation. The entry point for the formation of gender policy at the sub-national level can be the family, traditional values in that part of them, which is appropriate and does not contradict universal values (for example, care for the youngest and respect for the elderly). Practice confirms this recommendation. For example, the issue of preventing domestic violence is much more empathetic in rural communities than it would be if the issue were considered in the context of women's rights. The second way to transform the conceptual apparatus is to draw attention to the economic impact of women's involvement in community development. During the discussion workshop, the participants proposed to formulate policy goals at the local level, transforming the treatment of women as an object of special attention to the perception of women as an active subject of economic development: *the development of rural communities with the contribution of women*.

"I think that gender experts can challenge the idea that gender socialization should take place only through the family, because the institution of the family is transformed quite strongly under the influence of various factors, and therefore the family cannot be considered a static tool of socialization. As the most important agent of socialization, the family can be a source of formation of gender sensitivity, but the presence of the family is not enough for this. And local politicians must look for alternative, optimal ways. We had a sad experience in Uzbekistan, when local politicians were engaged

in forced reconciliation of conflict families. And measures of “forced” reconciliation were used directly at women, as a result, the level of violence and the number of divorces and suicides increased. Now the official authorities warn that forced reconciliation is not the best way, politicians try to change the ideological and educational approach (with elements of gender bias in relation to gender commitments of family members) to socio-economic, gender-sensitive approaches”. ***A quote from the consultation workshop participant***

Transformation of language, reorientation of “entry points” from the term “gender” and the phrase “women’s rights” to family and family values, drawing attention to the economic contribution of women in the development of rural local communities will reduce the political gap between the levels of policy formation and implementation, and find more supporters and implementers of state gender policy at the local level.

At the same time, the use of the concept of gender equity and equality at the national level should not be abandoned, so that we do not lose the level of political commitment we have achieved and “get lost” in the basics. The transformation of the conceptual apparatus at the sub-national level should be seen as a temporary measure, so that in the future, through long-term efforts and the system of education, a new generation of managers who understand and share universal values, gender equality and justice can be formed.

Transformation of gender budgeting

The countries of Central Asia are undertaking diverse efforts to introduce gender budgeting, which is understood as an equitable allocation of resources between gender groups and generations. This requires transformation from a “passive” gender budgeting to active budgeting measures aimed at achieving gender equality. Passive approach means taking into account the interests of different groups in development planning and budgeting. At the local level, gender-responsive budget measures often include, for example, improvement of basic infrastructure, including access to drinking water, which certainly works in favor of rural women. But the possibility of expanding and disseminating active methods of gender-responsive budgeting should be explored more thoroughly. By active methods we mean creating special preferences for a vulnerable gender group, as opposed to simply considering interests. Since in the countries of the region women are the obvious lagging group, it is useful to look at the experience of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which have targeted support to women from the state budget among active measures of gender budgeting. For example, the creation of educational quotas in higher education institutions for rural girls, scholarships from subnational budgets for rural female students, preferential educational loans for girls; programs of financial support to crafts mentors and their students in rural areas; national and local contests and awards for women entrepreneurs; targeted funding for women’s entrepreneurial initiatives.

Focus on “flexible” (“soft”) skills¹⁰

With the deteriorating quality of education, the fastest and most effective way to empower women economically and socially is to focus on developing “soft skills” especially digital, legal, and financial literacy for all, including men, women, and excluded groups. Measures to develop these skills should be an obligatory element for any government programs and policies aimed at improving the lives of people, especially rural ones. Civil society organizations (NCOs, NGOs), which are able to offer quick, inexpensive, effective, large-scale and diversified programs for different gender and age groups, should

¹⁰ Soft or flexible skills, often - a set of general skills, closely related to personal qualities; somehow important in any profession. Soft or flexible skills are the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, public speaking, business communication, teamwork, digital communication, organization of activities, which are also affected by the level of leadership qualities, knowledge of work ethics, discipline, sense of responsibility. To some extent the opposite of flexible skills is considered to be highly specialized professional knowledge (hard skills), which is more difficult to master and not so widely used

be a key partner of the state in the development of soft skills. It is difficult to expect that the state and state institutions will be able to address the problem on their own in the short term.

Organization of a system of integrated social services with the help of NCOs and NGOs

Rural women are not a homogeneous group and are exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination, and therefore require special attention from both the state and NCOs/NGOs. As a rule, the efforts of official structures in relation to this group turn out to be insufficient due to the difficulties of interagency interaction. Therefore, in some countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) it is necessary to more actively introduce the mechanism of state social contracting, through which NCOs can organize more effective comprehensive social services (aimed simultaneously at socialization, reduce poverty, medical or palliative care, other types of support) not suffering from the difficulties of interagency interaction. In this direction, it is useful to study and disseminate the experience of Kazakhstan, where the state social contracting has already become a regular tool for implementing state social policy. State social contracting programs should be divided by the level of complexity of services provided into national and local ones, giving the local level of government some freedom of action in determining the target audiences and areas for state social contracts. This will also increase the level of trust in NCOs, NGOs, which currently suffer from reproaches of dependence on Western funding, but have few or no sources of funding within the country to provide social services to the population.

Creating preferences in social development and economic empowerment

In general, this block requires additional research and development of specific measures for each country individually. However, the problem of self-employed women and their economic status is to some extent inherent in all countries. The issue of legalization and granting status to self-employed women in local communities, and the lack of conditions for their transition from the informal to the formal economy, is of particular attention and concern. This transition is especially important not only in terms of taxes and pensions, legalization should also help women and men to realize the right to social security, i.e. to have a guaranteed income in case of temporary disability (illness, injury, pregnancy). In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the issue of tax regimes for women who engage in economic activities that allow them only to provide a minimum level of income, which is not entrepreneurship in the full sense of the word, is acute. Small trade, often self-produced goods, or small-scale resale, handicrafts, casual seasonal employment in agriculture and other similar activities cannot be considered profitable and economically viable enough to equal the income of entrepreneurs. Even the minimum patent rates (in Kyrgyzstan) or conditions of mandatory payment of wages and taxes on income (in Uzbekistan) put an enormous burden on self-employed women, and they refuse to register officially, to enter into relations with the social and pension insurance system, which makes them even more vulnerable. Therefore, it is important to develop and introduce special conditions of tax regime, pension insurance and realization of the right to social protection for such women and such activities.

DISCUSSION WORKSHOP OBSERVATIONS

Uzbekistan: compulsory taxation and remuneration of labor irrespective of the financial result. Affordable credit portfolios are needed, especially for rural women. Ensuring the transition of small women's businesses to medium-sized businesses. Access to land to grow crops.

Kyrgyzstan: lack of social insurance due to unprofitable registration even in the status of an individual entrepreneur (when purchasing all types of patents or paying taxes for a certificate of individual entrepreneur the payment of insurance premiums is mandatory, but for self-employed rural women the tax rates are too high (unaffordable to pay monthly 2200 soms) so they do not register business, as a result - no social insurance (MHIF, pensions, health improvement fund). There is a need for preferences and tax "breaks" for self-employed rural women (tax rates are lower).

Tajikistan: development of income-generating activities in rural areas depends mainly on the project efforts, there is a program of presidential grants for women entrepreneurs, but rural women are not defined as a priority, and they have no motivation, knowledge, self-confidence to apply for a grant.

Support for research

Governments should formulate tasks for the scientific community in at least two directions. First, collaborative ethnogender research needs to be organized at the national and interstate (regional) level to better describe the characteristics of the Central Asian gender subsystem, the regional gender context, to provide managers with a clear understanding of applicable and inapplicable policy measures; limitations and opportunities. Second, it is necessary to research and assess the opportunity costs of insufficient women's economic and social empowerment, and consider potential effects of preferential development in sectors that generate the greatest number of gender-sensitive jobs, such as the care economy, the social services industry, digital logistics, and others. Inter-state, regional research projects focused on practical outcomes, which should be carried out by complex, multidisciplinary research teams (in accordance with the complex nature of the concept of “ethnogender research”), may be of particular importance in this direction. Such projects will not only increase the effectiveness of national policies to achieve gender equality, but will also create cross-border and regional projects based on regional economic and social opportunities and advantages.

Personalization of responsibility for achieving gender equality

The obvious fact is that the majority of government leaders are men, who remain members of society and in most cases are influenced by negative gender stereotypes and specific features of the gender context. However, the constitutions of the countries in the region, which declared gender equality and non-discrimination, entrusted them with the responsibility to implement policies in this direction. However, attention to this area of managers' work has traditionally remained a low priority, secondary, which reduces the motivation of managers to deal with these issues. It is necessary to consider the possibility of introducing the criterion of gender sensitivity or gender-oriented performance of managers and employees into the performance evaluation systems of managers, both at the national and local levels.

Relevance of recommendations for the countries in the CA region

Recommendation / Relevance for country	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
Transformation of conceptual apparatus and language as a temporary measure	High	High	Medium	Medium
Transformation of gender budgeting	High	High	High	High
Focus on “soft skills”	High	High	High	High
Organization of a system of integrated social services with the help of NCOs and NGOs	Medium	High	High	High
Support for research	High	High	High	High
Personalization of responsibility for achieving gender equality	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Creating preferences in social development and economic empowerment	Medium	High	High	High

Recommendations for the local (subnational) governments

Creating public spaces for girls and women

Traditional lifestyles in rural communities in Central Asia do not encourage women to get out of the house and engage in self-development and paid activities. It is assumed that women have enough household chores and family responsibilities to fill their time completely, that women do not feel the need for organized leisure and development. The opinions of the panelists, numerous empirical observations, and most importantly, the transformation of society refute this stereotype. Moreover, at the local level, a certain recognition of women's right to leisure and self-development has already taken shape (partly preserved from the Soviet Union, partly emerged under the influence of external migration, partly caused by the digital transformation of society). Targeted efforts should be made to create public spaces for women and girls in small towns and especially in rural areas. These should be courses for the development of “soft” skills, places for leisure activities, gender-oriented sports and recreational facilities, places for family time, etc. Public spaces will also promote leadership development among girls and their skills in building dialogue with boys and other groups.

Gender-oriented inclusive local economic policy

The essence of inclusive development policies is to move underdeveloped groups from being consumers of resources to being producers of benefits, participating equally in their distribution. Therefore, it is necessary to shift¹¹ gradually from passive material assistance (for example, buying coal or providing food packages) to active development measures, including active gender budgeting (see a similar recommendation for the national government). At the local level, these may include special conditions for businesses run by women or creating jobs for women and vulnerable groups, programs to develop financial literacy and other “soft” skills, special conditions for self-employed women and artisans, mentoring support programs, scholarship support for girls, etc.

Active involvement of the civil sector (NCOs, NGOs) in the implementation of gender policy at the local level

Both at the national level and the local level it is necessary to make NCOs key partners in the implementation of gender policy, subject to the transformation of the approaches and methods of work of NCOs and NGOs, described below. As mechanisms it is necessary to actively utilize Kazakhstan's experience in the implementation of the state social contracting, Kyrgyzstan's experience in financing local initiatives from the local budget, Uzbekistan's experience in initiative budgeting (participatory budgets), as well as to study the possibility of introducing new mechanisms in the region, such as initiative budgeting with a quota for women and others.

Fairer recognition and reward procedures

Women's contributions to local development should be valued and recognized, not only in terms of attracting investment, building kindergartens, renovating schools, but also in terms of strengthening the economic status of individual families (making “invisible” women visible). Local levels of government can effectively contribute to transforming the evaluation of women's contributions to community development by introducing more equitable systems and procedures for recognizing and rewarding women. So far, the most common type of recognition is the recognition of the reproductive achievements of the mother (the title of mother-heroine), other awards are given to women much less often than to men, which negates their contribution to development. Why not, for example, encourage women peacemakers, women keepers of traditions, women in the professions, etc.? In support of the transformation and localization of the ambassadors described below, the local level of government can

¹¹ This should by no means mean a complete rejection of material assistance, benefits, because there will always be groups who need it to survive.

promote the recognition of women's contributions as such, without regard to their political activism and positions, ordinary women who work and help development, even if their contribution is not visible. Men who in one way or another support or contribute to gender equality also deserve special encouragement.

Relevance of recommendations to the countries in the CA region

Recommendation / Relevance for country	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
Creating public spaces for girls and women	High	High	High	High
Gender-oriented inclusive local economic policy	High	High	High	High
Active involvement of the civil sector (NCOs, NGOs) in the implementation of gender policy at the local level	High	High	High	High
Fairer recognition and reward procedures	Medium	High	High	Medium



Recommendations for the NCOs

Horizontal mutual support of women deputies and women leaders

Practice has shown that women, even when holding leadership positions and becoming members of local councils, are excluded from the actual decision-making process. This is caused by the fact that real policy, both at the national and local level, is formed not so much in the halls of official meetings, as at the level of informal interaction of micro-groups, which consist mainly of male politicians, which excludes women from the process. The problem is particularly acute with regard to local governments, particularly in the Kyrgyz Republic - local councils. In rural areas of all countries of the region there are practically no public spaces where women could realize the process of political participation in the form of micro-groups, besides, the culture of micro-groups and coalition building is less traditional for women in rural areas than for men. NCOs should develop and implement projects aimed at building horizontal networks through which women can provide each other with mutual support.

Transformation and localization of ambassadors

Trust: the practice of ambassadors (influencers) and the term "ambassador" should be transformed in accordance with the "peer to peer" approach. Given the rejection of "alien" words, the word "ambassador" should be replaced with the words "champion", "ambassador", "lawyer". The success of the super-popular individual is already too detached from the reality of the vast majority of the rural population and no longer inspires the kind of trust that it did even 10 years ago. Moreover, the growing number of religious women and men for whom "stars" in the secular sense (e.g. from show business) do not become authorities also narrows the possibilities of such ambassadors. Therefore, it is necessary to transform the qualitative composition of gender equality and human rights ambassadors towards localization. To put it simply, an ambassador must be "own/local" understandable, real, someone you can "touch", someone you can talk to, someone "I know personally or my neighbor knows".

Understanding: These localized ambassadors must be pulled from the following groups. First of all, from local male politicians and influential men who serve informal community leaders. Religious leaders become an extremely important audience for this purpose (relevant for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, some regions of Kazakhstan). Obviously, not all of them are and will not automatically all become adherents of universal values. Moreover, it is in this environment that opponents of gender equality in the secular sense are often found, so a set of specific arguments must be developed for them, proving the overall benefits to communities potentially possible with the economic and social empowerment of women. These arguments must be developed after a careful analysis of the false risks and false threats that male local formal and informal leaders see in women's empowerment (among them, of course, a large number of myths and prejudices). These arguments must include convincing economic indicators and examples that prove that life in the community will improve significantly without violating men's boundaries or threatening their influence. Here we need well thought-out information strategies aimed at understanding that gender applies to both women and men, as well as the formation of new positive stereotypes about the roles of men and women. Dialogue needs to be built with religious leaders to develop measures: introduction of secular education into religious instruction, actions and campaigns, etc.

Accessible experience: the second group of ambassadors should be women themselves, who have managed to make a significant contribution to the development of their community, and it should be not only recognized activists and deputies, but also ordinary women who work and help development, even if their contribution is not visible. In other words, it is necessary to "bring to surface", assess and recognize women's contribution to local development, which can be expressed not only in attracting investment, building kindergartens, repairing schools, but also in strengthening the economic situation of an individual family.

Support: Ambassadors can also be men and boys who promote gender equality. For example, if a woman is economically active, men can help with family responsibilities. And men can talk about this by not being shy about sharing family responsibilities with women, emphasizing that this is the modern norm of behavior.

Transformation of target audiences: women and girls in isolated (closed) communities, boys and young men, and self-transformation of NCOs, NGOs

The understanding of the target audiences that NCOs and NGOs work with to promote gender equality should be transformed. Three target groups should be highlighted and receive special attention: women in isolated (closed¹²) communities, especially religious ones; women exposed to cross forms of discrimination; young men and boys.

With regard to *the first group*, it is useful to study, generalize and expand the experience of progressive women's Islamic groups that are engaged in legal education of women in the framework of Islam and secular law (particularly relevant for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and parts of Kazakhstan). For example, the popularity of the “Mutakalim” movement deserves the closest attention, the level of trust women have in the leader of the movement, Jamal Frontbek kyzy, who easily gathers an audience of 200-300 people of rural women, while not having significant financial resources, not organizing coffee breaks, etc. It is clear that there is a huge need for soft skills development in this target group, and that the existing methods and approaches of NCOs and NGOs do not work for these audiences.

The second group - women exposed to cross forms of discrimination are already a target audience of civil society organizations and further efforts should be aimed at advocating the creation of an effective system of delivering comprehensive social services (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) through the dissemination of state social contracting practices using the example of Kazakhstan.

The third group - boys and young men should become a critical target audience, the coverage of which also requires the transformation of NCOs themselves. The problem of the existing cadre of civic organizations also lies in the fact that the majority of leaders and employees of these organizations are women. And in the countries of the region, more and more rural local communities are not ready to listen to women, especially those from outside the region. Therefore, NCOs should actively involve male local leaders or recruit men in order to intensify their work with young men and boys, including through religious leaders. The undervalued status of women in the family produces an even more “gender dormant” generation of men, and work with them should begin from the age of three, from elementary school, where rural gender discrimination is already taking shape, brought by children from home. It is important to take into account that the child is immersed in stereotypical ideas, including through the behavior of the mother, father, and relatives, so the focus should be on each group: grandparents, mother-dad, and the child himself. Any activity designed for the rural level should include measures of involvement and impact on boys and young men, preferably with or without family members, but with localized male assailants.

Transformation of impact from fighting to partnership

The discussion seminar participants acknowledged that the tactic of fighting, counteracting no longer works. Rural communities are rallying and rejecting any interventions that they feel threaten the values that are important to them. Therefore, NCOs should abandon the tactic of confrontation in their work with local communities and build all relationships in a spirit of partnership, seeking and forming mutual and obvious benefits. Partnership approaches should be applied at any level of impact, starting with language. For example, one cannot “fight stereotypes”, one must deal with the fears that these

¹² There is a difference in the understanding of the term “closed communities” between countries. Thus, “closed” or isolated communities can be understood as: LGBT communities, communities in remote regions, religious communities, communities of repatriated persons.

stereotypes generate and try to reduce anxiety by acting from within the stereotype, as well as create new values.

Transformation of methods and practices of influence: strengthening the targeting, comprehensiveness, sustainable sharing of responsibility with the community

In the organization of any activities at the rural community level, it is necessary to take into account more carefully the age differences between the groups of women and men being trained/informed, due to the different perceptions and needs of these groups. It is also important to consider family status when organizing activities, for example, the status of daughters-in-law when recruiting to such groups (in the presence of older women in age and status, daughters-in-law will remain silent).

It is necessary to exclude a one-time or fragmented approach, abandoning the principle of selecting the nearest locations (a focus on distant regions/areas is needed), all training or interventions should be comprehensive with the long-term involvement of mentors. In some cases, for primary interventions, special motivational measures are to be envisaged, which have yet to be developed.

A suggestion was made to give out useful gifts (except in Uzbekistan, where this is considered unacceptable), which would justify the presence of a woman at a public event in the eyes of family members¹³. Particular attention should be paid to sharing responsibility for results with local communities, be sure to openly share the results of project activities with the community in which the activity took place, so they feel ownership, emphasizing their primary role in the implementation and achievement of results.

Transformation of impact priorities: balanced focus on political empowerment and economic empowerment through soft skills development

As stated above, a key partner of the government in soft skills development should be primarily civil society organizations (NCOs, NGOs) that are able to offer quick, low-cost, effective, large-scale and diversified soft skills development programs for different gender and age groups. One should not expect the government and its institutions to be able to cope with the task on their own in the short term. Only NCOs and NGOs can organize targeted and relatively quick programs to develop soft skills for different groups of men and women to help achieve gender equality. It is the soft skills that can help women monetize their contributions to family well-being, strengthen the voice of women and girls, and enhance their recognition by families and communities.

Among these skills, digital, legal and financial literacy needs lead the way, but focus on other personal skills, such as dialogue, advocacy, and information-seeking skills, which will help them conduct dialogues at different levels, know and exercise their rights. Separately, the need to develop critical thinking (all countries) and emotional intelligence (Kazakhstan) was noted. At the same time, for Uzbekistan, the need to build the political capacity of women to participate in local development remains high.

Stimulating motivation to self-development and psychological support

It is extremely important to develop women's intrinsic motivation to take any action to improve their situation, as the participants of the discussion seminar also mentioned in the list of problems the decreased motivation of many women to change, complete resignation and acceptance of vulnerable and underdeveloped status. Organizing psychological support and encouraging women themselves to be active remains a complex issue, but "soft skills" seem to be one of the easiest ways to achieve a minimum result in this direction.

¹³ This measure is highly controversial and the participants in the discussion are divided between those who believe it is acceptable to give out gifts and those who believe it is categorically impossible and harmful.

Relevance of recommendations for the countries in the CA region

Recommendation / Relevance for country	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
Horizontal mutual support of women deputies and women leaders	High	High	High	High
Transformation and localization of ambassadors	High	High	Medium	Medium
Transformation of target audiences: women in isolated (closed) communities, boys and young men, and self-transformation of NCOs, NGOs	High	High	High	High
Transformation of impact from fighting to partnership	High	High	High	Medium
Transformation of methods and practices of influence: strengthening the targeting, comprehensiveness, sustainable sharing of responsibility with the community	High	High	High	High
Transformation of impact priorities: balanced focus on political empowerment and economic empowerment through soft skills development	High	High	High	High
Stimulating motivation to self-development and psychological support	High	High	High	High



МОЛЧИ,
ЖЕНЩИНА.

Recommendations for the international development partners

Transition from a strategy of counteraction to a strategy of implementation

Fighting negative gender stereotypes does not help achieve gender equality in the CA region. It would be appropriate to rely on traditional values and cultural and value diversity, to go “inside” stereotypes and destroy them from the inside, without engaging in open confrontation. For example, the negative stereotype of the housewife can “serve” as an “entry point” for increasing women's political participation in local governance, and then be destroyed by demonstrating the genuine political contribution of women. An effective approach here would be to recognize the priority of cultural values and the implementation of gender equality principles through the culture and traditions of peoples, using the images of ethnic, national leaders, heroes, etc.

Assessment of women's economic contribution - actual and perspective

For each country in the CA region, it would be useful to assess women's economic contribution to development – accounted for and unrecorded (assessment of the real contribution of women's unpaid labor to GDP; assessment of the impact of women's unpaid labor on the economy), as well as the omitted contribution. Research is also needed here on the potential contribution to the development of industries focused on job creation for women (continuing and developing the assessment of the contribution of the care industry, which has been done by UN Women for the Kyrgyz Republic).

Innovative solutions against the destructive messages of the media, social networks that promote false values and destructive stereotypes: mindless consumption, attributes of wealth as an end in themselves, idle life without effort. The participants of the seminar are aware of the threat, but a set of precise and effective measures has not yet been formed.

Promotion of innovative methods of inclusive development

Supporting the government and local programs of inclusive development, taking into account the framework for authorities according to the Index of Inclusive Development, which corresponds to the ideology of “leaving no one behind”. Despite the official commitment of international programs to this principle, there are still few practical tools integrated into the management and development of local communities contributing to this goal. It is important to understand that the implementation of inclusive development practices must begin at all stages simultaneously and in parallel, both in the planning and implementation phases. The process can begin with an assessment, such as an audit of the inclusiveness of local development programs and local government mandates.

Promotion of horizontal networks and cross-sectoral networks

Support is needed to disseminate the best practices of countries in the area of inclusive community development and gender equality through the creation of Central Asian partnership networks both at the regional level and within the countries. During the discussion workshop there was a proposal to make them on the basis of existing networks, through leadership and support of the network by countries according to the schedule. It is necessary to support the networks, collections of successful practices in the countries of Central Asia and similar gender contexts of the regions of the world.

It would be good if there were more practical recommendations, specific practices on how to work differently. For example, there are organizations which during events for rural women create conditions for women to leave their children for that time, where they will be occupied with something and will be taken care of, so that women can fully participate in the workshop. That kind of recommendations was a little lacking. A quote from the discussion workshop participant.

Development of large-scale, cost-effective methods of impact

Given the rate at which women's status in local communities is deteriorating due to various factors (poverty, migration, education, radicalization), support is needed to develop and implement low-cost but large-scale approaches to keep new generations from gender degradation (reaching a level of trust where 200 women can gather in a club without coffee breaks or gifts). These approaches must address the intrinsic needs of the target audiences and be clearly and strongly motivating to the communities. For example, the effective GALS tool should be refined and transformed so that it is truly cost-effective and easily self-replicating at the local level.

Build gender expertise among a wide range of development experts and consultants, including sectoral NCOs

The participants of the discussion seminar noted the lack of gender experts on one hand, and their weak capacity to specialize gender expertise, to "apply" it to a particular sector or area of development. For example, there are almost no gender experts in local government (and self-government), agriculture, planning, public and corporate finance management and other areas. Therefore, improving the gender qualifications of highly specialized, sector-specific experts and consultants, as well as NCOs and NGOs will be of great benefit. However, efforts to expand the range of specialized gender experts and consultants should not be stopped. In general, gender expertise should be cross-cutting, natural, access to knowledge on this issue along with knowledge of rights and finances should be provided throughout a person's life "kindergarten - school - university – job".

Support for research to define a framework of the ethnogender subsystem, the Central Asian gender context

This research will be especially useful for cross-border and regional projects to best amplify their ethnogender impact. Research should be comprehensive and conducted by multidisciplinary research teams (in accordance with the comprehensive nature of the concept of "ethnogender studies"). Such teams should include specialists in sociology, history, psychology, demography, art history, linguistics, and other disciplines who are directly or indirectly involved in the issue of gender behavior. The mandatory participants should be NCOs that can play the role of a source of information and immediately "translate" scientific results into practice.

Transformation of support for human rights work: greater focus on social and economic rights

The traditional field of support by development partners has been the political empowerment of women, their representation in governance, and others. However, practice shows that the formal level of representation is not enough, although it plays a great stimulating role in the development of the gender theme in general. For example, appearance of women in regional governments in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has had an inspiring effect (female akims and heads of oblasts), and introduction of a 30% quota in local councils in Kyrgyzstan has become a significant benchmark for other countries in the region. However, the expansion of political rights by itself will have an impact on the situation of each woman only if the expansion and creation of social and economic rights is synchronized. The discussion seminar and other empirical observations show that neither NCOs, NGOs, nor women and men themselves can even list their social and economic rights, being limited to the rights to education, medical care, work and recreation. Other rights remain "behind the scenes" missing focus by civil society, the government, and women themselves. Therefore, initiatives aimed at educating citizens about the law and creating the conditions for the execution of social and economic rights in their entirety require special support. It is important to note that with regard to social rights, the concepts of "social rights" and "social protection" are often substituted, which leads politicians away from the importance of creating a gender-sensitive environment for the equal development of human capital. At the same time, supporting women's political capacity in local governance and development remains relevant for Uzbekistan.

Transformation of the funding model

It is necessary to return to mass support of informal initiative groups, which will contribute to a faster and wider coverage of the rural population as opposed to projects carried out by professional project teams of large international NCOs. It is clear that this approach carries a number of risks, but the countries of the region have developed a network of localized NCOs that are capable of organizing and monitoring the process. They also require institutional support to strengthen their administrative capacity to manage such umbrella projects, but this approach is more effective, cheaper and sustainable.

Sharing responsibility for results with the local level of government

It is important to support the introduction of institutional mechanisms of interaction between local authorities and formalized and informal development groups, such as state social contracting, local initiative and active budgetary measures. In addition to partners represented by NCOs and through NGOs, local governments must become partners for international support and initiatives. This is especially important with regard to supporting the creation of public spaces for women, the sustainability and development of which is unlikely without the participation of local governments.

Innovations in projects related to economic empowerment and development of women's entrepreneurship

The discussion workshop participants emphasized that in many communities there is already a demand for more modern types of employment and self-employment. Women can and want to engage in more “advanced” activities, such as participation in marketplaces, innovative services, and production of new agricultural products using new technologies. In other words, innovation should replace sewing machines and baking machines, which have traditionally been seen as helping bring women into the economy.

“Is it possible to redistribute domestic labor at the same time as promoting traditional values? We have to be careful here. Many projects that promote entrepreneurship simply create another job for a woman who already takes care of the entire household and everyone in her family. Without the redistribution of unpaid labor within families, involving women in entrepreneurship will create even more work for them”. *Quote from the workshop participant*

Development and implementation of projects to form women's “soft” skills

Priorities include improving women's digital, legal and financial literacy, as well as psychological self-support skills, motivation for development, communication, emotional intelligence and others.

Support the localization and transformation of ambassadors

It is necessary to transform the qualitative composition of gender equality, human rights ambassadors towards localization. To put it simply, an ambassador should be trusted by the local community, to be one's own. It is necessary to attract these localized grassroots ambassadors from among local male politicians and authoritative men - informal leaders of communities. Religious leaders become an extremely important audience for this purpose (relevant for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, some regions of Kazakhstan). The second group of ambassadors should be women themselves, who have managed to make a significant contribution to the development of their community, and it should be not only recognized activists and deputies, but also ordinary women who work and help development, even if their contribution is not visible. In other words, it is necessary to “bring to surface”, assess and recognize women's contribution to local development, which can be expressed not only in attracting investment, building kindergartens, repairing schools, but also in strengthening the economic situation of an individual family.

Relevance of recommendations for the countries of the CA region

Recommendation / Relevance for country	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
Transformation of support for human rights work: more focus on social and economic rights	Medium	High	High	High
Assessment of women's economic contribution - actual and perspective	High	High	High	High
Innovative solutions to counteract destructive messages from the mass media and social media	High	High	High	High
Promotion of innovative methods of inclusive development	High	High	High	High
Promotion of horizontal networks and cross-sectoral networks	High	High	High	High
Development of large-scale, cost-effective methods of impact	High	High	High	High
Build gender expertise among a wide range of development experts and consultants, including sectoral NCOs	High	High	High	High
Support for research to define a framework of the ethnogender subsystem, the Central Asian gender context	High	High	High	High
Transformation of the funding model	High	High	High	High
Sharing responsibility for results with the local level of government	High	High	High	High
Innovations in projects related to economic empowerment and development of women's entrepreneurship	High	High	High	High
Development and implementation of projects to form women's "soft" skills	High	High	High	High
Support the localization and transformation of ambassadors	High	High	Medium	Medium