

Gender Equality in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001



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Abstract

Much of the research on Kyrgyzstan has focused on its internal political, cultural, trade, commerce and foreign relations issues. But very limited work has done exclusively on this topic. Hence, very little literature is available in this area, so an attempt has been made in this study to fill the gap in research. Therefore it would be a productive exercise to understand the various programmes and measure has been initiated Kyrgyz government to promote the Gender equality in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001.

The period of the present study (1991 to 2001) starts from 1991 and has been chosen for two reasons: (a) Kyrgyzstan has become an independent country in 1991 after the disintegration from USSR and (b) Kyrgyzstan has initiated several programme and policies including National Action Plan on Gender Equality and Matrix of Measures on its implementation with regards to women's rights in 2001.

The primary aim of the present study is to examine the Gender equality in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001 and assess the impact of government policies and programmes in this endeavour. Objectives of the study are to study the Status of women in Kyrgyzstan and to evaluate the role of INGOs, NGOs, Constitutional provisions of Kyrgyz Republic (KR), media, government policies and programmes to improve the Gender equality and education in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001

Keywords: Gender Equality, Ayalzat, Oblast, Rayon, Social Construction, USSR, Cars, CEDAW, BPA, Mdgs, CCPR and CESC.

Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is a Central Asian Republic (CAR), which gained its independence with the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. The country is bordered to the north by Kazakhstan, to the west by Uzbekistan, to the south by Tajikistan and to the east by China. It is the second smallest Republic of the five Central Asian states; it has an area of 199,900 square km. Bishkek is the capital, which is located close to the northern border.¹ It is very mountainous country of great natural beauty, thus its population is concentrated in river valleys and along lakesides.

Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic society. The main ethnic groups are Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian with a large number of smaller minority groups. Although officially, Kyrgyzstan is the secular state but Sunni Islam is the predominant in this region, followed by the Russian Orthodox faith. The country consists of 7 oblasts² and the capital, every oblast includes rayon³ and towns subject to the oblast.

Gender is a social construction like race and ethnicity. It clearly defines and differentiates the roles, rights, responsibilities, and obligations of women and men. Sex is the natural biological differences between females and males; it is gender which creates discrimination between two sexes. On the basis of social norms that define appropriate behaviours for women and men and determine the social, economic, and political power gap between the sexes. Although the specific nature and degree of these differing norms vary across societies and across time.

Although Kyrgyzstan has a great legal base for building gender equality, but there are still many forms of discrimination exist. Statistically, three fourth of all working places are taken by women. In spite of this, in average women are doing the same kind of work as men but they earn only 65% of what men earn every month in addition, most of women have a little paid job.⁴ Presentation of women is not enough in public and political life in new Kyrgyz parliament. There are no women or only a few women take official high rank. The fact is that women are more discriminated is the statistical growth of violence towards women.⁵ There are up to 3000

women are suffering from gender problems. Roughly, 50% of these women are suffered from domestic violence.⁶

Women have been always treated unequal compare to men in every society and central Asian republics in general and Kyrgyzstan particularly is not an exception as there is also gender inequality found. In the Kyrgyz communities gender problems do exist, which was the result of the difficult economic times and also the shift in social values. They are expected to do the housework, raise the children, care for the elderly, as well as earn a living. Although such expectations were also true in the Soviet period, there were many more social and institutional supports in place, such as day-care programs, regular salaries, benefits for each child, and free health and educational services.⁷

The Platform for Actions adopted by the Fourth UN World Women's Conference held in Beijing (1995) and recognized by the world community as the program of human rights for women, became a fundamental program document. On the basis of Beijing Platform for Actions, Kyrgyzstan began structuring the national strategy on development and use of potential of women of the republic. Most countries have made at least some socio-economic progress benefitting women, but still the gender stratification is a universal worldwide. The world remains unequal along sex lines in education, income, health care, and much else. Possibly the most glittering disparity is that men monopolize politics in almost all countries.⁸

Growing social differences and inequalities echo trends for stratification in Kyrgyz society. Due to these inequalities and differences all ethnic-cultural and gender factors are obviously make important. Thus, the study of Gender equality and education in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001 is essential to give adequate focus. Furthermore, researcher would like to assess the government policies besides national, international donors as well as national and international NGO's.

Aim of the Study

The aims of the present study are to examine the Gender equality in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001 and assess the impact of government policies and programmes in this endeavour. It also reflects on the Status of women in Kyrgyzstan and to evaluate the role of INGOs, NGOs, Constitutional provisions of Kyrgyz Republic (KR), media, government policies and programmes to improve the Gender equality and education in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001.

Research Methodology

This study is based on analytical and empirical review of data and information collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include documents in the form of Central Asian Republics Government documents, treaties, agreements, signed by member states and Kyrgyzstan with international organizations as well as various governments' reports, press releases issued by the other Central Asian republics governments and Kyrgyzstan government on this issue.

The secondary sources of information include books, periodicals, journals, newspaper clippings, magazines and various websites (National and International) etc. is used. In addition to this, NGOs and Civil Society groups working on Gender equality related issues and their documents are also been consulted. The documents of various policy makers, researchers and non-governmental organizations, Civil Society groups to supplement the facts as well as to understand the position of Gender equality and the Central Asian Republics government's initiatives in the matter related to Gender equality in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan were consulted.

Kyrgyz Women Status in Soviet Period

During soviet period the status of women has plausible been a subject of particular pride in the family and the women achieved significant advancement in the areas such as housing agricultural, civil rights and living standards, education, legal rights, access to employment and profession and equal pay for equal work is some of the indicators where women made substantial progress sine revolution of 1917.⁹

The communist party set up a special women's Department (The Zzhenotdel) to give exposure to the freedom of divorce of women and to observe the apprehension of women's rights and newly achieved freedoms. In its operation it changed patriarchal attitude at all levels of society. It organizes special literary classes for women, encouraged them to take part in education and technical training programmes and informed them of their important role in the newly founded voluntary, social and political organizations that was being set up in the workplace towns and villages. It remained active till 1920s.

During the first decade of soviet rule, the government played an active role and took decisions to improve the socio-economic status of the women. The entry of women into productive employment outside the household was viewed as essential for the liberation of women. A resolution at the party congress in 1924 insisted that the protection of female labour power in industry has political significance and directed party organs to take opportunities.¹⁰

Generally the sphere of Kyrgyz women's rights was enormously broader than European women. Soviet rule also very much contributed in the development of Kyrgyz women. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz Government has been in the vanguard of gender legislation in Central Asia. It would be wrong to describe the life of Kyrgyz women as a continuous disgrace and to represent them as only victims. The nomadic way of life was encouraging to relative freedom of Kyrgyz women, who as distinct from the settled peoples never covered their faces and were freer to express their opinions. Consent of wife in marriages of children or joint purchases of property were essential.

Kyrgyz Women Status in Post-Soviet Period

In the earliest years of independence of Kyrgyzstan, women have played more high-flying roles than elsewhere in Central Asia. Since 1991 women have occupied the positions of state

procurator (the top law enforcement official in the national government), minister of education, ambassador to the United States and Canada, and minister of foreign affairs. Women have also excelled in banking and business and the editor of Central Asia's most independent newspaper, Respublika, is a woman. Roza Otunbayeva, who was minister of foreign affairs in 1996, has been mentioned frequently as a successor to Akayev.

The situation faced now-a-days by women in Kyrgyzstan is ambiguous and prejudiced by various factors. A concept of modern Kyrgyz women is formed based on the following three factors: (1) secularized Islamic tradition; (2) traditional value system of the Kyrgyz, historically a nomadic nation where women played an important role both on a household and on a community level and; (3) Soviet heritage of gender equality promotion.¹¹

The independence proclaimed in 1991 did not lead to equality in gender relations in the Kyrgyz Republic. On the contrary, the actual status of women in society deteriorated. In practice, women are unprotected and not safe from violence neither at family nor at work in public institutions. The transition to market relations is resulting in deterioration of the economic situation. This aggravates exploitation of women, who have become in many cases the main breadwinners of their families. The collapse of the social safety net and the decline in public health services has led to a sharp deterioration of women's health and to growth of maternal and child mortality.

Democratization means the elimination of quotas for women in elective organs, meaning that women lost even formal representation in the power structures. The transfer to a contract system of employment and the loss of state control over the personnel policy of employers has undermined the security of women in the labour and employment market. Women's unemployment, violence against women, bride kidnapping, a practice degrading and humiliating to women has been revived and become more widespread. The return to the ideals of the past, perceived as the revival of patriarchal and Islamic customs, is a real threat that weakens the gender equality in the Kyrgyz society.

In 1996, the State Commission on Family, Women and Youth Affairs was established under the Kyrgyz Government to provide institutional support for promotion of women's interests. According to its mandate, the Commission implemented the state policy on women's development, developed and implemented state and national programs on gender in relation to family, women and youth. The State Commission coordinated these efforts with the sectoral ministries, administrative structures, local governments, civil society organizations including political parties, non-governmental organizations, as well as international organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The year 1996 was declared as the Year of Women by the President of KR. State support, institutional reforms and strengthening of the legal framework to promote women policy. Women's problems were discussed during the

same year at parliamentary sessions and were reflected in other national programs, such as Bilim, Cadres of XXI Century, Madaniyat, Manas, Araket, Emgek, on prevention of AIDS and STD in the Kyrgyz Republic for 1996-2000.

In 1997, Special committees on family, women and youth affairs were established through the State Commission's efforts, within the Legislative Assembly and People's Representatives Assembly of Jogorku Kenesh.¹² The State Commission was also represented at the Oblast level by Women's Initiative or Ayalzat Centers. The activities of these Centres focused on co-ordination of Youth, Family and Women's issues among local agencies, field support for women's NGOs, communities, women-entrepreneurs and farmers. Additional Centres have been established at Rayon and Village level.

A major achievement in this regard was the launch of the State Commission for Family, Women, and Youth Affairs under the Government of the KR for implementation of the National Program Ayalzat. Ayalzat is the Kyrgyzstan's national plan of action, was established with the support of UNDP. It covers the period 1996-2000. It reflects the priority areas of the Beijing Platform for Action and it was aimed at improvement of women's status in the republic. The main elements of this programme were approved in the decree of 6 March 1996 of the President of KR. It Committees on protection of health, women, and family and youth affairs started functioning in both chambers of the Jogorku Kenesh (lower house is Myizam Chygaru Palatasy and El Okuldor Palatasy is upper house) of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In July 1998, the National Council on Gender Policy under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic was established to boost the work of the State Commission, perk up government commitment to promoting women's advancement and to introduce the gender approach in policy and programming. It comprised representatives of state bodies and non-governmental organizations. Its functions were to provide expert advice and promote best practices on gender mainstreaming within these organs, coordination of gender related policies and strategies of target organizations, including ministries, commissions and agencies and enhance coordination with NGOs and other organizations on gender issues. In February 2001, this structure was renewed into the National Council on Women, Family and Gender Development Issues under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic with the Secretariat within the President's Administration being its working body.

International and National Efforts for Gender Equality

The status Kyrgyz women improved by the secular government policies and programmes, International donors, NGOs, INGOs and mainly by the cooperation of both man and women. The Kyrgyz Government provides compulsory education for women, guaranteed their employment, paid for their year-long maternity leaves, free health care in clinics and free medical treatment at sanatoriums for children

with chronic diseases, paid benefits for young children and family. The system of social objects, such as kindergartens, baby kitchens, canteens, sports facilities, laundry, and dry cleaning facilities.

Though there are increasing gender inequalities and discrimination in all five Central Asian Republics in the education, health, employment, economic and political participation means socio-economic-political status. Kyrgyzstan was the first country among CARs to identify clearly the human orientation of its reforms. In this region women continue to be dramatically underrepresented in decision-making positions. Women should be present at the table when solutions are being discussed to support economic growth rooted in gender equality and social justice.

During 1991 to 2001 in Kyrgyz Republic, continuous process of improvement of the national legislation and its reshuffle in fulfillment with international legal norms was underway. About 30 universal documents on human rights have been ratified. It allowed for a significant progress in the sphere of ensuring the rights of women of the republic and provided them with an access to international human right defending systems. An achievement in this area is a gender experts' examination of legislation and development of a number of new draft laws on gender equality.

All the Central Asian Republics have signed the Conventions on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and aim at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The ratification for the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action has made mandatory to government to facilitate women's empowerment and equality. All Central Asian Republics signed the CCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) and CESC (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) which are related to social, economic, political and cultural fortify the women. By the signing of these covenants, the Central Asian Republics are obliged to respect and protect these rights. The following table shows the year of signing of CCPR as well as CESC by the Central Asian Republics-

Table: 1.1**The year of signing of CCPR and CESC by the Central Asian Republics**

C.A. Republics	Year of Signing the CCPR	Year of Signing the CESC
Kazakhstan	2 nd Dec 2003	2 nd Dec 2000
Kyrgyzstan	7 th Oct 1994	7 th Jan 1995
Tajikistan	4 th April 1999	4 th April. 1999
Turkmenistan	1 st Aug 1997	1 st Aug. 1997
Uzbekistan	28 th Dec 1995	28 th Dec. 1995

Sources: Chawadha, Sunita (2012), *Status of Women in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2001, M.Phil. Thesis*, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, p.11.

This table shows that Kyrgyzstan Republic was the first among all the five CARs, who signed first on both the CCPR and the CESC followed by Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

Article 3 of CCPR said that the State parties to the present covenant undertake to ensure the equal rights to men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present covenant.

In 1975 the first World Conference on the status of women, was convened at Mexico city, also declared as International Women's Year. The second World Conference on the status of women was held in Copenhagen in 1980. The third World Conference on the status of women was convened in Nairobi in 1985, which is also known as the "birth of global feminism".¹³ The fourth world conference on women in 1995 for achieving the advancement and empowerment of women, the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted by the governments in it. The mission statement of the Beijing Platform for Action said that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is a prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on gender equality is a condition for people entered sustainable development.¹⁴

The CEDAW calls for government to remove all discriminatory barriers against women in all fields in particular the political, social, economic and cultural fields. National Action Plan has been adopted by the countries that have signed and ratifies the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), to meet the requirements of the CEDAW.

Here we discuss only Kyrgyzstan's National Action Plan. It was adopted to carry out the decisions of the Fourth World Conference on women held in Beijing in 1995. CEDAW, in its preamble accepts that extensive discrimination against women continues to exist. Gender discrimination and all other forms of discriminations, particularly racism, racial discrimination, Xenophobia and related intolerance continue threat to women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.¹⁵

The Kyrgyz Republic has ratified the following international conventions to eradicate discrimination against women: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, and the Convention on Maternity Protection etc.

The Millennium Declaration, as a statement of values, principles and objectives for the international agenda of the 21st Century, set time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating discrimination against women together poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, and environmental degradation. The Road Map for implementing the Declaration has been issued by the UN Secretariat, focusing on eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by the year 2015. These goals are shaping the agenda for national as well as global policy development.¹⁶ MDG 3 refers to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender equality should be considered as an essential

cross-cutting element for achievement of all MDGs. The Millennium Declaration in rightly recognizing that the goal of gender equality is not only important in its own right, but is essential to reaching all goals.¹⁷

The United Nations has been at the front to protecting women's rights as well as to raise women empowerment. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), commonly referred to as the "International Bill of Rights of Women".¹⁸ Along with other states that joined the Beijing Platform of Action, Kyrgyzstan took on responsibility of the development and empowerment of women in all areas of the state life, particularly, in political, social, economic, and cultural spheres, guaranteeing this empowerment by relative legislation. At present there already exists a sufficient legal basis where human rights and freedoms are recognized regardless of the gender factor.¹⁹

National Agenda for Kyrgyz Women

Aylzat national programme is the Kyrgyzstan's national plan of action. On 13th May 1996, the Government of Kyrgyzstan adopted resolution No.212 on the status of women in Kyrgyzstan and measures to assist them in the transition period. On 12 October 1996, parliamentary hearings were held on the current situation of Kyrgyz women.²⁰ Principal aim of this programme was improvement of women's situation by the year 2000. The programme creates the necessary preconditions for real gender equality and reflects all 12 priorities of the Action Platform adopted in 1995 at the International Conference in Beijing.²¹ The Aylzat national programme has 11 sections and each section is divided into short and long-term objectives.

Improvement of Basic Legislation and Legal Norms

Women's rights are unquestionable human rights, which they have simply because they are human beings. Though, there is no modern society in which women have the same opportunities as men. Nevertheless the declaration of the equal rights of women, equal opportunity has yet to be achieved in Kyrgyzstan.

Develop an Institutional Mechanism for Improving the Status of Women

The national mechanism for improving the status of women is the State Commission for the Family, Women and Youth attached to the Government of Kyrgyzstan. Its principal tasks are to elaborate and implement State policy on the family and family relations, establish national gender development programmes and implement the Aylzat national programme.

Women's Education and Enhancement of Their Functional Literacy

Women's education and the enhancement of their functional literacy presuppose an increase in economic and legal literacy and women's mastery of new information technologies.

Women's Health, Reduction of Maternal and Infant Mortality

Mother and child welfare is one of the most urgent women issue. The number of disabled persons has increased, and diseases related to social troubles

like tuberculosis, venereal disease, alcoholism, drug addiction and substance abuse are on the rise. Anaemia is fairly widespread among women, and there has been deterioration in the level of services provided to pregnant women and women in childbirth. Maternal and infant mortality is a serious problem.

Women and the Economy, Overcoming Poverty

Women play a key role in the economy since they are a large source of Kyrgyzstan's labour resources. While the new economic conditions have enabled a significant number of women to find work in the private sector.

Women's Participation in Decision-Making at The Political, Legislative and Executive Levels

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country. It will provide a balance that reflects in the composition of society and strengthen democracy for proper functioning.

Creation of Special Support Programmes for Girls

Although Kyrgyzstan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is still a need to increase and adapt health education and medical services, especially programmes providing primary medical and health care, including sexual and reproductive health services, and to develop quality programmes in the area of health care and education for girls.

Reduce All Forms of Violence against Women

During the transition period, violence against women has been growing. Although Kyrgyz legislation seeks to eradicate violence against women, traditions of violence persist in national stereotypes aimed at ensuring male supremacy.

Women and the Media

During the transition period, the media have been playing an extraordinary role in society. It is the most effective and accessible means of improving the status of women, enhancing the prestige of the family and educating young people.

Women and the Environment

The environment has a direct impact on human health. Maternal health is a prerequisite for improving the health of children and young people and preserving the nation's gene pool.

Rural Women

Rural women constitute a significant section of the population. During the transition era, their situation has been sharply exacerbated by such factors like unemployment and the deterioration of the health care, educational and social security systems. Therefore they need constant attention and special support.

Women's NGOs are also essential part of the gender equality and women empowerment. There aims are to support the socially vulnerable groups of women and children, and the establishment of gender balance, especially in the resolution of unemployment and poverty problems. In Kyrgyz Republic where the NGO movement is stronger as compared to the other republics, it has been found that the number of people involved in the activities of NGO is much higher than in the system of public administrations. Currently many of these organizations are completely

independent from the government, they do not receive government funding, and feel no pressure by the government in their activities, which makes them different from women's organizations of the Soviet type.

Women's participation in NGO has been accepted as an important tool for women empowerment and gender equality. They act as development actors and are driving forces for reaching gender equality. 1999 is a period when more than 150 non-governmental organizations that protect women rights were formed. These are key players in the civic movement in Kyrgyzstan. Now, they are trying to cooperate with different international organizations and movements. More than 80% of NGOs are led by women. Many of these organizations have achieved considerable organizational growth, including the Congress of Women of Kyrgyzstan, Forum of Women's NGOs, League of Women, Women in Development Bureau, the Committee of Women of Kyrgyzstan, Independent Union of Women, and in rural areas, organizations such as Alga Rural Women, and Kol-Kabysh. These NGOs have many different tasks and purposes, but overall they focus on the improvement of women's status.

Constitutional Provisions for Gender Equality

The equality of human rights is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Kyrgyzstan, which was adopted in 1993 and has been amended three times, recognizes and guarantees "the basic rights and liberties of human beings" and ensures everyone's equality before the law and in court.²² Kyrgyzstan is making significant efforts to improve the status of women and establish gender equality.

The rights and interests of women are protected by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic as well as the Labour Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Matrimonial Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Civil Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Laws of the Kyrgyz Republic On State Benefits to Families with Children, On Protection of Health of People in the Kyrgyz Republic.

1. Article 3 of the Constitution of the KR, discrimination on the basis of sex, confession, or ethnicity is prohibited. Observance of the gender equality is also guaranteed by Civil Code, Criminal Code, Labour Code and Family Code.²³
2. Article 15 of the KR Constitution stipulates the principle of equality of the rights of men and women. It is expressed in the equal right of women and men to participate in elections and referenda, to obtain, change and keep the citizenship, to receive a series of civil, economic and political rights.²⁴
3. Article 15 (3) states that no one may be discriminated against although women and men enjoy equal rights under the law, the death penalty cannot be applied on women.²⁵
4. Article 16 of Section states that, no one may be subject to discrimination on the basis of sex, race, language, disability, ethnicity, belief, age, political and other convictions, education, background, proprietary and other status as well as other circumstances. Furthermore, men and

women shall have equal rights and freedoms and equal opportunities for their realization in the KR.

5. Article 20 says that Human and Civil rights and freedoms may be limited by the Constitution and laws for the purposes of protecting national security, public order, health and morale of the population as well as rights and freedoms of other persons. These limitations should be equal to the declared objectives.
6. Article 31 of Chapter II Human rights and freedoms, says that the propagation of national, ethnic, racial and religious hatred, gender as well as other social supremacy which calls to discrimination, hostility and violence shall be prohibited.

Challenges in Gender Equality

God produced women and men for reciprocated understanding and support during their lives. Unluckily, the ideal is not always coinciding with reality. It is generally known that social roles of women and men are interactive. When people change this concept, then they change the whole idea of harmony between men and women. The integrity of gender issue is making it a great tool in social justice building in any country. Since women are making the half of the population of the world, all issues have feminine part. Equal and full rights, participation of women are essential in the solving of social, economic and political problems.

There are certain factors have been noticed to hamper the process of women's empowerment and the achievement of gender balance. Some of them are growing poverty and unemployment of women, lack of gender approaches in politics and mass consciousness, undeveloped training system of women leaders, ignoring of gender methodology, monitoring and political analysis assessment systems, insufficient stability of the institutional mechanism, lack of continuity regarding its personnel, etc.

There is a big challenge to create equal ground for men and women in each and every sphere viz. social, economic, political, cultural, etc. For that first of all we have to point out the barriers and challenges in the path of equality of men and women then we have to work on them, prioritization is also needed. What and which type of problems are faced by women and then try to solve them.

Women have been always treated unequal in every society and central Asian republics in general and Kyrgyzstan specially is not an exception as status of women in this region is also unequal to men. Mostly status of women is determined by the traditions. Traditionally, home is the work place of women; they are expected from childhood to old age to care of family members. Women are also not enjoying the independency and self-dependency due to their dependency on male. Before marriage a girl has to under her parents and brother, after marriage her dependency moves to her husband and later on it goes to her son. Means in the journey of life women never ever feel freedom.

Conclusion

Although achieving gender equality is a difficult task, but one and foremost it must be

addressed at all level in all sectors. The lack of understanding of what gender equality really means is probably the greatest hindrance. Sometimes inequality lies in the equality means equal treatment of a person in unequal situations will simply preserve inequalities. Generally, it is believed that equality means treating people in the same way and thus applying existing policies and practices in the same way which itself is enough for gender inequality.

Kyrgyz Republic (KR) is off course to meet targets for gender equality in education, health services, employment and parliament. Although gender equality in primary schools has been met, unemployment is high amongst women as employers prefer males to females as a stable workforce; women's wages are lower than those for men. Women hold few managerial and parliamentary positions. One of the major and most significant achievements of the KR is a high education level of women due to provision of equal access to compulsory education irrespective of sex. But there is still an inequality of wages of men and women.

Kyrgyz women participate more actively in business, education and other professions rather than do women's of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, or Tajikistan. They even make up one third of all their country's elected officials, although almost exclusively at the lower levels, at the same time, old traditions that subordinated women to men persist especially in rural areas like the custom of bride kidnapping in which young women are kidnapped by male suitor and held overnight at the home of his parents. Spending a night at a men's house often is disgraceful enough to force a young women to agree for marriage.

Achieving gender equality involves redefining the power relationships, confronting gender stereotypes and traditions, overcoming barrier to equality etc. A society where ideas of men's superiority are prevalent can only be altered by strong laws, state authority and mentality of men as well as women. Equally serious changes in women's mentality are needed, too, because it is the women who raise children and make them follow stereotypes. This vicious circle can only be broken if work is done both from men's and women's side.

It cannot be said that women of Kyrgyzstan enjoy equal rights to men's as they are supposed to under the existing legislation. Patriarchal traditions still limit freedom of women and choices that they make in their lives. After the two decades of independence of Kyrgyzstan women have become less active in the political life of the country, as they still cannot use all their political rights and powers, including the right to express themselves and protect their interests.

International Conference on "Kyrgyzstani Women at the Edge of Centuries" in April 2001 indicated that there have been a number of significant positive changes in such areas as the constitutional development mechanism on women's empowerment, improvement of the national legislature in terms of women's rights, in the sphere of education, health care, elimination of all forms of violence toward

women, support of girls and the development of the economic potential of women, including rural women.

Many International, national, regional organizations, United Nations Commission, Central Asian Republics as well as Kyrgyz Government are considering to solve the problem of Gender discrimination in Kyrgyzstan. The voice of women has been listened by the governments. To institutionalise support to Kyrgyz women, a number of important measures have been taken: the State Commission on the Issues of Family, Women, and Youth was created, the network of non-governmental organizations is being strengthened, and mechanism of review of legislation from the gender viewpoint is in place.

The Kyrgyz Republic has a legal environment that defines the rights and interests of women in fulfilment with international norms. Nevertheless, the rights of Kyrgyz women still cannot be viewed as equal to the rights of men. Women's attempts to achieve true equality are hindered by growing unemployment and poverty, the low level of social protection, the decrease of participation of women in decision making and property distribution and the high level of diseases. Many women are poorly informed about their rights and stereotypes and traditions formed by the patriarchal way of living are still strong in the society. The legal environment still needs improvement aimed at broadening the scope of legal institutions and increasing the efficiency of court decision enforcement.

Endnotes

1. *Meimanaliev, Adilet-Sultan et al. (2005), "Health Care Systems in Transition", European observatory on Health Systems and policies, Vol. 7 (2): 1.*
2. *Oblast (province) is the largest administrative and territorial unit in the Kyrgyz Republic relating to regional territorial division.*
3. *Rayon (district) is the next basic administrative and territorial unit of the Kyrgyz Republic after the aйл.*
4. *Accessed on 12March 2012 UR: <http://www.mtnforum.org/sites/default/files/pub/1051.pdf>.*
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