

Regional Human Development Report 2016



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# Progress at Risk

Inequalities and Human Development  
in Eastern Europe, Turkey, and Central Asia

## Case Study on combating gender inequality in political participation in Kyrgyzstan



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# Acronyms

CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
KR	Kyrgyz Republic
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSC	National Statistics Committee
PRP	Poverty Reduction Programme
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
WIC	Women's Initiatives Center

# Introduction

This report provides findings of the case study as part of the United Nations Development Programme aimed to overcome gender inequality in political participation in the Kyrgyz Republic. This case study was conducted as part of the joint UNDP, UNICEF and Peacebuilding Fund Project “Women as Peaceful Voters and Women as Candidates” (2015-2016) and the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub.

Promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment within political participation is a key component of UNDP activity in the Kyrgyz Republic. Currently, according to the 2014-2017 UNDP Gender Equality Strategy in the Kyrgyz Republic, ensuring equal participation of women and men in governance processes, including management and decision-making, is deemed an essential prerequisite for democratic governance, strengthening societal capacity, and equitable and inclusive development in general.<sup>1</sup> Implementation of specific tasks in this area—namely: 1) achievement of gender-balanced representation in decision-making bodies; 2) formation of women as effective policy entities; 3) introduction of gender equality in all aspects of public policy<sup>2</sup>—relies on well-developed gender legislation,<sup>3</sup> national strategic documents on gender policy, and civil society activism in the KR. However, it is difficult to achieve sustainable results within the assigned tasks because of high-risk vulnerability of women due to political instability, economic crisis and increasing unemployment, gender segregation in the labor market, weak social protection system and poor provision of public services, as well as the increasing influence of patriarchal traditions and religion in society.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, given key contributions of UNDP in addressing gender inequalities through broad support of national partners at public and civic levels since independence of the KR, focused analysis of this experience seems to be important. The relevance of the case study was also conditioned by adaptation processes at the national level in accordance with the obligations of the Kyrgyz Republic<sup>5</sup> for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda, including women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the main purpose of the cur-

rent case study was to analyze gender context in the Kyrgyz Republic in terms of the relationship of economic, social and political inequality opportunities, as well as challenges in implementing tasks aimed to promote gender equality in political participation that take these inequalities into account. (For more details about research methodology, see Appendix 4.)

## Country Context

Political and civil rights of citizens which were secured by the first Constitution (1993) of the sovereign Kyrgyz Republic became the basis for development of various forms of political self-expression. In this context, civil society movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were rapidly developing, including various women’s associations with a broad spectrum of collective actions ranging from lobbying at the national level to grassroots initiatives of self-help groups.

The agreement on the provision of assistance between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNDP was signed on September 14, 1992 – almost exactly one year after the adoption of the Declaration on the state independence of Kyrgyzstan. UNDP Country Office launched its activities in the Kyrgyz Republic in 1993,<sup>7</sup> and in 1995, the Office of “Women in Development” was opened.

At the same time, clear manifestations of authoritarian tendencies became apparent in the public administration by the mid-90s. Experts noted that “although the 1993 Constitution defines the form of government as a democratic republic with substantial civil rights for its citizens, the (first) President, Askar Akayev, dominates the government.”<sup>8</sup> Imbalances in the distribution of power, lack of transparency and accountability of the public administration, and numerous irregularities in the electoral process resulted in further political and economic instability in the country. The Kyrgyz Republic experienced the deepest crises in 2005 and 2010, when the wave of public dissatisfaction entailed violent change of the country’s presidents and serious ethnic conflicts.<sup>9</sup> This has resulted in critical weakening of the state administration system. All these predetermined opportu-

<sup>1</sup> *Gender equality in public administration* UNDP 2014, p.9 <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Women-s%20Empowerment/GEP%20Project%20Brief.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Enhancing the role and participation of women in the political processes: analytical review and recommendations for countries of Central Asia and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.* – Bratislava, 2009

<sup>3</sup> *Gender Legislation - set of normative legal acts determining principles and governing the implementation of gender policy. Includes provisions of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (KR), international conventions, special laws on gender equality and gender-relevant standards and legislation (education, labor, employment, health, etc.).* Materials Gender Encyclopedia of Kyrgyzstan “Beijing + 20” 2015

<sup>4</sup> UNDP Gender Equality Strategy in KR 2014-2017

<sup>5</sup> State Resolution № 887 dated 22 December 2015. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/98266>

<sup>6</sup> Sustainable Development Goals. Target 5.5 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

<sup>7</sup> UNDP Kyrgyzstan. [http://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/ru/home/operations/about\\_undp.html](http://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/ru/home/operations/about_undp.html)

<sup>8</sup> *Kyrgyz Republic Human Rights Practices, 1995.* - U.S. Department of State, March 1996 [http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1995\\_hrp\\_report/95hrp\\_report\\_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html](http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1995_hrp_report/95hrp_report_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html)

<sup>9</sup> For more details see *National Report on the peace and development analysis.* - UNDP, Bishkek 2011

<sup>10</sup> For more details on the policy and practice of special support measures see Zakharchenko, N Quotas on Quotas? Political representation of women in Kyrgyzstan in the 2007 and 2010 Convocation <https://app.box.com/s/bh3pj8lhap8tfhji9ta778ysmn1bjjow>

<sup>11</sup> These women's groups were later called OBON (special women's squad). One of the reasons for using OBON was the fact that law enforcement agencies of the Kyrgyz Republic were prohibited from using physical force and weapons against women and children during mass actions in times of emergency and war. For more details see "Obon as a mirror ..." of the political activism development or use of women's resources for the purposes of interest groups in Kyrgyzstan. Research Report – Women Assistance Centre, Bishkek 2012 <http://wsc.kg/public/files/library/9d15b-2284869da48adcb5d2d46a43b65.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Constitution of KR. [http://www.gov.kg/?page\\_id=263&lang=ru](http://www.gov.kg/?page_id=263&lang=ru)

<sup>13</sup> The first elections were based on party lists in 2007; the quota system was tested the same year. However, based on the results of these elections, the overwhelming majority - 71 percent of seats received the "Ak Jol" party, which was created on the eve of the elections - this was definitely due to violation of the electoral process in favour of those who represented the President's power. [http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/18165-ZHogorku\\_Kenesh\\_Kyrgyzskoj\\_Respubliki.aspx](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/18165-ZHogorku_Kenesh_Kyrgyzskoj_Respubliki.aspx)

<sup>14</sup> The final report on the observation of parliamentary elections in 2015. The Association "Taza Shailoo" [http://www.tazashailoo.kg/web/index.php?act=view\\_material&id=1917](http://www.tazashailoo.kg/web/index.php?act=view_material&id=1917)

<sup>15</sup> Tursunbai Bakir uulu (Parliament member of Kyrgyzstan) repeatedly advocates for polygamy <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=101907636018.04.2002>; KR Ombudsman advocates for a ban on abortion among married women [http://kg.akipress.org/news:35444\\_06.01.2007](http://kg.akipress.org/news:35444_06.01.2007); Interview: Why MP wants to restrict travel of young Kyrgyzstani females abroad. <http://kloop.kg/blog/2013/03/04/interv-yu-pochemu-deputat-hochet-ogranichit-vy-ezd-molody-h-ky-rgy-zstanok-za-granitsu>, 04.03.2013; Polygamy in Kyrgyzstan <http://www.currenttime.tv/content/article/27242535.html>, 12.09.2015

<sup>16</sup> Campaign by women's and youth organizations "We are for a secular Kyrgyzstan!" <http://akipress.org/constitution/news:891>, 12.05.2010

<sup>17</sup> For details see Concepts of the Soviet. Georgy Mamedov. The illusion of the Soviet: "a conservative turn" in Kyrgyzstan. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-Dy68lC8PtU>; Working Papers of the project "Gender (wiki) Encyclopedia of Kyrgyzstan" "Beijing + 20", 2015

nities for and nature of political participation, including women's participation. Particularly, when women's organizations and movements were expressing their dissatisfaction with the complete absence of women in Parliament after the elections in 2005 managed to mobilize and lobby for the introduction of special measures to support women in politics (the post of Special Representative of the President on Gender Issues in the Parliament, a gender quota for the underrepresented gender in elections).<sup>10</sup> (For more details about special measures, see Appendix 3.) Another significant event was election of the first female President of the country in 2010.

At the same time, women were actively involved in violent forms of political protest and were used on the front lines during the protests - meetings, seizure of buildings, blocking roads, etc.<sup>11</sup>

One outcome of the political crisis in 2010 was replacement of the presidential system with a parliamentary form, which is secured in the new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 27 July 2010.<sup>12</sup> This has created opportunities for strengthening the role of political parties.<sup>13</sup> According to experts, the 2015 parliamentary elections, where new election technologies (based on biometric data registration) were used for the first time, were conducted without any significant violations and were transparent compared to previous elections.<sup>14</sup> However, at the legislative level, responsibilities of the parties for noncompliance with the principles of compiling lists of candidates and representation of different social groups are not regulated. This has led to various conflicts between candidates and party leaders, as well as loss of MP mandates

by candidates, including women, who were elected in the Parliament in accordance with existing mandatory gender quotas.

When speaking about opportunities for political participation, it should be noted that conservative movements in the KR are strengthening, which have negatively affected women's rights. Initiatives for legalization of polygamy, banning women's right to abortion, abolition of sexual education in schools, prohibition of rights of young women for freedom of movement (migration without parental permission), and others were repeatedly promoted at the highest level.<sup>15</sup> Voices of conservatives have significantly intensified since 2010. When discussing the new version of the Constitution, religious groups attempted to remove the definition of KR as a secular state. The secular status was maintained thanks to public campaigns organized by women activists.<sup>16</sup> Draft laws on the prohibition of so-called "gay propaganda" and on political activities of NGOs (the Law on Foreign Agents) are a threat to women's rights to political participation.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, one can see quite a wide and dynamic range of political participation in the KR; and on the other, limitation of opportunities for such participation, especially for women, due to low level of party building, instability of political alliances, general weakness of democratic institutions and, as a consequence, the onset of conservative forces. Taking into account this background, the significance of economic and social development factors related to manifestations of gender inequality is enhancing. A brief overview of some trends in this regard is presented in the next section.

# SECTION 1.

## GENDER BACKGROUND: BALANCE SHEET OF GAINS AND LOSSES

As noted above, democratic processes have substantially expanded women's opportunities for political participation. However, the transition period entailed new challenges in economic, social, cultural spheres that limit women's public activity and political participation. This section presents a number of cases that illustrate this complex and contradictory context of gender and development in Kyrgyzstan. **Political leadership and representation, and participation of women in governance, in the KR are visible at all decision-making levels, and are guaranteed by special laws and measures. However, the existing guarantee system is not sustainable or strong enough to ensure full realization of these rights in practice.**

Promotion of gender equality is ensured by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. Thus, according to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, "men and women in the Kyrgyz Republic have equal rights and freedoms, and equal opportunities".<sup>18</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic also adopted special laws and national policies on gender equality (for details, see Appendix 2: Institutional mechanism for gender equality in Kyrgyzstan).

However, despite the fact that the country has developed and adopted gender sensitive

laws and legislation, de facto achievement of equality remains problematic. Indicators of political participation of women, such as women's representation at decision-making levels, can be presented as clear proof of that. Table 1 shows that since independence women were gradually "washed out" of the government. As a result, by 2005, the Kyrgyz Parliament became a male-only parliament. Only the adoption of the quota mechanism made it possible to change the situation. However, it should be noted that the mechanism is still weak and we can observe that the level of representation of women in the Kyrgyz Parliament has a declining tendency. The same picture can be seen at the local government (councils) level, where the number of women-deputies also decreases (Table 1).<sup>19</sup>

At the executive government level we can also observe a reduction in the level of women's representation in high-level positions which are related to real political influence and decision-making processes (Figures 1, 2, 3).<sup>20</sup> And at the local level, the percentage of women among the heads of айыл окмоту (executive bodies in village settlements) did not reach over 5 per cent (out of approximately 500 positions).

<sup>18</sup> Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. (Конституция КР. Статья 16, пункт 4. [http://www.gov.kg/?page\\_id=263&lang=ru](http://www.gov.kg/?page_id=263&lang=ru) (National referendum was held on 27 June, 2010.)

<sup>19</sup> NSC KR, [www.stat.kg](http://www.stat.kg)

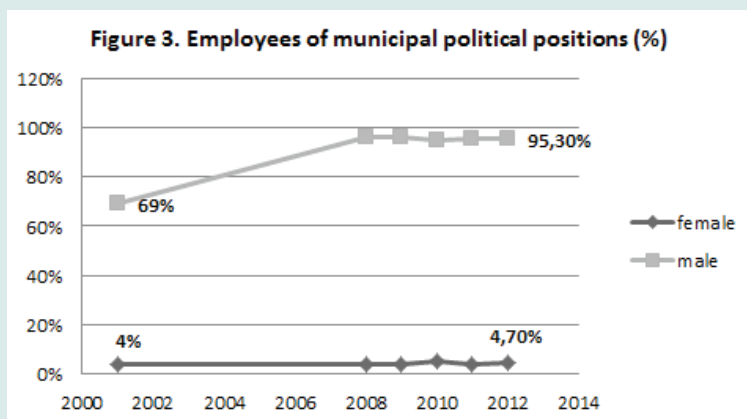
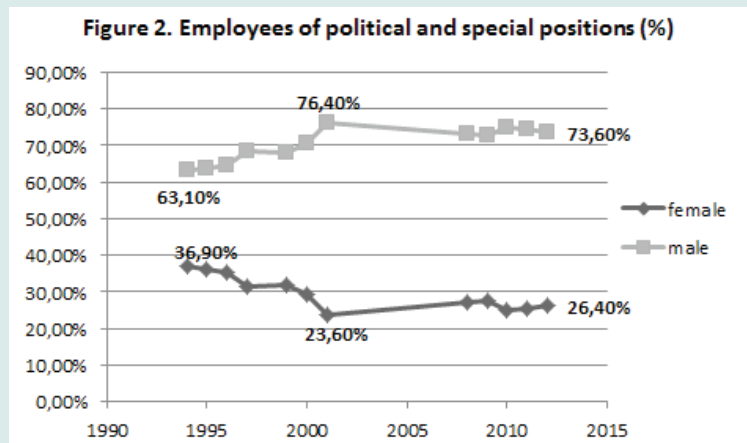
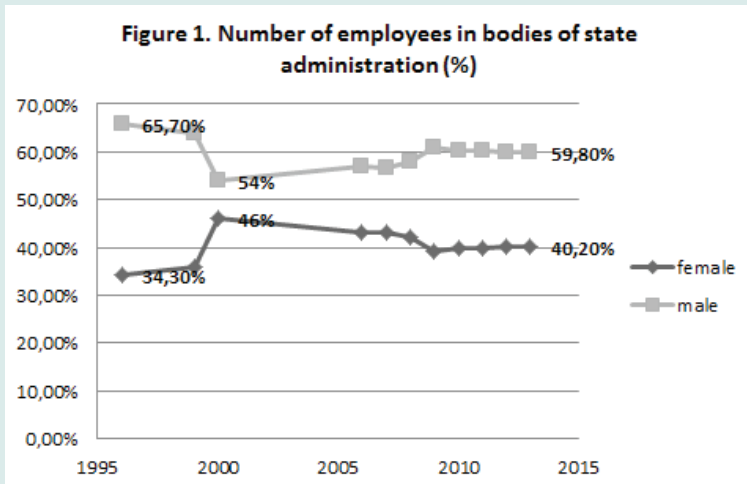
<sup>20</sup> Sources: NSC KR; The first and second report of the KR for CEDAW in 1998 and 2004. National Review: Beijing +20.

**Table 1. Women's representation at decision-making levels from 1995 to 2015**

Parliamentary elections	% of female deputies (Parliament)	Local level elections**	% of female deputies (local level)
1995	4,7%		
2000	6,8%	1998	14%
2005	0%	2004	16%
2007*	25,5%	2008	14%
2010*	22,3%	2012	13,4%
2015*	20%		

\*years since the quota mechanism was used

\*\* no data available until 1998 - via electronic sources



Hereby we can see that the existing women's support mechanisms in the KR are not supported. Political parties demonstrate lack of motivation to maintain gender quotas. In addition, there is a lack of control mechanisms for the implementation of special measures (as mentioned earlier) that do not allow achievement of the intended results.

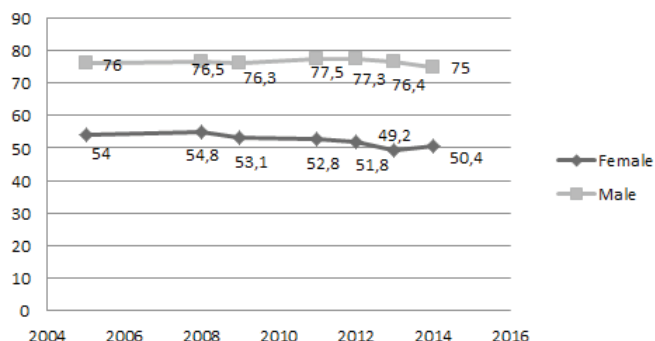
**Increase in women's political activity significantly limited by lack of access to economic resources.** It is significant that the results of a comparative qualitative analysis, conducted in 2008, which was related to representation of female and male Kyrgyz parliamentarians showed that 37% of women were from governmental bodies and municipal authorities, 17% of women legislators had experience in business or education, and 12.5% had background in the non-governmental sector and international organizations. However, only 2 women (8%) were professional political party representatives. Most men come to political parties from business sphere. It is important to note that those female politicians who had experience in business were often the wives of businessmen.<sup>21</sup>

The results of this qualitative analysis of women's representation at the highest decision-making level illustrate one of the most vivid examples of constraints to women's access to economic resources. This argument was also voiced in an interview with a representative of women's organizations, Forum of Women's NGOs in the KR: *"In 2005 we did not have a single woman in parliament, it is generally such a sad, and bad experience. Still, women are underrepresented. I think this issue will be relevant for 50 years, if not more. Of course, this question has to do with limited finances."*<sup>22</sup>

According to a World Bank report, women's involvement in economic activity is almost 1.5 times lower than that of men's.<sup>23</sup> According to the latest statistical data obtained from 2005 to 2014, the population's overall economic activity indicates a steady gender inequality trend (Figure 4).<sup>24</sup>

A comparative analysis of 2005 and 2014 data showed that men are more actively involved in the labor market. In 2005, the level

**Figure 4. Economic Activity (%)**

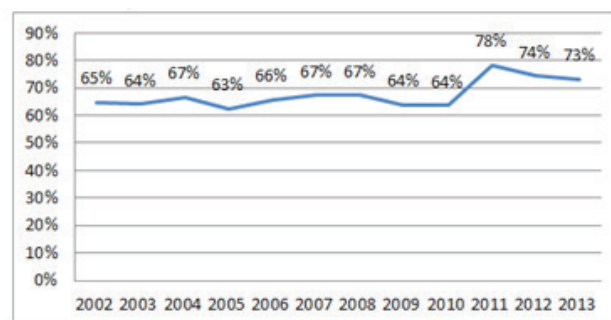


of economic activity of men was 76%, while for women it was 54%. The 2014 figures were not much different from the previous decade: men were more active in the labor market (75%) than women (50.4%).<sup>25</sup> Overall, women's economic activity decreased by 4%. Figure 5 illustrates salary differences between women and men. For example, in 2002 women in general earned 35% less than men. Although by 2011 the salary gap decreased (1,5 times), in 2013 we again see an increase in the salary gap to 27%. The sudden change of 12% from 2010 to 2011 was due to a substantial increase in salaries of government employees in the fields of education and health (Figure 5).<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, analysis of time budgeting shows that women spend almost twice as much time on unpaid labor related to housekeeping, raising children, caring for the elderly, etc.<sup>27</sup> A recent survey on time budgeting conducted in 2015 showed that the most burdened with domestic work were women living in rural areas, who spent roughly 303 minutes per day on housework. Women living in rural areas spend 1.5 times more time on housework than women in urban areas (197 minutes per day). Men from urban areas (59 minutes per day) and rural areas (87 minutes per day) spent 3.5 times less time on domestic work than rural women did.<sup>28</sup>

**The strategy to improve women's access to microcredit without adequate investment of resources in growth of women-borrowers' potential as economically autonomous active subjects (i.e. without reference to traditional female roles) can lead to an increase in women's workload and her vulnerability.**

**Figure 5. Ratio of women's and men's median annual earnings**



In the mid-90s the first international development agencies and microfinance companies opened access for women to microfinance resources. According to the policies and practices of microfinance institutions (MFIs), both at the global level and in Kyrgyzstan, the target group of beneficiaries / MFI borrowers are women from vulnerable groups - unemployed, rural women who do not have access to other funding sources.<sup>29</sup> The microfinance sector, both globally and locally, is seen as an opportunity to expand economic opportunities and improve social status; in other words, it is seen as a tool which helps fight poverty and involves women in economic activities and entrepreneurship.<sup>30 31</sup> However, in reality, we see a different picture.

When the maximum number of women borrowers was recorded in 2011, there were 430 283 women—three times higher than the number of male borrowers for the same period<sup>32</sup> Data for 2014 showed a significant decrease in the number of women beneficiaries of loans (Figure 6).<sup>33</sup> According to comments of representatives of the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic published in the media, we can say that one of the reasons for this double reduction of the number of female microcredit clients was over-indebtedness and parallel crediting (i.e. the same person having several credits).<sup>34</sup> At the same time, interest rates were very high. In 2010 and 2011, microfinance institutions had the highest interest rates of the survey period; 38.8% and 38.3%, respectively. After this period, interest rates went down.<sup>35</sup> Interesting results were obtained by "Microfinance Center", an organization which con-

<sup>21</sup> Analysis was conducted in 2008 by group of national researchers: N. Bagdasarov, G. Gorbukova, A. Moldosheva. Kyrgyz Republic: Country Gender Assessment: politics. p. 17. <http://www.un.org.kg/>

<sup>22</sup> Interview with B. Stakeeva, 17 November, 2015

<sup>23</sup> World Bank. KR Partnership program snapshot. 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Kyrgyzrepublic-Snapshot.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Statistical bulletin. Women and Men in Kyrgyzstan 2010 and 2014. Unfortunately, only gender statistics presented by the NSC data (in electronic format) since 2005 were available.

<sup>25</sup> Data was obtained from two sources: Social trends in the KR in 2005 (Социальные тенденции Кыргызской Республики в 2005г.) <http://www.stat.kg/rus/old/Rus/Home/analysis.html> and KR Labor market report 2014 (О состоянии рынка труда Кыргызской Республики в 2014г.) <http://www.stat.kg/media/files/11725bae0-25f0-403e-bed2-996ef4f4be1b.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Источник: НСК КР. <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics>

<sup>27</sup> For more details see Table H: Paid versus unpaid work in Kyrgyzstan by gender. Country Survey Kyrgyzstan. 2010. [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf) Also see NSC KR. Gender statistics.

<sup>28</sup> The National Statistics Committee. Time budget survey. 2015. <http://stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/030bc-dc0-e84e-41f4-9205-9bec51ffa9f.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Interview with B. Stakeeva, 17 November, 2015

<sup>30</sup> Interview with B. Stakeeva, 17 November, 2015

<sup>31</sup> Interview with B. Stakeeva, 17 November, 2015

<sup>32</sup> Statistical bulletin. Women and Men in Kyrgyzstan 2014

<sup>33</sup> Ibid



<sup>34</sup> By the end of 2011 in Kyrgyzstan, there were more than 800,000 borrowers. Head of the Supervision Department of the non-banking sector, the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic, Nurlan Ibraev. [http://www.vb.kg/doc/182032\\_v\\_konce\\_2011\\_goda\\_v\\_kyrgyzstane\\_bylo\\_bolee\\_800\\_tysiach\\_zaemshikov.html](http://www.vb.kg/doc/182032_v_konce_2011_goda_v_kyrgyzstane_bylo_bolee_800_tysiach_zaemshikov.html)

<sup>35</sup> Microfinance market of Kyrgyzstan and its perspectives report published by the National Institute for Strategic Studies of the Kyrgyz Republic. <http://www.nisi.kg/ru-analytics-533>

<sup>36</sup> Study on debt levels of individual borrowers and timeliness of repayments in Kyrgyzstan. Microfinance Center, December 2011. [http://www.mfc.org.pl/sites/mfc.org.pl/files/Indebtedness%20report%20Kyrgyzstan\\_RUS.pdf](http://www.mfc.org.pl/sites/mfc.org.pl/files/Indebtedness%20report%20Kyrgyzstan_RUS.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Big problems of micro crediting in Kyrgyzstan. 10 October, 2014. <http://www.nbr.kg/searchout.jsp?item=2008&material=53843&lang=RUS>

<sup>39</sup> Galindo, M. A., & Ribeiro, D. (Eds.). (2011). *Women's Entrepreneurship and Economics: New Perspectives, Practices, and Policies* (Vol. 1000). Springer Science & Business Media. Cm.p 171

<sup>40</sup> World Bank. *KR Partnership program snapshot*. 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Kyrgyzrepublic-Snapshot.pdf>

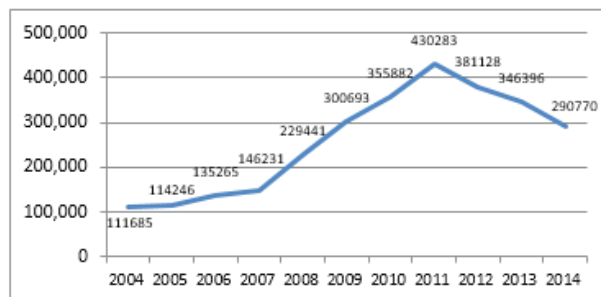
<sup>41</sup> Statistical bulletin. *Women and Men in Kyrgyzstan*. 2010

<sup>42</sup> Statistical bulletin. *Women and Men in Kyrgyzstan*. 2014. <http://www.unfpa.kg/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Sbornik-ZHM-2014.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Ibraeva, Niyazov, Abylazov, Moldosheva, Botoeva, Eratov. *Gender assessment: access of vulnerable groups to the state and municipal services in the Kyrgyz Republic*. Innovative solutions. EU project and the UN. 2012-2013.

<sup>44</sup> The diagram is based on combination of two sources: World Bank report – E. Murrugarra, M. Bonilla-Chasin, M. Temurov. *Public health during transition period and public health system reform: data from the poorest CIS countries*. World Bank. 2003.p. 15. <http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website00504/WEB/PDF/MURRUG-8.PDF>. and National Statistics of KR - HCK KP. <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics>. It should be noted that the data about maternity mortality ratio can be presented differently in other resources, as different enumerating methodologies were used. The data coincide with the data reported in the National Progress report on achievement of Millennium Goals in KR. [www.kg.undp.org](http://www.kg.undp.org). See more about differences in data in National Progress report on achievement of Millennium Goals in KR.

Figure 6. Number of female microcredit beneficiaries



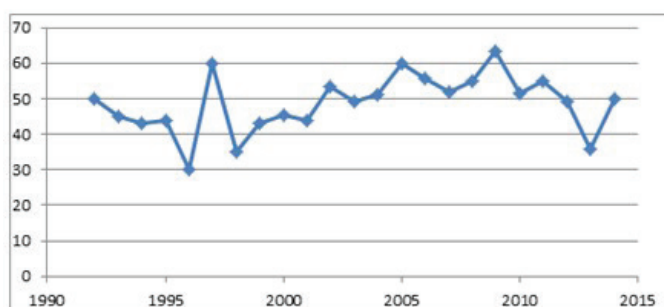
ducted a study in 2011 on the level of over-indebtedness of the KR population.<sup>36</sup> Their sample consisted of 2,603 individuals; among these, women accounted for 53%, while men accounted for 47%. According to this study, women comprise up to 69% of credit clients / borrowers and about 36% of them had more than one parallel credit, while only 18% of men had several loans simultaneously.<sup>37</sup> According to the National Bank, in 2013 the first three priority micro-credit spheres were loans for the development of agriculture (14.4 billion soms), trade and public catering (6.3 billion soms), and consumer loans (3 billion soms).<sup>38</sup> It is necessary to take into account the fact that Kyrgyz MFIs often practice the group lending methodology through the organization of so-called self-help groups, thus forming collective responsibility for credit payments. This approach is widely used when working with women, as practice shows that women are more disciplined microcredit clients.<sup>39</sup> This practice puts women borrowers at risk and under double pressure: they have to repay their credit payments, but also might have to repay debt for the other group members. (For more information about other socio-economic indicators of development in the Kyrgyz Republic, see Appendix 1.)

Significant losses in the social security and healthcare sectors have become barriers to public and economic activity of women. With the acquisition of its independence, the KR has lost many Soviet-period achievements related to women's emancipation politics. This has particularly affected the social sphere. According to a World Bank report, one of the causes of low involvement of women in the labor market is related to the great decline, over the years of independence, of access to free childcare. In the same report it was

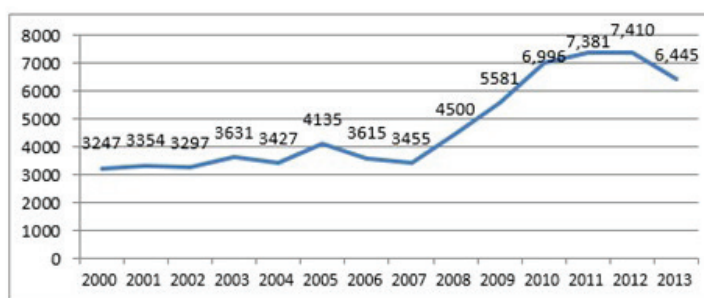
defined that one of the age groups which had the highest gap in access to economic opportunities was women from 25-34 years, and it was indicated that this was due to childbirth and childcare reasons.<sup>40</sup> Kindergartens and other pre-school educational institutions would reduce this gender gap. From 1991-2005, the number of kindergartens and nurseries in Kyrgyzstan declined by a factor of 3.8 (1,696 preschool institutions in 1991 compared to 448 in 2005). Only from 2009 can we observe a positive growth trend in the number of preschool institutions: in 2009<sup>41</sup> there were 594 preschools, whereas in 2013 there were already 927 preschool educational institutions with 132.5 thousand children this means that 17% of children from ages 1-6 had access to childcare. At the same time, it should be noted that the pre-school coverage of children in urban areas is 31.6%, whereas in rural areas it is only 10.8%<sup>42</sup> These problems associated with limited access to municipal services significantly limit expansion of women's employment; particularly, this issue affects young and middle-aged women living in rural areas. In practice, men and elderly women are more likely to become recipients of municipal services, whereas the needs of the most vulnerable groups of women are not prioritized by the family or by local government bodies in their practical activities.<sup>43</sup>

Another important issue related to serious limitation of women's opportunities is the women's reproductive health support system. One of the critical parameters of this problem is the maternal mortality rate. In the Kyrgyz Republic, in the last decade, the maternal mortality rate did not fall below 30-36 deaths per 100,000 live births (Figure 7).<sup>44</sup> Currently, the maternity mortality

**Figure 7. Maternal mortality rate (number of women who died from complications during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period per 100 thousand live births)**



**Figure 8. Number of reported crimes committed against women**



rate in Kyrgyzstan is estimated as the highest one among Eastern European and Central Asian countries.<sup>45</sup>

Due to the fact that the maternity mortality situation was critical in the country, government and international organizations had to initiate special measures. For example, in response to this challenge, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic jointly with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in July 2012 adopted a resolution which stated that the main focus of the impact in the Kyrgyz Republic should be MDG 5 - "Improve maternal health". MDG Acceleration framework is designed to protect the interests of vulnerable groups of women, and improve their access to high-quality services (social and medical protection).<sup>46</sup>

Prevalence of violence against women and domestic violence can be correlated with the growth of conservative and religious values and forces that suppress women's public activity. It is important to note that the Kyrgyz Republic adopted the law "On social and legal protection from violence in the family" in 2003. This law is designed to regulate the system of protection for victims of domestic violence.<sup>47</sup> Despite adoption of the law, however, thousands of cases of domestic violence and violence against women are registered annually in the country. In 2014, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic initiated the reform process of examining and revising the existing law.

The importance of this aspect was also voiced by representatives of women's organizations, which shared the experience of UNDP focused on the promotion of women at the local level in political participation: "We teach women at the local level how to read a budget, and how to consider gender issues, violence issues, and issues of economic independence into the

budget. All our work is based on several Programmes: women's political participation, violence against women, women and economics, and national and international lobbying. We try to consider all four dimensions to our Program, but it turned out that for women on the ground, very important issues are political participation and violence against women."<sup>48</sup>

According to data obtained from National Statistics in 2013, there were 2,542 cases of domestic violence; the bodies of internal affairs issued 2,327 temporary protection orders; 175 criminal cases related to domestic violence were directed to the court; and 1,302 persons were brought to administrative responsibility.<sup>49</sup> In 2012, the relevant project "How much does domestic violence cost?" was implemented, which helped focus on violation of human rights directly in cases of domestic violence and solve one of the most important tasks: to "get the most profound understanding of the economic aspects related to human rights violations in cases of domestic violence, and to show the connection between the problem of domestic violence and policy of investment".<sup>50</sup> The authors of the "How much does domestic violence cost?" report made calculations of direct expenditures of the state and society for domestic violence. They took two cases of domestic violence: one case of murder of a woman by her husband - 2 million soms (\$42,194) - and one case of sexual violence - 232 040 soms (\$4,895).<sup>51</sup>

Overall, despite the measures that were taken, there is still an increasing trend of reported crimes against women. According to data obtained from the NSC,<sup>52</sup> the number of crimes against women doubled from 3,455 cases in 2007 to 7,410 cases in 2012 (Figure 8). Taking into account these

<sup>45</sup> Bazarbaev, K. (2014). *Third National Review on KR's implementation of Beijing declaration and action platform*. [http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national\\_reviews/kyrgyzstan\\_review\\_beijing20\\_en.aspx](http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national_reviews/kyrgyzstan_review_beijing20_en.aspx); See more information about regional trends via *Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2008*. Estimates developed by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and The World Bank. World Health Organization 2010 and 2012; see also *Источник - Отдел докладов по ЧР, ПРООН*.

<sup>46</sup> UN in KR (2013). *Kyrgyz Republic: Third progress report on achievement of Millennium Development Goals*. Bishkek. (p. 77) [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/poved/KGZ\\_Third\\_MDG\\_Progress\\_Report\\_2014\\_RUS.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/poved/KGZ_Third_MDG_Progress_Report_2014_RUS.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Kyrgyz Republic Law "On social and legal protection from violence in the family" - <http://women.soros.kg/index.php/ru/2009-02-11-02-51-51/54-lawofdomesticviolence>

<sup>48</sup> Interview with B. Stakeeva. 17 November, 2015

<sup>49</sup> *Statistical bulletin. Women and Men in Kyrgyzstan. 2009-2013 Bishkek*. 2015. p.139

<sup>50</sup> Eliferenko, Temirova, Moldosheva. *How-much-violence-in-a-family-costs*. 2012. p. 4. <http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/gender/UNDP-kgz-How-much-violence-in-a-family-costs.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*. pp. 16-17.

<sup>52</sup> NSC KR. <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics>

examples and results, it can be concluded that the efficiency of the work on the reduction of violence against women and domestic violence requires not only resources of law enforcement bodies, but also requires a comprehensive approach that involves “various levels - individual, community, institutional, and legislative levels.”<sup>53</sup>

This section presented the key statistical data that registered and represented women’s situations at different levels, such as representation of women at senior and executive political levels (decision-making level), women’s economic activity and involvement in the labor market of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as their level of social protection. The authors tried to illuminate some aspects/factors that reflect the complexity of the gender context and challenges that should be taken into account by the Kyrgyz government and international organizations.

Overall, the dynamics of women’s representation at the level of decision-making levels remain negative, in spite of the adoption of special measures and a relatively high percentage of women in government bodies compared to other countries in the region. Decline in the participation of women in governance at the local level is of particular concern: firstly, because the variety of needs related to the daily life of women, which is most tangible at

the local level, is not expressed in the political agenda of local government authorities; secondly, lack of investments in developing capacities for women’s political participation at the national level. Also of concern are the economic vulnerability of women (decrease in economic activity, increased scale of informal insecure employment, pressures due to parallel credits, etc.), poor social support system, and large scale gender-based violence, particularly evident in rural areas.

Reliance on microcredits in many cases has led only to an increase in the burden on women, while expectations for the development of women’s entrepreneurship in the absence of conforming and supporting programmes were significantly overstated. Focusing on women acting as managers in low-income families to meet family’s basic interests, as illustrated by a number of studies within the country and worldwide, is problematic, as it defines women’s problems as family problems. This definition—although it aims to support the production role of women recognize their economic contribution, and empower women in income-generation—leads to effects well-known from the experience of other regions: choosing support strategies in favor of combining women’s reproductive role, rather than working on profitability.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, access to social support services is poor.

<sup>53</sup>Eliferenko, Temirova, Moldosheva. *How-much-violence-in-a-family-costs*. 2012. p. 4. <http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/gender/UNDP-kgz-How-much-violence-in-a-family-costs.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Kabeer, N. *Reversed Realities. Gender hierarchies in development thought*. Verso 1994

# SECTION 2.

## GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ON THE AGENDA OF UNDP KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Based on the review of the main areas of UNDP activity, this section attempts to outline certain successful examples and lessons learnt from the implementation of tasks aimed to address gender inequality in political participation.

In the first phase (1995-1999), gender was outlined as a special area of focus, which—as mentioned before—was institutionally enshrined by opening the “Women in Development” Office in 1995 (“Gender in Development” since 1997; hereafter referred to as “the Office”). The activity of the Office was deemed a catalyst for uniting the efforts of the governmental and non-governmental sectors which aimed to promote and improve the situation of women in the country.<sup>55</sup>

During this period, based on the main projects of the Office—“Support the capacity development of women’s organizations” and “Support for Women’s Leadership”<sup>56</sup> — development of women’s leadership at both political and economic levels (with a focus on support of women’s business initiatives) can be outlined as the priority of UNDP in the area of political participation.

The work of the Office was focused on close cooperation with national partners from government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Due to the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995),<sup>57</sup> one of the key areas of partnership was the formation of the national institutional mechanism for improving the situation of women, including the creation of the authorized body, development of national action plans, development of a network of women’s organizations, and training of women leaders. As part of the previously mentioned projects, the Office provided technical and financial support to the State Council for Women, Family and Youth that was established in 1996 under the supervision of the Government of the KR.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, other

institutions were supported by the Office: Women’s Initiatives Centers (WICs), which were organized in each region as part of the first National plan “Ayalzat” for improving situation of women (1996-2000).

The key role of UNDP at this phase related, firstly, to assisting in the development of the regulatory and legal framework—in particular, promotion of international standards on women’s rights and development of women’s leadership capacity. Purposely, a variety of leadership schools and networking of women’s organizations at the national, regional and global levels were supported, including women’s participation in international conferences and workshops where they could gain lobbying experience. Basics of gender expertise and gender statistics were also formed during this period. In particular, the National Statistical Committee (NSC) supported by UNDP Social Governance Programme published the first collection of gender disaggregated statistics in 1996. In addition, UNDP supports initiatives on gender expertise of the legislation.<sup>59</sup>

Secondly, support for women’s public initiatives directly related to the focus of UNDP within the framework of the poverty alleviation and social mobilization projects was provided through enhancement of economic opportunities for women. This work was also conducted through established WICs that provided business training and micro-credits for women. The idea was that WICs, on the one hand, ensured access for women (mainly from remote, rural areas) to resources for the development of income-generating activities; and, on the other, women got money for their work as resource centers for the development of local women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>60</sup> The women’s mobilization strategy was based on the formation and support of

<sup>55</sup> *From Beijing to New-York: the report on the situation of women.* - Bishkek, 1999, p. 86

<sup>56</sup> K. Musisi, *Gender and public administration in the Kyrgyz Republic: experience and lessons learned after the Beijing Conference and future prospects.* UNDP “Gender in Development” Programme, 2000, p. 20

<sup>57</sup> *Participation of the delegation from Kyrgyzstan in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was also organized with the assistance of UNDP.*

<sup>58</sup> *Relevant experts were also appointed in the regional state administrations. The interministerial body - the National Council for Women, Family and Gender Development under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic was established in 1998.*

<sup>59</sup> *From Beijing to New-York: the report on the situation of women.* 1995-2000 – UNDP, Bishkek, 1999, p. 23-24

<sup>60</sup> *It was supposed to develop other specialized credit institutions, as well; for example, women’s Credit House with the UNDP support. See a more comprehensive action plan on the implementation of the main directions of the National Programme “Ayalzat” for 1997-2000 // The report “Kyrgyzstan: the rights of women – human rights” - Bishkek 1997*

women's self-help groups. The results of the study on the impact of programmes to reduce poverty, conducted in 2011, make it possible to suggest that the provision of funds through self-help group mechanisms facilitated access of small businesses to loans/credits. At present, Associations of self-help groups have relatively big credit portfolios, which support not only their members but also provide external loans.<sup>61</sup>

In general, we can say that at the initial stage, institutional foundations of women's and gender initiatives were formed based on new rules, including international standards of women's rights (CEDAW, etc.) as well as interactions between the government, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies. Issues related to political participation during this period were mainly considered through the prism of women's leadership in public life (support for women's NGOs, legal education of women, and access to finance) in order to reduce the risks, resulting from a sharp decline in the indicators of socio-economic status of women since the beginning of market reforms in the country in 1991.<sup>62</sup>

UNDP activities within the political participation framework at the second phase (2000-2004) were mostly related to the project supporting gender equality in politics, which covered several strategic areas and was implemented jointly with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Project activity aimed, firstly, at strengthening capacity of women parliamentarians and local female parliament members; secondly, at enhancing solidarity between parliamentarians and women's organizations; and thirdly, at encouraging cooperation between men and women in politics.<sup>63</sup> Challenges addressed by these areas were outlined in the situation analysis conducted by the Office in 2000, which showed a significant decline in women's representation in government bodies, low participation of women in political parties, and poor participation of women in the electoral processes, as well as underestimated importance of cooperation with men in the processes of political participation.<sup>64</sup>

During this period, significant changes occurred in the institutional structure of gender equality at UNDP. According to the business plan (2000-2003) adopted by UNDP, gender

was deemed not as a separate issue, but as a multidisciplinary aspect of all UNDP's activities.<sup>65</sup> The regulatory framework in this area is also strengthened by the nature of UN Millennium Development Goals.<sup>66</sup> Gender mainstreaming is becoming one of the main areas of activity of the gender component of UNDP.

At the country level, the first UNDP gender mainstreaming strategy (2003-2004) in the KR was developed. In 2004, the post of the country's Gender Programme Coordinator was established. This new post of Coordinator ensured, first of all, gender mainstreaming in the linear programmes and internal operations of the country offices. Equally important was the fact that this enhanced the country office's influence in defining general UNDP gender equality strategies that take into account the local context.<sup>67</sup>

Partnership with national structures was based on the second National Gender Development Action Plan for 2002-2006 (NAP -2). In particular, formation of national gender legislation was supported. Assistance provided by UNDP in the development and adoption of the Law "On the basis of state guarantees of gender equality", which also has provisions that ensure equality in public administration and civil service, was of particular importance. One feature of the law was the quota of seats with regard to representation: not more than 70 percent of persons of the same sex for a number of public posts (for example, Supreme Court judges and auditors of the Chamber of Accounts).<sup>68</sup> Here it should also be noted that the Decree of the President of the KR on mandatory attraction of women to positions in executive branches of power at the national and local levels was adopted earlier.<sup>69</sup> So, along with educational programmes for women, the agenda of women's participation in politics and governance also provides for special support measures (see details about this mechanism for special support measures in Appendix 3). In general, UNDP activity aimed to strengthen the legal and institutional basis of gender equality in the country is further evolving.

Gender mainstreaming gains practical importance in both the internal structure of the Programme and in external activity. This is done through assistance in the devel-

<sup>61</sup> "Assessing the impact of the UNDP Poverty Reduction Programme and the identification the contribution of ecosystem products / services in the changing welfare of households and beneficiaries" of the program cycle, 2005-2011. UNDP. 2013

<sup>62</sup> K. Musisi et al, *Gender and public administration in the Kyrgyz Republic: experience and lessons learned after the Beijing Conference and future prospects*. UNDP "Gender in Development" Programme, 2000, p. 3

<sup>63</sup> *Materials of the conference "Genderstan 2004: women and men cooperating for gender equality"*, 1-3 November. 2004. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

<sup>64</sup> K. Musisi, 2000. Report, p. 24

<sup>65</sup> *During the preparation process of the PASD (Poverty Alleviation Strategy Document) paper in 2000 and 2001, special attention was paid to integrating gender aspects (as an issue crosscutting) into three program documents: Political and Administration Governance at the central level, Political and Administration Governance at the local level, and the Social Governance Programme. See more Annual Report of the Social Governance Programme UNDP 2002*

<sup>66</sup> *UNDP in the Kyrgyz Republic. The gender mainstreaming strategy for 2008-2011. Annex 1 of the Report on gender mainstreaming, UNDP in Kyrgyzstan.*

<sup>67</sup> *Expert interview with A. Divinskaya. 7 November, 2015*

<sup>68</sup> *For details see "Report on the situation of women in the Kyrgyz Republic", 2000-2005. - Bishkek, 2004, p. 10*

<sup>69</sup> *Decree No 240 of the President of KR of 27 August 2002 "On further improvement of the personnel policy to attract women leaders to public administration" <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/3876>*

opment of strategic documents on gender equality, including the NAP-2, conducting training on gender issues and promotion of academic gender, development of mechanism of gender expertise, and strengthening the analytical base (introduction of new methods of gender analysis - time budget, gender budgeting, etc.<sup>70</sup>).

UNDP objectives related to political participation within this period focused on enhancing the capacity of government officials, advocacy work with Parliamentarians, involvement of men in promoting gender equality at the local and national levels, promotion of women's participation in the 2004 local elections and the 2005 parliamentary elections, etc.<sup>71</sup> A number of studies were conducted on this subject that focused on gender analysis related to personnel policy and governance in general, all in the context of conflicts.<sup>72</sup>

The next phase (2005-2010) was full of events of acute political crises accompanied by violence and conflict, as mentioned above, and has become one of the most complicated and interesting periods in the development of the agenda of women's political participation.

The complete absence of women in Parliament after the 2005 elections forced civil society organizations to overcome disagreements<sup>73</sup> and radically raise the issue of urgent adoption of special measures to support women. Based on the common platform for actions across the country, women activists organized campaigns and events in favour of a quota. One of activists remembered this quota campaign:

"A very large-scale campaign on quotas was organized by the civil forum.<sup>74</sup> It was an unprecedented media campaign— including a fax attack on the Parliament, videos, and other actions—demanding special measures. With the additional help of other donors, special measures were introduced. This was a very successful and wide-scale campaign that managed to unite civil society. The post of Special Representative on Gender Development was created in Parliament until the Parliament's inclusion of women. In this critical situation, civil society managed to formulate its tasks and raise funds for the implementation of this task, not vice versa [the initiative from inside and not outside]".<sup>75</sup>

Under these conditions, UNDP has demonstrated its role in advocacy, especially in promptly responding to initiatives of grassroots women's organizations. UNDP was supported by the resources of the European Union and UNDP Parliamentary Project in 2005-2010, on the basis of which the existing mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in the work of the Parliament (e.g. parliamentary hearings) were strengthened and new mechanisms (e.g. parliamentary hearings, gender-based expertise of laws<sup>76</sup>)<sup>77</sup> were created.

On the other hand, support was provided for the political and managerial capacity of women as part of the project and in cooperation with SIDA's "Promotion of Women in Civil Service and Politics" (2007-2011); leadership schools were organized for young women from the political parties, as was a national media campaign in support of women's political leadership. In parallel, promotion of gender mainstreaming intensified in civil service, which included the introduction of gender-based analysis, enhancing gender-based competence of state and municipal servants, and others.

During this period, the fight against gender inequality in politics and governance took the form of operational working groups and was based on broad representation of different women's associations, as well as UNDP specialists and experts. Almost every day, they had to adopt joint decisions on lobbying women's interests, including those relating to the interests of marginalized groups of women (migrant women, rural women, single mothers) and women "land occupants" (squatters), who took an active part in the political events of 2005 and demanded jobs, social support, housing, etc.

A quota system during the elections established by legislation ensured more than 25 percent representation of women in Parliament in the 2007 elections, creating new opportunities for women's political participation. Political parties, pushed by the requirements for quota seats for under-represented groups, showed interest in attracting more women. Job prospects at the parliamentary level and elsewhere also increased.

<sup>70</sup> See for more details report on Gender aspects of poverty. UNDP. Mini-assessment. 2004

<sup>71</sup> For more details see Social Governance Programme UNDP. Annual Report 2002, p. 25-32

<sup>72</sup> See for more details: Gender aspects and local governance. Gender aspects and conflict prevention (preventive development). UNDP. 2014

<sup>73</sup> In the early stages of the development of agenda on women's political participation, the attitude of many influential women's organizations was critical. It was believed that such measures are in violation of the principle of equality and it is necessary to move away from the existing perception of physical presence in power.

<sup>74</sup> It should be noted that the initiatives were based on the results of the joint work of various international agencies and non-governmental organizations. Thus, the Agency for Social Technologies and the national women's network "Women can do everything!" with the advice and technical support from the OSCE ODIHR have developed a media strategy for lobbying gender quotas. Extensive use of symbolic actions and PR-campaigns were planned as part of this strategy. For more details about the campaign in general, see "Gender equality and empowerment of women in public administration". - UNDP 2012

<sup>75</sup> Interview with G. Ibraeva. 8 November, 2015.

<sup>76</sup> The expertise is mandatory in accordance with the laws "On the Regulation of the Jogorku Kenesh", "On the normative legal acts", "On state guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women" and "On Environmental Impact Assessment". For more details see "Standards for Legislation Expertise: Application Guide". 2nd edition / Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, the European Union, UNDP. - B.: 2012 [http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/demgov/DGP\\_Law\\_Expertise\\_Standards\\_RUS.pdf](http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/demgov/DGP_Law_Expertise_Standards_RUS.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> On the role of parliamentary and judicial reforms for gender equality in the governance system, see Gender equality and empowerment of women in public administration. Case study: Kyrgyzstan. UNDP 2012.

The relevance of gender in governance due to the adoption of the Country Development Strategy for 2007-2010 by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the development priority of which was to reform public administration<sup>78</sup>, increased during this period. This is reflected in the internal strategy document of UNDP in the KR on gender mainstreaming for 2008-2011, which specifically refers to the inclusion of enhanced gender perspectives in civil service reform.

It should be noted that according to experts, a “real” mainstreaming of UNDP started in 2005<sup>79</sup>. Through the mobilization of resources of linear programmes, the scope for promoting the gender agenda in public administration is expanding. New analytical and evaluation tools (e.g., gender regime, gender audit, gender assessment, functional analysis of the state mechanism for gender equality, development of training guidelines/aids) are tested in the ministries and departments, in order to enhance the capacity of staff and quality of governance.<sup>80</sup>

In terms of enhancing economic opportunities for women, it is important to note some of the initiatives that were implemented under UNDP Poverty Reduction Programme (PRP). The aforementioned impact assessment shows that long-term involvement in programme activity based on the experience of the rural population mobilization, as well as testing tools and mechanisms to affect income-generating activities, have contributed not only to improvement in the economic status of beneficiaries, but also to the establishment of egalitarian relationships in households and rural communities.<sup>81</sup>

The results of UNDP’s anti-crisis measures in the southern regions following the 2010 conflict are also notable. At that time, hundreds of young men and women from vulnerable groups had mastered professional knowledge and skills that were in demand in the community at their local educational institutions. In addition, young men and women received initial capital in the form of grant funds for equipment and key consumables to develop their business initiatives.<sup>82</sup>

The post-conflict context was a determining factor in the development of UNDP’s women’s political participation agenda for the following

five years (2011-2015). During this period, institutionalization of gender mainstreaming at the state and municipal levels was continuously a strong focus of UNDP. Support was provided for development of the first National Strategy on Gender Equality until 2020 and the following action plans: NAP-3 for 2012-2014, NAP-4 for 2015-2017.

At the same time, when responding to post-conflict challenges, UNDP’s focus shifted to ensuring access to services for the most vulnerable population groups, including access for women, youth, and children by improving good governance mechanisms at the central and municipal levels. For this purpose, the project “Promoting good governance for social justice”—jointly implemented by UN Women, UNICEF, and the European Commission from 2011-2014<sup>83</sup>—aimed to assess accessibility of services and develop infrastructure for services provision which take into account the interests of vulnerable groups. An important component of UNDP was to assist in the involvement of women and youth in decision-making processes for the development of policy measures, as well as to develop institutional mechanisms and technologies (including information technologies) to improve the quality of services.<sup>84</sup>

Considering women’s political participation in the context of common approaches to ensuring security and peace, based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Resolution 1325<sup>85</sup> also becomes one of the programme’s directions: participation of women in decision-making processes in the context of peace-building. Currently, the relevant project is the “Women as Peaceful Voters and Women as Candidates Project” (UNDP/UNICEF/UN Peacebuilding Fund, 2015-2016), which is aimed at enhancing women’s participation in elections with the account of women’s interests, especially young women, women from rural areas, and representatives of ethnic minority communities. Special attention to the rights of women as voters (one of the rare cases when voters were targeted) was due to the need to respond, on the one hand, to challenges related to women’s involvement in non-traditional, violent forms of protest (seizure of buildings and so on as mentioned above), which undermined traditional assumptions

<sup>78</sup> Country Development Strategy for 2007-2010. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/62531>

<sup>79</sup> Interview with A. Divinskaya. 7 November, 2015

<sup>80</sup> See for more details “Gender analysis of personnel policy in Kyrgyzstan on the example of the Ministry of Economy and Finance”—Social Technologies Agency (STA) 2005–2006.; *Interim evaluation of the implementation of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic.*, STA. 2009 [http://soros.kg/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/npd\\_01.pdf](http://soros.kg/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/npd_01.pdf); *Gender analysis of governance service.* 2008 [http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/gender/kgz\\_Gender%20analysis%20of%20the%20civil%20service\\_RUS.pdf](http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/gender/kgz_Gender%20analysis%20of%20the%20civil%20service_RUS.pdf); *Introduction of gender mainstreaming approach in the processes of public administration and local self-government of the Kyrgyz Republic. Study guide.*—the Presidential Academy of Management. 2011 [http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/gender/Manual\\_Gender\\_Mainstreaming\\_in\\_Public\\_and\\_Municipal\\_Administration\\_RUS.pdf](http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/gender/Manual_Gender_Mainstreaming_in_Public_and_Municipal_Administration_RUS.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> The study was based on a comparative assessment of the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in pilot communities covered by PRP in the rural area. For details see the Report. [http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/povred/Poverty\\_and\\_Environment\\_in\\_KGZ-UNDP\\_RUS.pdf](http://www.kg.undp.org/content/dam/kyrgyzstan/Publications/povred/Poverty_and_Environment_in_KGZ-UNDP_RUS.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, page 44

<sup>83</sup> UNDP in Kyrgyzstan. <http://test.undp.kg/ru/component/resource/article/news-list/13-democratic-governance/2011-social-justice-project-meeting>

<sup>84</sup> *Gender aspects and access to state and municipal services.* UNDP. 2012-2013

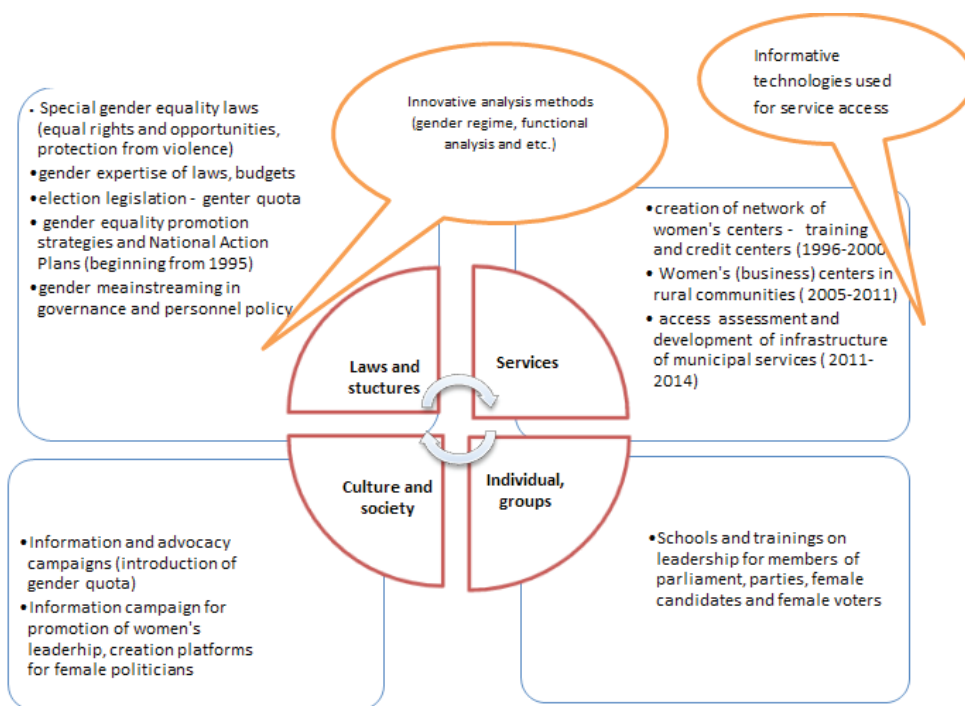
<sup>85</sup> National Action Plan. Resolution 1325. [http://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/ru/home/library/womens\\_empowerment/follow-your-voice1.html](http://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/ru/home/library/womens_empowerment/follow-your-voice1.html)

about the “peaceful” style of women’s activity. On the other hand, in the context of political instability accompanied by strengthening of conservative and ethno-nationalist movements, it has become particularly evident that ethnic, age, and social differences as well as gender differences determine political opportunities for women.

In reviewing UNDP’s gender agenda in the political participation sphere, it should be noted once again that it would be difficult to conduct in-depth analysis of all important areas of activity within the limited scope of this report. We covered only a few examples based on the

study results, and reviewed documents and expert data. These allows us to see, first of all, the variety of approaches used by UNDP and the comprehensiveness of coverage of different levels of the desired changes. The following matrix attempts to schematically present and summarize different examples of policies and interventions of UNDP at 4 levels of change: 1) laws and structures, 2) services, 3) changes at individual and groups levels, and 4) changes at cultural level. There is no doubt that this scheme is highly subjective and further discussions are recommended.

### The Matrix of Programme strategies and tools<sup>86</sup>



It is important to focus on the following aspects:

1. Significant investments were made at the institutional level, which is certainly due to the inclusion of these issues in the central mandate of UNDP on assistance to national partners. As a result, it was possible to develop legislation that supports gender equality in political participation, forms capacity for gender expertise and analysis, and improves practices of gender-sensitive personnel policy. At the same time, expert opinions received in the course of the study indicate that it is difficult to achieve sustainable results due to a number of negative factors in

the development of the country (economic and political crises, weakness of democratic institutions, etc.). As a result, UNDP often had to work with government agencies, who at once could be partners receiving the resources and violators of human rights (e.g. members of parliament who promote legislative initiatives that repress women’s rights).

2. Accordingly, there were obstacles at the practical level. We see that there were limited numbers of initiatives related to services, as well as changes in individual and social practices, that support gender-sensitive lead-

<sup>86</sup> Examples of approaches and tools that were used within the projects of UNDP in Kyrgyzstan



ership in policy and governance. The results of effective interventions on women's promotion in public service and politics outside the project framework, for example, also did not have a legitimate chance of becoming sustainable.

3. In this situation, it is of particular importance that UNDP activities in the field of women's leadership and political participation were supported by processes aimed to strengthen the internal institutional framework of UNDP on gender equality including increasing gender sensitivity of the personnel policy of UNDP. Thus, on the one hand, the work was focused on the formation of commitment and, on the other hand, promoted professionalization of staff of the Gender Equality Programme. This has largely ensured high efficiency of cooperation with partners and the possibility to work at several levels through mobilization of the resources of all UNDP programmes in order to support equality in political participation and governance.

4. At the same time, when addressing UNDP's gender development agenda process in general, we can see that the fight against inequality in political participation usually

complies with goals of broader approaches (e.g. sustainable development and poverty reduction, good governance and social justice, peacebuilding). Recognizing the importance of gender mainstreaming, we would express the view that by taking no account of power relations, there are risks of instrumentalization (subordination) of women's participation—such as women's mobilization for the production of goods and services in favor of the state, market and family—which, according to critical research, results only in strengthening the system of inequality.<sup>87</sup>

This is most evident in the strategies of women's leadership through their involvement in business. As a result, implementation of these strategies strengthened women in the role of managers to satisfy, first of all, basic interests of the family (as mentioned above) without becoming more autonomous political actors. It is not by chance that after 20 years of women's mobilization through various initiatives aimed at equality, we can see the importance of re-actualization of issues related to protection of women's political rights.

*See, for example, Taylor, V. Marketization of Governance. Critical feminist perspectives from the South. DAWN 2000; Kabeer, N. Reversed Realities. Gender hierarchies in development thought. Verso 1994*

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the aforementioned findings, the following conclusions and recommendations were made:

1. When responding to challenges related to gender inequality in political participation, the UNDP has managed to successfully implement many initiatives; this is particularly noticeable in the area of support to institutional changes for gender equality. The lessons learned from this experience showed that the most successful examples were determined by several factors. On the one hand important factors were related to the state structures' readiness for a dialogue and active involvement of civil society in lobbying for changes (for example the promotion of gender election quotas, gender-laws). On the other hand no less important was the fact that the UNDP was working with specific targeted projects focusing on promotion of gender equality in politics (for example projects on promotion of women's leadership in politics and public services, and others.).

2. However, in the context of political and economic instability, despite certain successes and achievement of the UNDP related to support of changes at law and structure levels, and ensuring their implementation have been difficult. Multiple initiatives aimed at institutionalization of gender approach in the government management level seemed to raise unreasonable expectations and demands to the state, and it was difficult to respond to them due to unfavorable internal and external country development factors. At the same time, the prevalence of expert approach within the framework of institutionalization processes of gender policy and assumptions that "gender-related knowledge of policy makers help to improve quality of the decisions" transformed the gender issue into a technical solutions that did not take into account political and ideological contradictions.

3. Within the sphere of the economic empowerment of women there have been successes and there are still many issues remain that must be addressed. Reliance on microcredits in many cases led only to increase in the burden on women, while expectations for the development of women's entrepreneurship in the absence of conforming and supporting programmes were significantly overstated. At the same time, social support services of women and family remain inaccessible, and it is clear that new programs and initiatives are in extreme demand.

4. In the political sphere, there is relatively high number of women representatives that was achieved due to introduction of quota system, however, this system appeared to be difficult to be transformed into the real changes in favor of greater gender justice. Today, women's representation has formal/symbolic character and remains open to all sorts of manipulations, despite the introduction of institutional reforms that were supported by UNDP. One of the clearest evidences of this could serve examples of the parliamentary elections practices, when women who received a place in accordance with the candidates list and principles of gender quota were eliminated from the list as soon as the party wins the elections and freeing places, as a rule, for male party members. Once again, new legal and procedural initiatives are needed.

5. There is a high probability of political use of women's resources at the civil participation level. Vulnerability of women was clearly manifested in the periods of political and social crises in 2005 and 2010, when women were actively involved in protests actions associated with violent acts. Often in these cases, women's groups, without promoting their own agendas, were considered only as a tool used in the interests of certain political groups. In this regard, UNDP's focus on the rights of women voters, especially from the rural poor,

and ethnic communities, is considered to be important and relevant. Until now, political participation mainly considered position of female leaders, female parliamentarians and managers, and thus, on the one hand the representatives became more important than the represented, on the other hand - the interests of the most diverse groups of women were ignored. The present UNDP Agenda development stage that makes an emphasis on the rights of voters could be used as an opportunity to form the agenda in favor of redistributing the balance of power in the interests of represented, and taking into account diversity of these groups.

## Recommendations

Taking into account the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals for the period up to 2030 (SDG), which defined one of the priority agenda targets as achievement of full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership of women at all levels of decision making, development of the following activity areas is recommended:

1. Promote the development of critical debates. It is necessary to create conditions for multilateral dialogue and support discussion platforms at various levels in order to deepen understanding of women's political participation as an independent value/principle for equitable social development. In the course of these discussions, including within UNDP, it is important to work out conceptions of women's political participation in relation to each working area related to women's rights, and to try to avoid instrumentalization of women's participation. The practical goal of this work in the near future could be adaptation of the SDG indicators on women's participation, namely the development of qualitative measures of the proportion of seats held by women in parliament and local government bodies, as well as the proportion of women in governmental management positions .
2. Alternative strategies and new partnerships. Particularly in the field of economic empowerment of women, it seems relevant to develop partnerships—especially with trade unions and political parties—in order to develop innovative approaches based on the rights of working women, including a high level of involvement of women in informal and low-paid / unpaid employment sectors.
3. Political education. It is particularly important at the civil society level to broaden political education of women through a variety of civil and informal associations in order to increase political awareness regarding the economic and social factors of gender inequality. It is important to develop this work on the basis of institutional support of women's organizations and networks. It is strategically important that they have strong potential to advance the agenda of women's political participation.

# APPENDIX 1

## Basic Economic Indicators

Indicators	Period	Data from Kyrgyzstan
Population (women/men)	2015	2 978 091 / 2 916 971
HDI	2014	0.655—medium human development category—positioning it at 120 out of 188 countries
GII	2014	0.353, ranking it 67 out of 155 countries
Percent of children starting school at required age of entering primary school (women/men)****	2014	93,7% / 96 %
The percent of girls in the total number of pupils at secondary school (9 classes)*	2014	49,2%
The percent of girls in the total number of pupils at high school (11 classes)*	2014	52,6%
The percent of women in the total number of students in vocational education*	2014	58,6%
The percent of women in the total number of students in higher education*	2014	54,4%
Economic activity rate (women/men)*	2014	50% / 75%
Employment rate (women/men)*	2014	46% / 70%
Unemployment rate (women/men)*	2014	10% / 7%
The percent of women from a total employed population*	2014	41%
The percent of women in the total number of heads of existing business entities *	Beginning of 2015	26%
The percent of women in the total number of who organize and operate businesses *	Beginning of 2015	34%
The percent of women in the total number of heads of existing farms*	Beginning of 2015	18%

<sup>89</sup> HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> GII reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/KGZ.pdf)

Poverty rate (women/men)*	2014	30% / 32%
Poverty rate by household head's gender (women/men)*	2014	15% / 26%
The ratio of women's and men's median annual earnings*	2014	71%
The percent of women in the total number of microcredit beneficiaries*	2014	64%
Amount of time in minutes spent by working individuals on housework per day (women/men)*	2014	243/ 71
Amount of time in minutes spent by working individuals on studying and training (women/men)*	2014	3/4
Percent of people who are single proprietors of a house or co-owners of a house (women/men)**	2012	52% / 72%
Percent of people are single proprietors of land or co-owners of land (women/men)**	20%	

\*Source: National Statistics Committee of KR. Women and Men of Kyrgyz Republic. 2010-2014. Bishkek -2015.

\*\* Source: National Statistics Committee of KR (NSC), Ministry of Health [Kyrgyz Republic] and ICF International 2013. Medical-Demographic research – Kyrgyz Republic 2012. Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic and Calverton, Maryland, USA: NSC, Ministry of Health and ICF International

\*\*\* Source: NSC data. <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics/gendernaya-statistika/>

\*\*\*\* Source: National Statistics Committee of KR, UNICEF. Kyrgyz Republic. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. 2014. Final Report. Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

# APPENDIX 2.

## Institutional mechanism for gender equality in Kyrgyzstan

In 1995, Kyrgyzstan acceded to the Beijing Platform for Action, which is a program aimed at women's empowerment. Adoption of the platform was a starting point and basic document on which the republic has built its national strategy on improving the situation of women and ensuring gender equality in Kyrgyzstan.

From 1995 to 1998, Kyrgyzstan ratified the international conventions "On the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW), "On the Political Rights of Women", "On the Nationality of Married Women", and others.

The first State Committee working on Family, Women and Youth issues was established in 1996. It had vertical structures at the regional level. In 1998, the National Council on Gender Policy under the President was established. It is composed of representatives of the government and women's non-governmental organizations. Specialists responsible for gender issues were appointed in all state bodies, local state administrations, and local self-governments for the implementation of gender policy.

At the end of 2000, the State Commission under the Government of the KR was abolished and the National Council on Gender Policy under the President was transformed into the National Council on Women, Family and Gender Development under the President of the KR with a working body—the Secretariat in the structure of the KR Presidential Administration. In 2004, a special sector on family and women was created in the department of social and cultural development of the Prime Minister's Office of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In 2009, due to changes in the structure of the Government of the KR, gender policy issues were transferred from the Office of the Government of the KR to the Ministry of Labor, Employment and

Migration of the KR. In 2010, functions on coordination of gender equality policy were assigned to the newly formed Ministry of Youth, Labour and Employment of the KR; and in 2013, they were transferred to the Ministry of Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Since 1996, several Special National programs were adopted and implemented to address gender equality issues: the National program "Ayalzat" (1996-2000); National action plans (NAP) on gender equality in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2002-2006, 2007-2010, and 2012-2014; and a long-term strategy on gender equality until 2020, which was developed for the first time.

In 2013, the NAP for the implementation of Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council was approved. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring equal, comprehensive and active participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution, peace-building and peacekeeping. One of the most important results of the NAP—with support from international development agencies—was civil society development, development of national gender statistics, gender expertise mechanisms, and special measures that supported women in politics and governance spheres.

In general, Kyrgyzstan has a wide range of normative legal framework for progress toward gender equality, which includes regulations of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, international conventions, and special laws on gender equality. Two of the most important are the law "On state guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for men and women" (2008) and the law "On social and legal protection from domestic violence" (2003).

# APPENDIX 3.

## Development of the mechanism for special gender equality support measures in Kyrgyzstan

Achieving gender parity and enhancing women's political participation in decision-making processes, as well as development of the gender-focused personnel policy in state and municipal services, are the international and national commitments of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The current Constitution of KR (Article 16, Paragraph 4) guarantees equality of persons of different sexes: "Men and women in the Kyrgyz Republic have equal rights and freedoms, as well as equal opportunities for their exercising". Special measures do not go against the Constitution; established by law, they ensure equal opportunities for different social groups in accordance with international obligations.<sup>91</sup>

The development of mechanisms of special measures during independence started after adoption of the 2002 Presidential Decree "On further improvement of personnel policy to attract women leaders to public administration in the Kyrgyz Republic".<sup>92</sup> It provided mandatory involvement of women to hold positions of deputy heads at regional and district state administrations, as well as local self-government offices working on social, cultural, educational and other issues. The decree stated that the most worthy women would be supported to keep the gender balance and to further strengthen the role of women in the socio-political and socio-economic life of the regions. There was also a measure to promote change management that suggested introducing an additional staff position: deputy heads at regional and district state administrations, as well as local self-government bodies in cities, to which only women should be assigned.

Another important law adopted in 2003 was "On state guarantees of gender equality"<sup>93</sup>, which provides specific mechanisms for gender equality in public administration. Article 9 of this law reads that the State "shall ensure equal representation of persons of different sexes in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government through legal, organizational and other mechanisms". Adoption of "temporary special measures aimed to

achieve de facto equality in gender relations" is deemed one of the mechanisms for implementing the principle of equality outlined in Article 6 of this Law. The law stipulates on the quota mechanism; in particular, not more than 70 per cent of persons of the same sex among judges of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, members of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda, and auditors of the Accounts Chamber of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In 2005, President of the KR established the post of Special Representative of the President of KR on Gender Development in the Jogorku Kenesh as a special measure compensating for the lack of women in Parliament.<sup>94</sup> One of the results that was achieved after the introduction of this position was the adoption of a Presidential Decree of measures to improve gender policy, which included the following: to ensure compliance of the Kyrgyz Republic with international and national commitments, it is advisable to ensure at least 30 per cent representation of women in state and local self-government bodies, including at decision-making levels. Heads of state bodies and local authorities were instructed to provide equal opportunities for persons of different sexes to participate in contests for vacant positions at the state and municipal levels.<sup>95</sup> A significant achievement in enhancing political participation of women was the introduction of gender quotas in the electoral law in 2007. According to the quota principle, representation of persons of the same sex shall not exceed 70 per cent, and the difference in the candidates' order in the lists should not exceed three positions.

An important step for enhanced political participation of women in government bodies at the decision-making level was the adoption of a new version of the Law "On state guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women"<sup>96</sup> in 2008. This defines specific mechanisms for ensuring gender equality at the decision-making levels in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government. In particular, guarantees of equal rights and opportunities in public

<sup>91</sup> Introduced by the Law of the KR, 27 June 2010

<sup>92</sup> KR President's decree № 240 dated: 27 August 2002

<sup>93</sup> KR Law № 60, dated: 12 March 2003

<sup>94</sup> Presidential decree № 245, dated: 21 June 2005

<sup>95</sup> Presidential decree № 136, dated: 20 March 2006

<sup>96</sup> KR Law N 184, dated: 4 August 2008

<sup>97</sup> KR Law N 40 «On selection of the Council of Judges of the Kyrgyz Republic», dated: 13 June 2011.

service are ensured through the mechanism of equal competitive selection and avoiding announcement of the competition for persons of only one sex. The new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010) has enshrined the provisions on prohibition of discrimination and on equal opportunities for women in elected bodies and management in state and municipal services. Special measures to support women's political participation at the local level were enshrined in Law 98 of the Kyrgyz Republic, "On election of members of local councils", dated July 14, 2011. When forming lists of candidates for district and city councils, political parties and constituency groups shall take into account the representation of not more than 70 percent of persons of the same sex, and the difference in female and male candidates' order in the lists nominated by political parties and constituency groups shall not exceed two positions.

It should also be noted that the gender quota mechanisms support women's representation at the level of the judiciary system. In particular, the selection of the Judicial Council, an independent collegial body for the selection of candidates for the vacant post of the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Chamber and local courts, civil society representatives on the Board are elected by the parliamentary majority and the parliamentary opposition at the meetings with regard to the representation of not more than 70 percent of persons of the same sex.<sup>97</sup>



# APPENDIX 4.

## Research methodology

This case study is based on data collected through analysis of documents and statistical data (desk research), interviews with experts at the national level. The study covered the period of 1995-2015 (starting from accession of the KR to the Beijing Platform for Action).<sup>98</sup> The respondents represented by two main categories of experts: UNDP gender specialists and coordinators (during different periods), and representatives of civil society and the state.<sup>99</sup> It is important to note that the authors of the current report participated in the UNDP KR projects as consultants, trainers, and researchers. Thus, their experience may affect analysis of the report materials.

The data were collected from September to December 2015. Report preparation took place in January and February 2016. The structure of the report was composed of four main sections based on the collected data:

- 1) Introduction, including a description of the country context in terms of opportunities for political participation and methodological issues of research;
- 2) Section 1. Gender context: balance sheet of gains and losses, with a presentation of the main trends (within the context of the study) in the development of gender situation;
- 3) Section 2. Gender and political participation in the UNDP agenda in the Kyrgyz Republic, with an overview of approaches, areas, and examples of interventions;
- 4) Conclusions and recommendations.

The first draft of the report was presented and discussed at a meeting with representatives of the UNDP Kyrgyzstan's Country Management Team. Additional feedback and comments were received from the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub Office. The received recommendations were taken into account when preparing the final report.

<sup>98</sup> The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women that was held from 4th till 15th of September in 1995. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20R.pdf>

<sup>99</sup> Due to repeated change of the Head of the Gender Department of the Ministry of Social Development (the authorized body), scheduled meetings with the experts of this state structure have not been held during the period of the case study.

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