

In support of the Millennium Development Goals  
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women



## **GENDER EQUALITY AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN KAZAKHSTAN**

Almaty 2005



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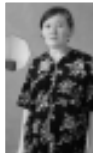
# GENDER EQUALITY AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN KAZAKHSTAN

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## FOREWORD

Women can be categorized neither as a minority group nor as a weak group. Some would even disagree about whether women can be grouped at all. However, in no country in the world are women found to have exactly the same opportunities or power as men to make decisions regarding national issues, economy, or even their own behavior or bodies. This is not in line with principles of equal rights and freedoms for all people. Moreover, it is a misuse of human capacity in the development of our societies.

Ten years have passed since the Beijing Declaration of 1995 urged all countries to undertake decisive measures to improve women's status. The establishment of the National Commission for Family and Women's Affairs under the President of Kazakhstan and the National Action Plan to Improve Women's Status in Kazakhstan, adopted in 1999, are main tools for the Government to achieve these goals. Further, the development of women's NGOs in Kazakhstan is expanding the active involvement of the whole society into the process.

The UN Millennium Development Goals, which identify the necessity to promote gender equality and encourage women's rights and opportunities, have been introduced into the country's developmental agenda. This report is prepared in support of Millennium Development Goal 3 - "Promote gender equality and empower women". Gender mainstreaming should also be a cross-cutting issue in developing strategies for achieving each of the eight Millennium Development Goals.

The report presents a broad analysis of the development of women's status in Kazakhstan. It also provides an opportunity to define perspectives for the improvement of gender policy in Kazakhstan.

The Report was developed by a group of international and national experts with active support of the National Council for Women's Affairs. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the author's group for their professionalism in preparation of the publication.

Gender equality is a matter of power and values, relating to all aspects of life. However, because power is a human construction, it can be altered to more equally reflect the rights and needs of women and men. Stereotypes, traditions, and structures in private as well as public life need to be continuously scrutinized and changed when found discriminative. I hope that this report will stimulate discussion as well as further research needed to reach a society in which men and women have the same opportunities, rights, and freedoms.

UN Resident Coordinator/  
UNDP Resident Representative  
in Kazakhstan

Yuriko Shoji

## FOREWORD

Democratization developments alongside of political and economic reforms have impacted the concept of women's niche and role in society. Today, challenges concerning the guarantee of equal rights and opportunities of women and men in all areas of life, implementation of national programmes for improving the status of families, women, and children, and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals related to gender equality are coming to the forefront.

Kazakhstan has many accomplishments in this area such as the adoption of a series of laws aiming to protect women's and children's interests and the approval of the Concept of Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, which underlies the Strategy of Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2015, soon to be submitted for the Government's consideration.

As the Beijing Platform for Action urges, the Strategy must ensure that 30% of decision makers are women. It also provides for gender subjects to be included in the general education system and gender training of government employees, Parliament and Maslikhat deputies, judicial staff, and decision makers of all levels. The Law "On Equal Rights and Opportunities of Men and Women" is to be adopted.

The Strategy provides for further development of enterprise and self-employment of women and promotion of microcredit, with a special focus on women.

A programme for the development of "soft" sectors of the economy, which traditionally employ women, will be elaborated. More girls and women will acquire engineering qualifications, since a large number of new jobs will be created in such well-paid sectors as oil and gas, metallurgical and other sectors.

In order to improve women's chances of employment, more government-owned and private preschool facilities will be established and mechanisms of including men in child care developed. It is expected that income tax will be reduced twofold for parents with 3 or more underage children, while single parents will not have to pay income tax at all.

A set of actions will be taken to protect and promote the reproductive health status of men, women, and adolescents. Male health guidelines will be prepared, while anti alcohol and drug abuse activities will be enhanced along with measures to reduce injury rates and on-the-job accidental death rates.

There are provisions for special programmes targeting a better Women's Health Index. Centres for the early detection of breast cancer (screening centres) will be set up.

Efforts will be focused around the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and the access of at-risk groups to modern contraceptives.

The Domestic Violence Law, classifying domestic violence as a crime, is expected to be adopted in 2006. Respective laws will be amended to include provisions for the protection of people affected by trafficking as well as those witnessing against traffickers.

The Strategy of Gender Equality provides for the training of children and youth in non-violent behaviour through the introduction of special items into school curricula.

Today, the volume of work related to achieving gender equality is increasing. Laws are being assessed for gender sensitivity, gender indicators integrated in national plans and programmes, and mechanisms for gender analysis of the republican and local budgets introduced at the stages of development, discussion, and implementation.

In this respect, the UNDP-prepared Report "Gender Equality and the Status of Women in Kazakhstan" is of particular interest to us. The report offers a fairly detailed analysis of the status of women in Kazakhstan and reveals the causes of gender inequality.

The report also states that women tend to seek more stable but lower-paid employment such as in government-funded organizations. Men, however, prefer better-paid employment, which is often riskier.

Of special interest are international practices of developing gender policies.

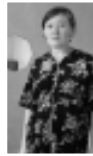
There is no doubt that the report will be useful for government agencies, NGOs, and political parties and will promote gender equality in Kazakhstan.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank UNDP for its cooperation, which I hope will endure into the future.

**Minister of Environmental Protection  
Chairperson of National Commission for  
Family and Women's Affairs under the  
President of the Republic of Kazakhstan**



**Aitkul Samakova**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Achieving equality between men and women is not only a matter of fighting discrimination but an integral part of human development striving for broadening opportunities and choices for the entire population.*

## Chapter 1. Development of gender equality

The UN Charter (1945) providing for "equal rights of men and women" was the first international document to call for equal rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without gender-based discrimination. Since then, UN efforts to improve women's situation have gone through a number of changes, from viewing women almost only from the standpoint of their developmental needs, to recognition of their significant contribution to the overall developmental process, and finally towards a will to enhance women's rights and opportunities to fully participate in all human activities. Thus, at the current stage, 'women's status' is not regarded as a synonym of "women's issues" but rather from the viewpoint of achieving gender equality and partnership between women and men for development.

The Fourth World Conference on Women organised by the UN in Beijing in 1995 was an important milestone to voice the need to shift focus from women as such onto a concept of gender equality, by recognising the necessity of revising and reforming accordingly the overall social structure and relations between men and women in all spheres of life. The Forum showed that only through such a fundamental reorganisation of society and its institutions would it be possible for women and men to become equal partners in all sectors of life.

Gaps between men and women in areas of education and health have narrowed rapidly since the 1970s; however, this progress has been disproportionate between countries and spheres of life. Fewer opportunities have opened up for women in economic and political spheres.

## Chapter 2. Gender balance and the status of women in Kazakhstan

Gender roles and disparities determine how the transitional period has affected women and men differently. The transitional period has given rise to some new specific forms of gender inequality, which are determined by the limited mobility of the labour force, poor information on the labour market, and the impact of the domestic division of labour. The status of most women is lower

than that of men both socially and economically, which suggests inefficient use of human capital.

Eastern European transition economies and the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) performance is slightly better than other emerging economies' performance in terms of the Gender Development Index (GDI). The relatively equal system taken over from the Soviet Union partly explains these





numbers. However, the achievements reached in Central Asia are far from being satisfactory. Kazakhstan, even if it ranks first among Central Asian countries, is distant from Russia and Eastern European countries. However, more troublesome is the fact that Kazakhstan is losing its position in the GDI ranking (62 in 2003 HDR).

Over the period of economic, social, and political reforms, the following areas have appeared most affected by gender inequality: participation in decision making, the employment arena and labour market, healthcare (which particularly affected women's reproductive health and children's health), education, and social protection. Deepening insight and research into these issues, their interconnection and complexity need to underlie strategies for improving gender equality.

The early 2000s were marked by an initially weak upward trend and then a settling down of the population's economic activity, encouraged by the economic growth. In 2003, 65% of women of working age (15+ years) were economically active, which was still high when compared internationally, but fell behind the percentage of economically active men (75.6%). This trend was observed in 2004 as well.

Regional disparities in economic development have caused corresponding considerable regional disparities in the proportion of economically active women. In 2003, the lowest level of women's economic activity was observed in West Kazakhstan oblast (57.8%), while the highest level was observed in Kostanai oblast (69.8%).

The economic revival of the late 1990s had a positive effect on the employment situation in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, this process was not the same for

women as it was for men. Initially, women's employment status revived somewhat faster than men's. It can be stated that women managed to hold out in the labour market over the reforms. The level of employment remained fairly high, and the proportion of women out of the total employed population remained almost unchanged.

However, this came about at the cost of decreased quality of female employment with a prevalence of women in low-paid sectors and at less prestigious posts, increasing gender disparities in remuneration and unemployment.

Women are found in more stable but lower-paid employments, such as in government-funded organisations. The years of reforms have encouraged a fast-growing form of employment to be used as a survival strategy against unemployment: self-employment. It should be noted that in Kazakhstan, just as in other CIS countries, self-employment is often in the informal sector and, as a result, comes with frequent violations of labour laws and poor social protection. There are more self-employed women than men. Proportions of self-employed women and men in 2004 were standing at 42.3% and 36.8% respectively. Self-employment is most prevalent in rural areas.

Extensive vertical segregation is one of the most prominent problems of gender inequality on the labour market in Kazakhstan. Only 3.5% of heads of government authorities and managers of all levels, including heads of organisations (high level offices) are women, while 76.7% of workers at lower levels are women. Extensive vertical segregation in combination with the higher educational level of women compared to men suggests an inefficient use of edu-

cational and professional potential of labour resources as well as the prevalence of traditional stereotypes and sex-based discrimination when recruiting and promoting workers in Kazakhstan.

In Kazakhstan, just as in many other transitional economies, gender disparities in remuneration increased considerably during the reforms. Thus, in the early 1990s women's wages were on average approximately 70% of the average men's wage, and in 2003 this figure dropped to 60.7%. One of the main causes of gender disparities in remuneration is horizontal segregation by sector and profession, i.e. extensive employment of women in lower-paid sectors and professions.

In 2004, women accounted for 57.3% of all unemployed people, and female unemployment exceeded male unemployment levels as the figures were 9.8% and 7.0% respectively. A general downward trend in the unemployment rate of recent years has affected both women and men; however, women's unemployment rate is decreasing more slowly. Thus, over 2001-2003 the number of unemployed men decreased by 57,000 (17%), while the number of unemployed women decreased by 52,000 (12%). Gender analysis of labour market trends shows that the feminisation of unemployment figures is characterised both by the unemployment rate as well as by gender disparities in almost all the indicators used to measure unemployment, such as breakdown by age and education, duration of unemployment, level of long-term unemployment, etc. However, the improved economic situation over the last few years has reduced the duration of unemployment and levels of long-term unemployment. This affects both



men and women, but the female long-term unemployment rate is also decreasing more slowly.

Kazakhstan has achieved the goal of ensuring a universal primary education for both boys and girls. Access to education is less of a gender issue in today's Kazakhstan, but rather determined by regions and rural/urban access to schooling as well as poverty and low living standards. The 1999 census showed that 10.6% of all women have a higher education; the proportion of women with a vocational secondary education is twice as high. The situation is reversed at the lower levels of both professional and general education, where the proportion of men at all levels of education, but general primary education, is higher than that of women.

When reviewing structural gender inequality in education, the segregation of students enrolled in professional education by profession should be noted, as it is closely related to the segregation in the employment arena. Young girls tend to choose professions that are highly feminised both in the employment arena and the labour market and avoid "male" professions.

Over 1991-2003, 86.9% of all kindergartens were closed with an 82% reduction in the percentage of children accessing preschool facilities out of all children of appropriate age. However, starting from 1999 there has been an upward trend in the recovery of preschool facilities. The undeveloped and unaffordable system of preschool education is an essential factor, as it is most often women taking care of children, hindering the improvement of women's status in the employment arena and their competitiveness on the labour market.

Economic crisis, deteriorating

living standards, and the challenges of the social and economic adjustment that people have faced over the last few years have had a negative effect on life expectancy in Kazakhstan. As a result, today both women and men are faced with the shortest life expectancies at birth throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS.

In addition, there are distinct gender disparities in life expectancies that are increasing with time. Thus, official statistics for 1990-2004 report that life expectancy at birth dropped from 72.7 to 71.5 years for women and from 63.2 to 60.6 years for men. This indicates that the gap between female and male life expectancy at birth increased from 9.5 years in 1990 to 11 years in 2004, which is significant by international standards and indicates serious gender aspects of mortality in Kazakhstan.

Anemia is a widespread problem among women in Kazakhstan, caused mainly by inadequate and unbalanced nutrition. In the 1990s, the incidence of anemia among registered pregnant women increased more than two-fold from 25.5% in 1991 to 57.5% in 2001 and grew in subsequent years as well.

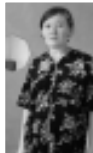
Maternal mortality rates show an overall downward trend but are still high by international standards. Thus, in 1990 the maternal mortality rate was 55.0 per 100,000 live births. The rate decreased to 36.9% in 2004. An increase in the maternal mortality rate was observed in 1992 (57.2), 1995 (57.6), and 1997 (59.0). These years were the most critical years of the transition; this may have affected the situation and caused the increase.

Despite a reduction, abortions are still the most commonly used family planning method. The pro-

portion of women using contraceptives is fairly moderate and is growing only slowly.

The current gap between women's and men's pensions is much less than the gap in remuneration. Over the last decade, the average female to male pension ratio varied within a relatively small range and did not have a stable upward trend. However, gender disparities in pensions may increase in the near future. The current pension provision is savings rather than distribution-based, which implies a very close correlation between income, the income gaining period, and the amount of pension provision. Such methods for calculating pensions pre-determine that women's pensions will be at a lower level due to the lower income women gain, with the gap increasing and shorter income gaining periods determined by gender disparities due to maternity, child rearing, and family responsibility benefits.

It is only possible to have a well-informed electorate that makes an ongoing contribution to all areas of public and social policy if women's involvement at all levels of decision making is ensured. However, in Kazakhstan women are poorly represented in governmental and political structures. There is a typical gender pyramid of power, where women are present at lower and medium levels, but they are not proportionally represented at higher positions. Over the last ten years the representation of women in Parliament actually decreased. For the election in September 2004, there were 106 registered women out of 623 candidates. The result of the election is that 8 women are members of the current Mazhilis, or 10.4% of all deputies. In Maslikhats, the locally elected representative body,



the proportion of women is higher than at national level, but they still constitute a significant minority. In 2003, there were 17.1% of women among deputies at this level.

The prevalence of violence against women is a serious and growing problem in Kazakhstan. The initial years of the transition to the market economy in all CIS states were characterised by a number of negative social phenomena such as unemployment, inflation,

weak state policies, and reduced living standards, which caused an increase in crimes, alcohol usage, and other undesirable behaviour, including domestic violence. Kazakhstan was not an exception.

There are no official statistics on trafficking in women maintained in Kazakhstan, but women's rights organisations and IOM point to the extent and gravity of this problem. Kazakhstan is not only a country of trafficking to other countries but also a transit

and destination country for trafficking in women. In transitional economies the difficult economic situation, worsened by a cutback in vacancies, might be the main factor that causes women to look for a job abroad. Women try to escape from poverty and earn money to provide for themselves and their families. Victims of trafficking usually find themselves abroad without visas or passports or with fake passports, which makes them illegal migrants.

### Chapter 3. Institutional framework for improving gender equality

Over the years of independence, Kazakhstan has developed a system of institutional mechanisms to protect women and improve their status. These mechanisms are continuously becoming more effective and efficient in all areas of life.

In order to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, Kazakhstan developed the Concept of National Policy for Improving Women's Status in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Concept defines the general strategies and priorities of the national policy aimed at ensuring equal rights and freedoms and providing equal opportunities for women and men based on Kazakhstan's Constitution and international commitments. Kazakhstan also adopted the National Action Plan for Improving Women's Status in Kazakhstan, containing 12 priorities and 105 specific programs and major activities. The priorities are grouped into four main areas of activities defined by the National Commission for Family and Women's Affairs. These include 1) political empowerment, 2) economic advancement, 3) improvement of

women's health and 4) combating violence against women.

In order to implement recommendations of the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) concerning the development of comprehensive policies and an institutional approach to achieve gender equality in all spheres of life, the Concept of Gender Policy in Kazakhstan was adopted.

The Council for Family and Women's Affairs and Demographic Policy under the President of Kazakhstan was set up in 1995 to address challenges faced by families, women, and children. The Council was reorganised in 1998 to become the National Commission for Family and Women's Affairs under the President. The Chair of the National Commission has ministerial status and the status of a Government member, which allows him/her to take part in high-level decision making. The main task of the National Commission is to define priorities and develop recommendations for shaping public policy regarding family, women, and

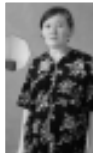
children and to facilitate the development of a system of social, economic, and legal support.

Non-governmental organisations, or NGOs, play an important role in improving women's status in Kazakhstan. Currently, there are 4,500 NGOs in Kazakhstan with approximately 150 of them being specifically women's NGOs. There is also a Coalition of Women's NGOs of Kazakhstan. Women's NGOs have established employment and professional guidance centres, which are centres for small business development and legal advice. NGOs also do extensive work to develop a network of crisis centres to fight violence against women. There were 38 centres in 2003 with legal and psychological support for families, women, and children, mostly financed and run by non-governmental organisations.

Many international organisations, for example UNIFEM, OSCE, IOM, USAID, British Council and UNDP, work actively to support the development of gender issues in Kazakhstan, combat trafficking, and promote women's participation in decision making.

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# ACRONYMS

GID Bureau	- UN Gender in Development Bureau
CEDAW	- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
GDP	- Gross Domestic Product
HEI	- Higher Education Institution
LL	- Labour Law
MFL	- Marital and Family Law
HDI	- Human Development Index
Kazakh SSR	- Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic
MIA	- Ministry of Internal Affairs
IOM	- International Organisation for Migration
ILO	- International Labour Organisation
NAP	- National Action Plan (for Improving the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan)
NGO	- Non-governmental organisation
OSCE	- Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UN	- United Nations
UNDP	- United Nations Development Programme
RK	- Republic of Kazakhstan
RF	- Russian Federation
CIS	- Commonwealth of Independent States
USSR	- Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics
UNHCR	- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
RK CC	- Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	- United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	- United Nations Women's Fund
UNFPA	- United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
USAID	- United States Agency for International Development
WHO	- World Health Organisation
WB	- World Bank

# CHAPTER 1.

## DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY

### 1.1 From women's development needs to gender equality

The UN Charter (1945) providing for "equal rights of men and women" was the first international document to call for equal rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without gender-based discrimination. Since then UN efforts to improve women's situation have gone through a number of changes that have shifted from viewing women almost only from the standpoint of their developmental needs, to a recognition of their significant contribution to the overall development process, with finally a tendency towards a will to enhance women's rights and opportunities that they may fully participate in all human activities at every level. Thus, at the current stage, "women's status" is not regarded as a synonym of "women's issues" but rather from the viewpoint of achieving gender equality and partnership between women and men for development.

The Fourth World Conference on Women organised by the UN in Beijing in 1995 featured the first attempt to voice a need to shift the focus from women as such onto a concept of gender equality, by recognising the necessity of revising and reforming accordingly the overall social structure and relations between men and women in all spheres of life. The Forum showed that only through such a fundamental

reorganisation of society and its institutions would it be possible for women and men to become equal partners in all sectors of life.

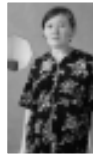
At the same time the term "gender" is fairly new to the world community, having emerged only in the last third of the 20th century. In spite of its recent emergence, the term has already established itself in modern scientific literature and international political discussions and documents.

In a broad sense the term "gender" means socially and culturally constructed roles of men and women as well as relationships between men and women as shaped by a society at a specific time and place. The roles and relationships are not fixed, but change over time and circumstance<sup>1</sup>. The term "sex" implies anatomic and physiological characteristics used to differentiate men and women. The term "sex" is only used in relation to characteristics and modes of conduct that are the direct results of biological differences between men and women. It is clear that the terms "sex" and "gender" are not interchangeable but rather complementary.

Gender is designed through

<sup>1</sup> *Transforming the Mainstream - Gender in UNDP*, by UNDP





certain systems of socialisation, division of labour and accepted cultural norms, roles, and stereotypes. Accepted gender roles determine to a certain extent emotional qualities (encouraging some and giving a negative assessment to others), abilities, activities, and professions according to sex. As such, gender roles do not imply the same things and vary significantly from community to community.

At the same time, the term "gender equality", which emerged at the end of the last century, is not yet concretely determined and is still under development. Politicians, researchers, and participants of the women's movement of many states have had many discussions on the question "What is equality?" Similar discussions have taken place at an international level. There are several interpretations and definitions of equality, which are largely determined by the national traits and differing mentalities of different communities.

Sometimes gender equality is interpreted as equality before the law and equality of opportunities, including equal remuneration and equal access to human capital and other resources of production that make these opportunities legitimate, as well as equal opportunities to express one's opinion and state one's interests<sup>2</sup>. In some cases this term is broadened to a requirement for equal division of responsibilities, labour, and decision-making opportunities<sup>3</sup>.

Over the last few decades the term "gender equality" as interpreted at the international level is increasingly guided by the right of both women and men to hold differences, special interests, experiences, knowledge, and val-

ues. As such, gender inequality is regarded as the unequal or asymmetric status of the two genders in various fields of social life such as economy, politics, governance, etc. From a social standpoint this is called gender differentiation.

Accordingly, there exists neither a universal recipe for achieving gender equality nor a fixed set of approaches to developing and implementing gender equality policies. Some countries do not go beyond formally adopting gender-neutral laws. This approach often results in achieving formal gender equality without removing the issues of actual social inequality and without overcoming former discriminatory practices. Other countries take a different approach to achieving gender equality by taking positive steps to enhance women's access to the labour market and/or decision making.

Each country targeting to achieve gender equality progresses based on its historical, cultural, and political background and current realities. However, achieving gender equality in all fields of life is key to effectively addressing other social and economic issues. Thus, for example, research conducted by the World Bank shows that advancement along the gender equality ladder results both in more effective use of labour resources and economic development, in improved economic efficiency, and in a better standard of

living for the overall population<sup>4</sup>.

It is obvious that achieving gender equality is a multi-profile and multi-level goal that encompasses research, analysis, political practice, planning, and institutional development in all sectors, including economic development. Such a goal takes a long time to achieve.

A current strategy for achieving the above-described goal is gender mainstreaming, according to which gender roles in the society are not purely biologically but rather socially pre-determined. It puts forward democratic principles and fundamental human rights that demand gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is crucial to ensure social justice and sustainable human development.

The UN defines the term "gender mainstreaming" as "an appraisal of any planned action from the standpoint of its impact on men and women, including laws, policies and programmes in all fields and levels. This policy is based on the expectation that women's and men's interests and experiences should become an integral criteria to developing general concepts and implementing, monitoring, and appraising overall course lines and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, so that both women and men can equally benefit, while inequality should never grow strong"<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Gender Issues and Development. Report on the World Bank's Policies.* - The Whole World, 2002

<sup>3</sup> *Materials of the workshop on project staff capacity building.* - ILO Subregional Bureau for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Moscow, September 21-22 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *Gender Issues and Development. Promoting Development through Gender Equality of Rights, Availability of Resources and Opportunities to Express Own Interests.* - M.: Whole World, 2002

<sup>5</sup> *Economic and Social Council Report 1997.* UN. 1997.

## 1.2 International practices of developing gender equality policies and implementation mechanisms

The work the United Nations has been doing for almost fifty years is a foundation to build upon for the development of international gender equality policies and their implementation mechanisms. The respective points of departure were the four UN-organised World conferences to develop policies and plans of action to improve women's status.

The first World Women's Conference was held in Mexico in 1975. The Conference was the first to recognise that discrimination against women and violation of women's rights were a matter of fact. The resulting document was the World Plan of Action outlining the main areas of action to be taken by governments and the world community for the next ten years. The Plan included three major targets: absolute gender equality and eradication of sex-based discrimination; women's involvement and their active participation in development; and greater contribution of women to the strengthening of world peace. In addition, the World Action Plan included the minimum programme until 1980 to ensure equal access of women to education, employment, politics, healthcare, housing and food provision, and family planning services.

The year the Conference was held in was declared the International Women's Year to remind the world community of the fact that the issues concerning discrimination against women were still outstanding on the agendas of many states.

The Second World Women's Conference took place in Copenhagen in 1980. The focus of the Conference was on reviewing and evaluating the implementation status of the World Plan of Action of 1975. The gap between guaranteed rights and women's ability to enjoy them was noted as emerging. The major factors contributing to the problem were identified. They were: poor involvement of men in improving women's status in the community, a lack of political will, poor recognition of the valuable contribution of women to social development, the small number of women at the leadership position, the inadequate range of services promoting women's participation in society, a general lack of financial resources, and poor awareness of women about available resources. In order to remove these, the participants of the Conference adopted the Programme of Action.

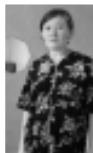
The Third World Women's Conference held in Nairobi in 1985 was called the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. The Reports which were presented indicated there was only limited success in equalizing the rights of men and women and reducing discrimination. The reports led to a more in-depth understanding of gender equality issues and the recognition that gender equality was not an isolated problem but concerned all fields of life, and that the equality of men and women

should reach beyond simply equality of rights to equality of opportunities. Therefore, ways, means, and mechanisms of achieving the type of equality set forth in the Nairobi strategies included both improving women's status and their active involvement in addressing all concerns, rather than just those affecting them directly.

The Fourth World Conference on Women organised by the United Nations took place in Beijing in 1995 with delegations of 189 states participating. The NGO Forum assembled 47,000 representatives of civil society. The Beijing Conference was another vital stage to the development of understanding gender equality and strategies to achieve it. The Beijing Conference was the first to put into words the need to shift focus from women as such (and improvement of their status) to the concept of gender equality, and to recognise the need to review and reorganise accordingly the overall social structure and relations between men and women in all fields of life. The Conference showed that only fundamental social reorganisation and reorganisation of social institutions could make women and men equal partners in all spheres of life.

The Conference resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration identified major concerns regarding the actual status of all women as well as political, social, and economic strategies to remove those concerns.





### Box 1.1. Critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action

The Platform for Action, which is an agenda for empowering women, identified 12 critical areas of concern for women's progress, which require concrete actions on the part of the international community, governments and civil society. They are:

- women and poverty;
- education and professional training of women;
- women and healthcare;
- violence against women;
- women in armed conflicts;
- women and economy;
- women's participation in decision-making bodies and process; institutional mechanism for improving women's status;
- women and human rights;
- women and mass media;
- women and the environment;
- rights of girls.

The states that adopted the Beijing Platform for Action committed themselves to integrating effectively the gender dimension into all national institutions, strategies, planning and decision making. The integration of the gender component required a revised structure of society and of the structural framework of inequality.

Gender mainstreaming was defined by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1997 as "a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and ex-

periences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated." Gender mainstreaming means monitoring development and identifying gaps through the use of gender-disaggregated data; developing strategies to close the gaps with sufficient resources as well as monitoring the results and holding

institutions and individuals accountable<sup>6</sup>.

The Millennium Development Goals set out by the Heads of States at the Millennium Summit of September 2000 are important when reviewing the development of the international gender equality policy. They are a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets.

<sup>6</sup> *Transforming the Mainstream – Gender in UNDP by UNDP*

### Box 1.2. Millennium Development Goals

The following Millennium Development Goals are set to be achieved by 2015:

- Goal 1:** Halve the proportion of people suffering from poverty and hunger
- Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3:** Empower women and promote gender equality
- Goal 4:** Reduce by two thirds the under-five mortality rate
- Goal 6:** Halt the spread of diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS and malaria
- Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8:** Establish global partnership for development by setting goals in aid, trade and reduced debts

One out of the eight Millennium Development Goals urges the empowerment of women and the achievement of equality between men and women. It also creates the target of eradicating gender inequality at all levels of education by 2015. The following indicators were identified to measure the progress toward the third Goal "Empower women and promote gender equality":

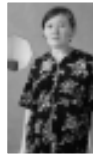
- The ratio of men to women (boys to girls) in secondary schools (by levels such as primary education; incomplete and complete secondary education);
- The ratio of literate men to women (young boys to girls) aged 15-24;
- The proportion of women employed in non-agriculture;
- The proportion of women in the Parliament.

The creation of an international legal framework for gender equality and protection of women's rights is essential to international gender equality policy and implementation mechanisms. Several conventions feature largely in the current legal framework, including: the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted by the General Assembly in December 1979 and the ILO Conventions, primarily, ILO Convention 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value of 1951; Convention 111 concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation of 1958; Convention 156 concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with

Family Responsibilities of 1981 and Convention 183 concerning Maternity Protection as revised in 2000.

The adoption of these Conventions has promoted the introduction of international standards to enable the improvement of women's status to enter into national legislative frameworks, state programmes and national plans of action.

To date, 180 states have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These states have committed to submitting national implementation progress reports to the UN Women's Committee every fourth year. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Convention.



### 1.3 Global progress - but still inequalities<sup>7</sup>

Gaps between men and women in areas of education and health have narrowed rapidly since the 1970s; however, this progress has not been proportionate between countries. Further, opportunities have opened for women in education and health but rarely in economic and political spheres. A lot has been done, but there is still no country in the world that has achieved gender equality in all areas.

#### Progress over 1970-1990...

- Female life expectancy increased 20% faster than male life expectancy.
- More than half of married women of reproductive age in the developing world, or their partners, used modern

contraceptives in 1990, compared to a third in 1980. Planned Parenthood has brought women greater control over their lives.

- The maternal mortality was nearly halved.
- The gap between women and men in adult literacy was halved.
- The gap between women and men in school enrolment was halved.
- In 32 countries, more women than men are enrolled at the tertiary level of education.

#### ...but still an unequal world

- The majority of the world's poor are women. This is

linked to the unequal situation on the labour market as well as to women's status and power in the family.

- Women's labour participation rose only by 4% from 1970 to 1990 compared to a two-thirds increase in female adult literacy and school enrolment.
- Women normally receive a much lower wage than men.
- All regions record a higher rate of unemployment for women than men.
- Women have much lower representation in parliament and decision-making bodies.

<sup>7</sup> Human Development Report 1995, UNDP