

INTRODUCTION

The transition to a market economy and Political Democracy is the primary challenge Central Asia has confronted during the last decade. This process of deep transformation can be looked at from a number of perspectives. Socio-political aspect is one of the greatest importances.

There is no one beyond the influence of this transition: young and old, rich and poor, male and female. Of all the groups that make up Central Asian society the situation of women is one of the greatest concern and so of greatest interest to the researchers.

The central story of this paper is study of Women in Politics in Central Asia and their opportunity to engage to political decision-making. By doing so the awareness about the regional specifics of women's engagement to policy-making would be created. The main focus will be given to the study of the gender-based corruption, i.e. certain injustices that are overlooked in Central Asia towards women in politics.

Throughout the pages of the paper women's statements are presented in order to colorfully illustrate the situation of women today. These real messages from women emerge actions in the direction of improving educational opportunities for women. It includes direct assistance for support to the organizations that provide professional and technical training for them. Women want institutions of Education, Government and Non-Governmental Organizations be more accountable to them. This requires changes, sometimes very deep changes in accordance with existed social norm. How we will accomplish it is the central challenge that confronts us at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

It is also important to mention out that I have explored the nature of women's exclusion from politics from a social perspective seeing in the some social norm outdated customs the main reason of gender-based corruption in Central Asia.

Current paper begins with the chapter “Women in Politics in Central Asia” that gives the overall picture of how women are involved to Politics, gives some examples of women's failures to enter public sphere and institutions of power. Then the research continues with assessing women's attitudes toward politics and institutions involved to Policy-making in the second chapter of the paper “Attitudes towards politics”. The final chapters are call for action. They present my point of view to the problem around gender-based corruption in politics, and offer directions for the changes that need to be developed to make a difference to women's lives.

I. CHAPTER I : “WOMEN IN POLITICS IN CENTRAL ASIA”

The advent to Democracy in the former communist states of central Asia brings both much promise and as we learn much peril too. For millions the complexion of life has evolved from red to rose-colored to raw. The Central Asian region has endured wars and civil conflicts – in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Above all, the pain of transition has been far greater than anyone has anticipated with political, ethnic, religious and gender intolerance and dramatic increases in poverty.

In this new world the voices of the women are vital to healthy social and political discourse. The dramatically low status of women in post-communist Central Asia is an issue that goes beyond the well being of women per se to the fostering of political development and democracy.

Life under communism was a far cry from the auspicious pronouncement of fair treatment for all comrades. With the fall of communism, the trappings of gender parity fell away exposing discrimination against women that had persisted in the totalitarian state. The transition to capitalism has been difficult for all but especially for women.

While the particulars of women's status differ from country to country and even from region to region in Central Asia, patterns of marginalization exist: exceedingly low parliamentary representation of women. Women's opportunity for involvement in politics and policy-making has been directly affected by hardship of transitional period. During this period of transition ever-more-blatant gender-biased hiring and promotion practices are becoming deeply entrenched.

The power of the people in higher positions and those responsible for preparation of future qualified staff that would work in the institution of power, to dominate and demand bribes is pervasive in environments where no one is policing activity of the institutions involved to policy-making and politics itself.

No doubt, there are certain organizations that are designed to control process of elections. They are trying to make them as truthful as possible.

But one of the weakest sides of that control is uncontrolled stage when candidates that will take part in the new-coming elections are selected. In this mentioned stage women always tend to fail. For some reasons women would never meet the criteria of selections committee. Women in Central Asia are not recognized to be the real force that may play the significant role in political arena. As women who would try to venture to political sphere say: "*The only way to achieve something in political arena is to have a special protector and have good relations with powerful figures*".

CHAPTER II: "WOMEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD POLITICS"

Women's attitudes toward Institutions involved to policy-making, government and other state bodies in former soviet republics of Central Asia result from a complex combination of factors. Mainly there is widespread anger at what is perceived as horrendous mismanagement from the side of those in higher positions. People say that they "*bought*" their positions. It also explains why they are careless about peoples needs and why they are corrupt – they want to receive their money back – and in most cases they do...

People blame the government for their impoverishment, widespread unemployment and their powerlessness. People believe that government officials have exploited their social and political positions for wealth, influence and personal gain, at the same time ignoring idea of free access to the institutions of power. Throughout Central Asian region women complain about the humiliating treatment they receive when attempting to access government structures.

Many women become discouraged by bureaucracy, rude and unresponsive officials. As a respondent among asked women reports: "*You have to queue a lot from one room to another. The clerks are impolite [and] do not inform as they should*" (Kazakhstan, 1999)

Another woman was made to spend twice as long to gather all necessary documentation, when she submitted them the consideration of her candidature took much longer than for other male-candidates.

Here is another example of a woman who has managed to overcome all the obstacles that were created for her, but once she has done it – she was invited to visit the head of the local municipal government who has offered her a place in one of the political parties, where by his words she could continue her political activity; it was an offer for an exchange for taking her candidature from the elections.

During the period of transition and hardships faced by people, including those in the institutions of politics, they used to gain access to different places of power through connections and often paid for favors with gifts, or modest bribes. When it would start that was an expected way of doing things and it did not pose serious problems. Currently, however, the system of bribery has become more pervasive and extreme, posing hardships above and beyond what one can offer.

Reports of corruption towards women are often linked to descriptions of the psychological consequences: humiliation, intimidation and insults have a significant effect on the extent to which women participate in government elections. Negotiating a way through the corruption and rude treatment with some sort of underthinkings about women who wishes to participate in the activity of the state bodies involved in politics, leaves women feeling powerless, voiceless and excluded.

In many societies of Central Asia women have little access to the institutions of power or don't have such at all, and going there may be a dangerous act in itself: women may be ostracized by their society. Women say that they are afraid to venture to any sort of the public places because people can laugh at them and their families. Widespread lawlessness in some areas has led to disillusionment among young women. It's for sure they will never try to enter any of the institutions of power.

The situation of women's political opportunities in the rural areas is much worse as one can anticipate. In these regions strict traditional ideas about women's place in the society and public affairs are much stronger than those in urban areas. Local officials often have the skeptic opinion about women's involvement in governing. If knowing that in the judgements of those municipal government officials women are associated with the house-keeper or at the best case with receptionist, it's easy to see why their behavior towards women would be uncaring. Almost everywhere politicians are disdainful towards women trying to enter political sphere.

CHAPTER III: “SOCIAL ASPECT OF GENDER-BASED CORRUPTION IN POLITICS”

“Everybody is allowed to voice his opinion. In many cases I'm cut off while I'm voicing my opinion ”

(Uzbekistan woman, 1999)

“A norm is a shared expectation of behavior that recommends what is considered desirable and appropriate”
(Marshal, 1994)

In the overwhelming majority women are excluded experiencing pervasive violation. While the exact nature of exclusion is shaped by the culture of each society, there are certain similarities.

Women’s identity within the society is traditionally centered on their roles as mother and wife, women speak of their obligation to feed the family and care for the children, both materially and emotionally, regardless of the contribution of their husbands.

The primary expected role of family caretaker has made it harder for women to participate in public affairs. In many societies women are disconnected from the ownership of assets and contact with public institutions. In the discussion among women they say that *“wished to have been born a man”*.

In many cases the role of wife and mother is reported to be so inflexible that women who fall outside this category are ostracized by individuals and are discriminated against by state institutions. I can guess that corruption women face when trying to enter public sphere has the reason to try to drive away these women back to family and socially expected frames and try to pursue them to fit social norms.

CHAPTER IV : “LOCAL ELITE AND COMMUNITY POLITCS OR HOW WOMEN IN CENTRAL ASIA PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS DESPITE OF GENDER-BASED CORRUPTION”

“The leaders have the power, but they have no interest in the community. And what people want is that the leaders work for their communities, not only political games, the people don’t want promises”
(Kazakhstan, 1998)

While some women state that the low level of their participation in government affaires is the result pf their “voicelessness” that is underlined by gender-based corruption. Others don’t blame on the lack of political power. Many believe that local leadership is a large part of the solution. As people report they *“want political leaders to be accountable to their needs”*.

Local leadership may shape the way to influence the local politicians and other elite. Women leaders use that to utilize their natural strike to work for the good for their people. But ones and again, local leaders can not lobby any of the interests of people until the community elected leader doesn’t have strong connections to local and regional officials.

While people describe local elite as the way to get their interests at least known, some at the same time believe that the elite use government resources and political power to their own

needs. In part it is so – once being recognized as the good source of income the access of women to this positions is informally restricted.

While negative accounts of corrupt local officials and political elites towards women outnumber positive ones, there are examples within the reports of local women's leadership being viewed as an important parts of community politics. In fact, as a Tajikistan report notes, *“Many residents of communities emphasizing the importance of their elite, particularly those members residing and working in urban areas”*. Continues: *“Community leaders themselves point to their need to have links with “Godfathers” higher up in the system in order to successfully gain access to politics which will ensure access to benefits ”*

Many leaders say that if they are not active politically, they do not attract government actions which in turn means that community members cannot be enticed to participate in development of their communities.

The central conclusion drawn is that the inclusion of community leaders in government is a key to women's success in politics at the first stages of the reformations.

WOMEN'S NETWORKS

The different position that men and women occupy in politics has far-reaching implications for women's and men's access to formal institutions of power and even informal too. The most important political institutions in people's lives are often gender-segregated.

Women facing corruption simply cannot afford it, because they actually do not own property, are not documented as the person who can decide what to do with their assets, need to get permissions from husbands or other male relatives such as father or brother in order to go out or work, and have little contact with representatives of the state or with community leaders. This differential status of men and women is reflected in social norms and everyday interactions.

One important consequence of differential access and exclusion from the powerful political networks is that women invest heavily in informal social support mechanisms with other women.

Women's own informal networks also provide important support and political information. But despite of all the informal networks and other women's groups women are still absent from even community decision-making.

“Men have better place in the community”

“Central Asian society is a man's society”

Despite the rhetoric about “women in development”, women' participation in community decision-making remain highly constrained.

In one of the reports it's said: *“Women do not take part in committees because they have to pay more than men to enter them”*. There are at least two explanation offered: *“Men are better known in the communities and have better chances to be enter to the local institutions*

of power and become community representative” and “women’s duties within the families would not allow them participate or to be trained to political management duties even in the case that they are elected”.

In some communities women find it hard to participate in the local governance: *“Women are not allowed [informally] to make any representation in the meetings, where they can express their ideas. In case of disputes involving them, women do not get any support ”.* This increases women’s vulnerability to corruption.

Women’s participation in community activities has also declined with changes in livelihoods from indigenous systems of shifting cultivation in which women are key actors. *“But along with the changes of society when new social system came into place, the men took over the desicinmaking roles in organizations like the communist party, and in local authorities like the committee of the community ”.*

There is no institutional panacea of you want to do something worthwhile for your community and people of your country. Participation of women in politics is underlined by social norms of the society. At the same time informal participation of women in politics provide meaning and identity to the society. However, the power of these networks is limited.

There are important differences between men’s and women’s networks. Men are more embedded in formal relations, whereas women, lacking access to formal system, invest heavily in social relations with other women, both for social solidarity and for informal sharing of information and experience. These associations are stronger in rural areas, where they are more likely to be organized around political groups.

Women freely participate in politics informally but in this case they are responsive to the local needs only, but at the same time we must remember that as these women’s networks grow they may dominate in political arena of the region, and finally country. But the way is quite too long and some politicians say that they finally will lose the “taste”, i.e. interest to the politics when the day when they will be part of it will come.

It’s clear enough that there is no single institutional solution to the problems of women and gender-based corruption in Central Asia. Central Asian communities are gender-segregated at different extents. Women are likely to be further marginalized in their communities. Every human being deserves to be treated with respect. While the structural change requires organization and time, mindset and behavioral change are within the control of individuals. These issues will be studies more closely in the next chapters of the present paper.

One may guess that the power of civil organizations cannot be resisted. Here are the last changes in relations from the side of politics towards NGO and other civil organizations:

- **Working interactions:**
NGOs are active actors in politics. They are one of the most interested sides and are potential partners in the activity towards development.
- **Institutional interactions:**
NGOs are crucially important partners and interested groups when working out the policy and in realization of its programs and strategy.

Everyone and everywhere where women applying – NGO, local elite group, local officials, national and institutional bodies – all of us should be held accountable for our behavior towards women-politicians.

CHAPTER V: “ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE”

Women’s encounters with institutions of the power should provide opportunities to involvement to policy-making. Instead and despite the efforts of many committed individuals within governments, civil society and international organizations that work for the good to women – these institutional encounters often leave women disempowered, excluded and silenced. This “crises”, combined with so many efforts to rise political activity of women in Central Asia, created the opportunity for rethinking development strategy to reach women.

Women do not want charity but opportunity. While further research and evaluation are needed to find out which programs work best in which environment, women’s voices urge us to act now, to innovate, and to learn by doing. Changing the situation of women’s involvement to politics and fight gender-based corruption is inherently complex because it never caused by only one matter. It involves many interrelated elements and without shifts in power relations, women cannot access or shape projects aimed to assist anti-corruption initiatives.

Elements of the strategy has to involve at least following elements:

- Start with women’s realities: lawlessness and corruption
- Invest to the organizational capacity of women to fight gender-based corruption in politics
- Change social norms
- Change the mindset of the people
- Use power of personal combined with institutional in the struggle against gender-based corruption.

Start with women’s realities: lawlessness and corruption

Women feel powerless to change the behavior and actions of state officials, the police and the local elite and other institutions that pose corruption on them. Corruption and a decline in personal safety are real and widespread issues for women in politics in Central Asia. Since these issues cannot be dealt with in isolation, systematic interventions are needed to create local government council that are accountable to women, an accountable police force that protect women from corruption rather than harms them, justice political system.

Invest in the organizational capacity of women to fight gender-based corruption in politics in Central Asia.

Organizational capacity or social capital has rightly been called the key-helpers for women on the process of gender-based corruption in politics. Yet, being dependent on the government structures themselves, the networks of women begin to serve a survival and social function, rather than a transformational or political function to curb gender-based

corruption. There are relatively few women's organizations that have the bargaining power to negotiate with the state government, local elites and participate in local, national or global governance and decisions.

It is only when women can draw on the strength of their number and organize themselves that their voices can be heard, that they finally can overcome all the obstacles artificially created for them can participate effectively in politics.

Much remains to be done to support organizational of women-anti-corruption activists. Developing organizational capacity is a long-term process and very risky, as women who have faced gender-based corruption cannot talk freely about this fact, they are afraid about their future and future of their children.

Grassroots coalitions of women's anti-corruption organizations and intermediary organizations are needed to ensure that voices of women and their interests are reflected in decisionmaking.

Women need organization to demand transparency and accountability, a process that may also require protection from injustice. An independent press that investigates government and prints information about wrongdoing and facts of corruption can create pressure for accountability to ensure equality of men and women to participate in politics.

Change social norms

Women's interactions with state officials, local council members, local political elite, politicians – and other women's encounters within the household with husbands, mothers-in-law, other relatives, other women – are not governed primarily by the laws of the state, but by the social norms that dictate who has what value in each interaction.

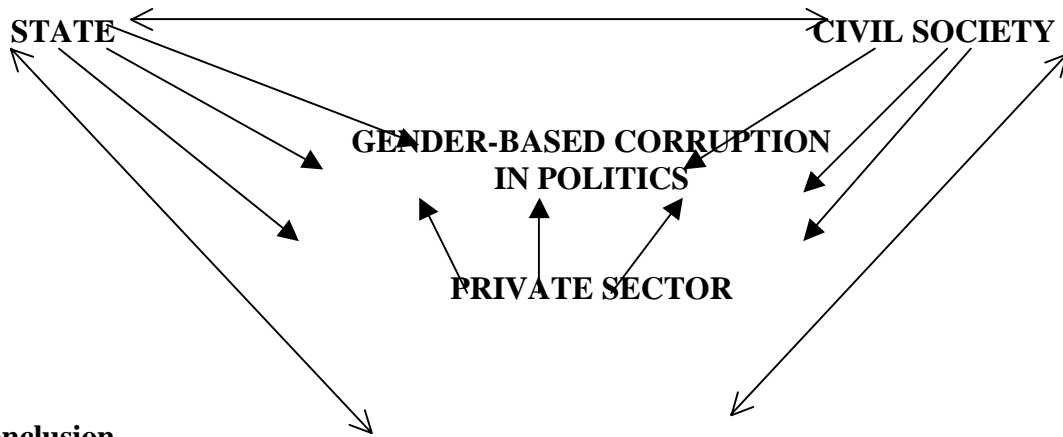
All Central Asian states have adopted anti-discriminatory conventions and have worked out plans for raising political status of women, but social practice will not change without supportive changes in social norms.

Changing the Mindset

I think, it's clear enough to everybody that policies are not implemented in a vacuum. They are formulated by bureaucrats, sometimes very corrupt ones, and planners and implemented by people with a particular mindset in a particular culture and with particular social norms, reinforced by metaphors, stories and proverbs. Simple, if officials and the political elite believe that there is no place for women in political arena, that women are politically illiterate, policies designed to raise women's participation in politics are unlikely to be formulated or implemented in ways that serve women. If it is assumed that women lack agency and cannot make wise spending decisions, politicians are unlikely to seek women's partners in their own play in politics. Changing the mindset is not simple, but it can be done

WHAT TO BEGIN WITH?

Who has to fight corruption?



Conclusion.

Listening to the voices of women as a beginning, but just a beginning. It may lead a way to change in rhetoric. Central Asia being one of the unique regions in the world with the huge gap between the highly educated women who actively participate in the Socio-political life of their countries at one end and illiterate women form another. It's unique feature is also in the fact that those women work for doing something good worthwhile for women with little access to the politics and institutions of the power. Will our work make things better for women in politics? The answer is that it depends. It depends on the vision and will of all the parts concerned. It depends on us! I hope this paper will encourage women to change the now-days' situation and raise their involvement in this process.