

Work Session on Gender Statistics  
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**ADVANCEMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN TAJIKISTAN**

Paper submitted by Tajikistan<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction**

**Institutional machinery for achieving gender equality.** In the Majlisi Oli (Parliament) of the Republic of Tajikistan 13% of all members are women. A woman has been elected as deputy speaker of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Lower House). Two committees out of five are headed by women. Members of Parliament, women as well as men, participate in the discussion of gender issues together with non-governmental organizations and political parties. This holds out the hope of more trouble-free lobbying for gender-sensitive laws in Parliament.

The traditional State body in Tajikistan responsible for the advancement of women in public and political life is the Committee for Women's and Family Affairs (CWFA) attached to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. The Committee has a wide network of corresponding divisions throughout the country, which have been set up on regional and occupational lines. Thus, the khukumats (local government bodies) at all levels have divisions on women's affairs. State institutions and enterprises also have committees for women's affairs. All of these bodies are accountable to CWFA and to the leadership of their respective institution or enterprise.

A woman is normally appointed as Deputy Prime Minister in the Republic of Tajikistan to deal with women's issues. In 1999 Nigina Sharopova was appointed Deputy Prime Minister. An active part in formulating a gender advancement strategy is played by Munira Innoyatova, State Adviser to the President, and Tatyana Bozrikova, Adviser to the President on religious affairs, social organizations and public relations.

One of the first women's social organizations is the Union of Tajikistan Women (UTW). The president of UTW is Bazgul Dodkhudoyeva, a former Deputy Prime Minister (1994-1999).

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UTW also has a wide network of its own representatives in all regions of the country. The organization does not have direct funding from the Government. It could be active while its director held public office. Now UTW's activities have been sharply reduced. However, it continues to function with support from international foundations and organizations.

The "Women in Development" Bureau attached to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and UNDP was opened in 1995. The Bureau began a number of important initiatives for the advancement of gender equality in the country. It is also one of the first and main coordinators of the women's movement in Tajikistan. The Bureau provided financial and methodological support for two publications of gender statistics in the republic (1999) and prepared the first report on gender relations in Tajikistan (also in 1999). It provides grants to assist in women's initiatives and gender publications and carries on gender training programmes for members of Parliament, women's NGOs and journalists.

**Gender goals in national policy.** In 1998 the "Women in Development" Bureau, together with representatives of the Government and women's NGOs, drew up a national plan of action to enhance the status and role of women over the period 1998-2005. The aim of this plan of action is to create the economic, social and legal conditions for women to have equal opportunities for the realization of their own potential.

However, the plan has not been supported with State funding. The only section that is being implemented effectively and covers the whole republic is the "Reproductive health of women" section, which is financed by WHO, CARE International, the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund and other international organizations. The executing agencies of the reproductive health projects include both State health-care institutions and NGOs. Many indicators on reproductive health have improved over the past decade: there has been a reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates, as well as in the birth rate and in the number of abortions, an increase in the number of women using contraceptives and an improvement in access to contraceptive devices. Nevertheless, many reproductive health indicators have deteriorated on account of the economic difficulties of the transitional period: there has been an increase in the number of sexually transmitted diseases, both among men and among women, and a rise in indicators of the incidence of anaemia among pregnant women, nursing mothers and children. Other sections of the plan - education, vocational training, poverty and economics, women's rights, action to prevent violence against women, environmental awareness-raising - cannot cover the whole country because of the lack of consistent funding. However, the existence of the plan enables non-governmental organizations to attract resources from international foundations and organizations for its implementation, although these measures cover only some human settlements and are often of a fragmentary nature.

In December 1999 the President issued a decree "on enhancing the role of women in society" which has provided, *inter alia*, for the development of a national programme to enhance the role of women in society. Those joining in the work to formulate the programme included staff of the administration of the President, the Ministries of Education and Employment, scholars of the Academy of Sciences and universities, and members of NGOs. After a discussion of the conceptual

framework, it was decided that the programme should not only be aimed at improving the status of women in society, but also have a gender-sensitive character. The programme was thus conceived with a view to establishing equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens, both men and women.

The drafting of the programme has not yet been completed. However, the Presidential decree on enhancing the role of women in society gave impetus to efforts to achieve a gender balance in bodies of the executive branch. Thus, before the issuance of the decree only 3% of district and municipal khukumats were headed by women. Half a year later, following the issuance of the decree, women had been appointed as chairpersons of 16% of them. In 70% of khukumats women are serving as deputy chairpersons. No document has set quotas for women in organs of the executive branch. However, at a meeting with female staff in 1999 the President of the Republic stated that the quota for women holding senior posts in organs of the executive branch must be at least 30%. There is thus an implicit policy of achieving gender equality in the leadership of the country's executive bodies.

No quotas have been provided for elected bodies. Two years before the elections, prior to the adoption of the new Elections Act, the women's movement in Tajikistan had begun working with political parties, representatives of the presidential administration and members of Parliament to lobby in favour of quotas for women in the new Elections Act. However, the new Act, which was passed in December 1999, did not include quotas for women. Yet thanks to the active work of women's NGOs with political parties and independent candidates, the number of women in Parliament has increased in absolute as well as relative terms. Whereas in the old Parliament there had been only five women, or 3% of the total membership, the new Parliament now has 12 women representing 13% of the total. Today the women's movement in Tajikistan is endeavouring to persuade the public at large that the political parties should draw up gender-balanced lists of party candidates for the next Parliament. Work is also being undertaken to train women leaders and create a broad-based school of political leadership for women; this was begun two years ago by UTW and women's NGOs.

**Gender issues and problems.** For Tajikistan, where 73% of the population live in rural areas, traditional stereotypes concerning the roles of women and men are a strong barrier to equal opportunities. The range of gender problems varies between urban and rural areas. Urban women have been enormously successful in reducing gender inequality. The gap between men and women in towns and cities in access to secondary and vocational education, in the level of economic activity, in the extent of their involvement in decision-making and in access to health-care services is considerably smaller than for rural dwellers. On some indicators, urban men lag behind women more than is the case with men living in rural areas. For example, average life expectancy in urban areas is 9.4 years less for men than for women, whereas in rural areas the difference is only 3.2 years. However, most statistical indicators confirm the inferior situation of women as compared with men. Such indicators include levels of income, employment in senior posts, employment in highly-paid spheres of the national economy, training at higher educational institutions, etc.

In the context of high unemployment many women, especially in rural areas, work only within the household, which includes not simply looking after other family members but also working on subsidiary holdings. Such labour is generally unpaid. It is precisely the traditional view of unpaid labour in the household as being non-productive that perpetuates the stereotype of the man as breadwinner and of the woman as a dependent. This is one of the reasons why women tolerate various forms of violence from men and older women in the home, and it restricts women's participation in decision-making within the family.

Persisting stereotypes which imply that the woman must be under the man's protection, as well as the revival of Islam in the region, have generated a new phenomenon in Tajikistan - polygamy - which is punishable by secular law. The number of registered marriages fell 2.7-fold in the republic between 1991 and 1998. For Tajikistan this does not signify an actual reduction in the number of marriages. Nor does it mean extra-marital unions by mutual consent of the partners, as is widespread in many European countries. Marriages are concluded in a religious "nikokh" ceremony with the agreement of the parents of the "bride". In this context, second, third and other wives have no legal rights to common property, inheritance or any share in the event of divorce or of the husband's death. Full economic dependence and the lack of legal rights deprives them of the opportunity to choose a social and economic activity.

Enormous destruction was caused in Tajikistan by the civil war of 1992-1993 and the difficulties of the transitional period. In rural areas the water supply system has been virtually destroyed, there is no gas, electricity is supplied irregularly and the system of goods trading has collapsed. The resulting difficulties have had to be shouldered principally by women. The increased hardships limit women's socialization even within the "makhalla" (community). There are now fewer festivities or visits to relatives and neighbours. For rural women this constituted a large part of the social life. Similar difficulties within the community are experienced also by urban women, although to a lesser extent. However, they are also often busy in the occupational sphere. Men tend to be rather less occupied. The high level of unemployment among men and a reluctance to deal with household tasks create stressful situations for men. The stress is very often relieved in the form of violence against women and children. Increasing poverty is thus leading to a natural change in gender roles, but awareness of these changes is growing considerably more slowly.

**Legislation to provide equal opportunities.** The legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan contains no articles discriminating outright between men and women. However, many laws that had played a progressive role in affording equal opportunities for men and women in both professional and private life during the Soviet period have, under market-economy conditions, tended to discriminate against women, even if they were meant to work in their favour.

(a) Family law

During the Soviet period family law granted women and men equal rights, and families received considerable support from the State in the form of monetary allowances and benefits. Women's obligations with respect to the family and their role in it were influenced by both policy on and wide access to health care and education, which were provided free of charge or at low cost.

A gender assessment of the Family Code carried out at the initiative of the “Women in Development” Bureau found no evidence of discrimination on grounds of sex with respect to the distribution of gender roles in the family, inheritance or the dividing up of property after a divorce, etc.

Within the past decade there has also been a decrease in the average age at first marriage for women, which fell from 24.33 years in 1990 to 22.89 years in 1995. The average age of women at the birth of a first child is even lower than age at first marriage - 21.82 years in 1995. The number of children born out of wedlock is, moreover, increasing. Although most of them are children born to second, third and other wives, they are deprived of many legal rights and also exposed to the risk of living in poverty, without any economic support, in the event of their mother’s divorce. The status of such women as single mothers, however, requires the allocation of enormous resources for social benefits and support from the State budget, which even so are miserly. There is a dispersal of resources on social needs, instead of an increase in disbursements to really needy families. The legislation needs to be amended to give this considerable group of women legal and economic rights in the Family Code and place responsibility for children’s welfare and upbringing on both parents.

This problem is a major concern of women’s organizations. Legal counselling is provided to women victims of unregistered marriages. Here the legal service does not cover all regions of the country, as it is run by NGOs and depends on support grants from international donors.

(b) Labour legislation

One of the main problems for most parents, but especially for women, is the need to combine paid employment with family obligations. The legislation provides for various services, benefits and allowances for women to lessen the conflict between occupational and family duties, as well as to raise incomes, and most of these have a gender aspect.

Maternity leave and leave for parents to look after children serve various purposes and have their own gender particularities. Maternity leave reflects the direct concern for the physical survival and health of the mother and child and in this sense is similar to social insurance. Maternity leave therefore includes compensation for the full amount of wages or payment for release from work on account of illness and is granted only to women.

An extension of leave to look after a child up to the age of three years, with the retention of the length of service entitlement, is granted also to the child’s mother. These measures played a progressive role in the context of the planned State economy, affording women the opportunity to combine motherhood and economic activity. However, under market conditions, these measures have tended to discriminate against women who are mothers. More and more often, private employers during recruitment take into consideration a woman’s reproductive function and not her occupational skills. Obviously, the employer is not interested in staff eligible for long-term leave by law for child care. The labour legislation needs to be amended and men granted equal rights in respect of leave to look after young children while preserving their length of service entitlements. Payments to look after children should be made from social insurance funds per child, and not according to the mother’s place of work. A child’s grandfather or grandmother should also have the

right to such leave. In other words, the right to obtain leave to look after young children should exist for any member of the family, regardless of sex. Each family can, of course, itself decide who will stay at home with the young child, depending on the current situation regarding each member's occupational activity. In this connection, the two parents can share such leave, taking turns. Of course, parents with young children should have the right to a flexible working schedule, part-time work at home, or other arrangements. Reforms of the labour legislation in this regard would help to reduce discrimination against women in the labour market, since for employers men would also become potential takers of leave to care for young children. Thus, the existence of young children would not be such an insurmountable obstacle for women to find work under conditions of free competition. An equal distribution of responsibilities for child rearing is not only a fundamental condition for gender equality, but also broadens the options available to both women and men and should therefore benefit all. Leave to look after a child should normally guarantee job security and may be used as a means of reducing unemployment.

Such a law would make it possible to incorporate into State policy the father's child-rearing functions and speed up change in stereotypes concerning men's limited responsibility for strengthening and developing the family and bringing up and caring for children.

(c) Military service

Tajikistan is still in a good position as regards secondary education coverage for children. According to gender statistics, there is no particular difference in the attendance of general education schools between boys and girls. However, in higher educational institutions in the 1998/99 academic year girls represented only a quarter of all students (in 1990/91 they accounted for 36.6%). Besides the traditional views of parents on gender roles, the greater difference between young men and women in access to higher education can be attributed to the law on universal military service for males. This law limits the rights of many girls to obtain higher or vocational education. Many parents, wishing to keep their sons from serving in the army, prefer to direct all the family's resources and efforts towards securing admission to higher educational institutions especially for their sons. However, a modern army requires not only masculine but also, to a considerable extent, intellectual characteristics. What is needed is therefore a well-trained professional army, with recruitment on a contract basis, in which both men and women would be entitled to serve. A professional army would have the following advantages at the present stage of Tajikistan's socio-economic development:

- fewer resources would be expended on training new recruits, since the length of service of each professional would be considerably greater than that of present conscripts;
- it would help to reduce the level of unemployment, since army personnel would be entitled by contract to a monthly wage;
- it would give equal rights for men and women in the performance of their patriotic duty;
- it would help to reduce gender inequality in access to higher and vocational education.

(d) Right to reproductive health

State health-care bodies offer paid and free reproductive health services for men and women. However, the system for protecting reproductive health is targeted only at women. In this area, extensive programmes of family planning include counselling, treatment, training sessions, the supply of free contraceptive devices for women and the provision of humanitarian assistance to nursing mothers and pregnant women. These services cover both rural and urban women, and are provided by State health-care institutions, NGOs and international organizations.

Men are at a high risk of infection with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). One of the reasons is the many unprotected sexual contacts, and another is a failure to appreciate the consequences of such diseases. The consequences of STDs are extremely tragic for men. Some never realize that they are infected and continue to contaminate other women. Others cannot afford treatment, but continue to place both themselves and women at risk. Some men, fearing punishment or exposure, refuse to go to health-care institutions.

Policy aimed at protecting women's reproductive health places virtually the entire responsibility for the future generation's health solely on women. The acquisition by men of rights and corresponding opportunities to protect reproductive health will also increase their responsibility for their own sexual conduct, women's reproductive health and the health of future generations. Measures to prevent STDs are required at State level, including:

- mass STD testing for men and women;
- free treatment for STDs;
- removal of all punishments for STDs;
- compulsory treatment when care is refused;
- dissemination through the media of information about STD prevention;
- broad publicity through the media and reproductive health centres, at enterprises and in other institutions of the use of condoms as a means of STD prevention;
- broad publicity of the danger of unprotected sex for the reproductive health of men and women and of the risk of AIDS and STD infection.

These and other gender-related problems are already being taken up by non-governmental organizations. For the time being, however, there has not been a wide response to them in the press. The media often present only women's issues. This picture of gender relations is discriminatory and annoying to members of the public, including women. Everyone knows that during the transitional period some of the main difficulties facing each family are economic. And since it is traditionally held that the family "breadwinner" must be the man, there is a tendency to view other issues as secondary. The "Women in Development" Bureau and UNIFEM have begun a programme on gender education for journalists.

The foundation of gender development in the country should be a Tajikistan scientific school of gender research. Exporting gender techniques, without adaptation to local conditions, also gives rise to public protests. NGOs have undertaken a pilot project in the Russian-Tajik Slavic University. Since 1999 there has been a special course entitled "Gender and culture" in the human sciences

faculty which includes the main areas of gender research, including gender statistics, gender planning, interactive problem-solving, etc. The next stage will be talks with the Ministry of Education on the introduction of such courses in all human science teaching institutions of the country and special training sessions for the teachers of such courses. A “Gender and culture” guide for students has already been published with the support of the “Women in Development” Bureau.

However, media coverage of gender issues and scientific surveys are also of a fragmentary nature and there is no official support as yet from the Government in this respect.

A national programme for achieving equal rights and equal opportunities is now in the process of being formulated. It is therefore difficult at this point to evaluate official Government policy and the time-scale for implementing particular measures.

**Role of gender statistics in policy-making. Indicators needed to address gender issues.**

Gender statistics could become an important tool for identifying problems and substantiating particular measures. Until 1999 many statistics included no breakdown by sex. The first compilation of gender statistics appeared only in 1999. State Statistical Agency methods rely on collecting data from ministries and regional statistical offices. Many statistics thus remain at the ministries and do not appear in statistical publications. Special access is therefore needed for them and not every user can obtain such access. There is hence some distortion when identifying problems and formulating policies to deal with them, and the real problems may still not be addressed.

Of particular concern are health indicators. Morbidity, for example, is determined on the basis of cases taken to health-care institutions. But since the quality and range of medical services in the transitional period have considerably declined, the figures for morbidity are clearly understated and do not reflect the real state of health of the population. Periodic sample surveys of the population are necessary. These measures are extremely costly. However, only such a method could provide a real picture of morbidity.

Surveys of the reproductive behaviour of both women and men are very important. Until now surveys have been conducted only among women in the republic, and these show that in 1998 31% of women of childbearing age used contraceptives, whereas in 1990 the figure had been only 3.1%. However, no such surveys have ever been conducted among men. The experts believe that men, especially in rural areas, consider it shameful to use condoms or other methods of contraception. Yet with the increase in STDs it would be more effective and safer for men to use condoms. The results of surveys among men would help to initiate measures for STD prevention, as well as make men more responsive to family planning issues. For the time being, such measures are being conducted only among women.

A survey needs to be held among women who have become or previously were wives not registered in civil registry offices. Identifying the reasons, causes and consequences of this phenomenon will provide factual material for devising methods to prevent this dangerous phenomenon. Such a survey is also important for official recognition of the phenomenon and extent



of polygamy in society and for the formulation of State policies on a mechanism to protect the rights of these women and their children. Polygamy is not at present officially recognized.

In gender statistics the State Statistical Agency published a survey on time use in the household for men and women. Periodical surveys of this sphere would be a good indicator of change in gender relations within the family. In the public, professional and political spheres, the women of Tajikistan have made considerable progress in achieving equality with men, even though much still remains to be done. However, the family continues to be the most conservative sphere for gender relations. Yet each woman is still also a family member. Patriarchal relations in the family remain for women a decisive factor in the choice of an activity, way of life and model of conduct. Data from such surveys would be very useful for journalists, NGOs, psychologists, sociologists, teachers and other categories of users of gender statistics.

**Accessibility of gender statistics to users.** A compilation of gender statistics was issued by the State Statistical Agency with the financial support and advice of the “Women in Development” Bureau in a print-run of 400. Some copies were distributed free of charge to NGOs, government offices and ministries. The rest were put on sale at very high prices many times exceeding the average salary of public employees (the average pay of doctors and teachers ranging from US\$ 2.5 to 7).

In the first place, a print-run of this size is clearly insufficient to meet the needs of all users of gender statistics. Secondly, the high prices charged for the publication make it inaccessible to scientists, teachers in educational institutions and other categories of users of gender statistics.

Thirdly, many education, employment, health and income distribution indicators are not broken down by sex. Fourthly, some indicators reflect only the situation of women and are silent about that of men. For example, indicators on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are given only for women. Moreover, State statistics include only cases referred to State health institutions, leaving out cases of resort to private individuals, cases of self-treatment or simply instances of diseases remaining untreated. Such data have also continued until now to be the property of the Ministry of Health and closed for a wide range of data users. UNFPA surveys of women from one enterprise in Dushanbe and among women going for counselling in one of the human settlements in Khatlon region showed that between 70% and 80% of all the women had STDs. However, State statistics indicate that in the same year (1998) only 24.6 per 100,000 women suffered from syphilis. If we consider that women of childbearing age are twice as few, this figure would represent about 0.5% of women of childbearing age suffering from syphilis, and three times less for gonorrhoea. Clearly, the persons spreading these diseases are their husbands, and among them no such large surveys are conducted. Since neither the public nor the planning bodies have such information, they cannot appreciate the extent of the threat to the nation’s reproductive health.

Since the State Statistical Agency uses old techniques for gathering information that do not allow enough gender statistics to be collected for users, it would be very useful for international organizations such as the World Bank, UNFPA and WHO to make the results of their own research available to a wide range of users of gender statistics - including scientists, journalists, NGOs,

planning authorities and ministries. For the time being, access to such information is very limited, making it difficult to identify and address gender problems at all administrative levels.

To facilitate user access to gender statistics it would be worthwhile issuing small statistical compilations that could be made available at affordable prices not only to the staff of international organizations, but also to a wide range of local activists, scientists, journalists and others who do not have high incomes. It is necessary to increase the number of gender indicators using the research of other organizations, and not only the State Statistical Agency.

**Cooperation and establishment of a mechanism for communication between the State Statistical Agency and users of gender statistics.** The transition from a planned to a market economy has made access to statistics virtually impossible for non-State institutions such as NGOs, independent scientists and the media. Gender statistics are in effect a monopoly of the State and not accessible to a wide range of users. Ongoing cooperation needs to be established between the media and the Agency to publish gender statistics for other users, as well as to popularize among readers the ideas of gender equality in various spheres, including public life and the family. Feedback with users of gender statistics would also be possible through the media. Such a media link to users will help first of all to save the Agency's limited financial resources for the publication of data and secondly to develop Tajik gender statistics keeping in mind user requirements.

**Ways of strengthening cooperation between ECE countries.** For the participants in this seminar from Tajikistan, where Internet access has become difficult, it would be desirable to have permanent contacts via electronic mail with participants from other countries, as well as with the ECE office to exchange information about the development of gender statistics in different countries. Seminars are already being held on gender statistics for students in Tajikistan, and the range of trainees will increase in future. We would like to obtain by mail theoretical materials on gender statistics, teaching aids, study guidelines, and the results and methods of gender research in various countries. We could also send the results of our own research. Materials obtained at the seminar on gender statistics in Almaty in April 1999 were, for example, included in a guide for students called "Gender and culture" and used in the teaching of a special course with that title for university students as part of the topic "Gender statistics". Because of the shortage of materials, the topic of gender statistics has been scheduled for only four hours of teaching. Once there are sufficient materials on gender statistics it is proposed to introduce a special "Gender statistics" course for the students of economics faculties, which will be assigned 20 teaching hours. It is also possible to develop modules and hold training sessions on gender statistics for NGOs, members of Parliament and officials of ministries and local government bodies.