

## Introducing a gender perspective: a case study



Poverty alleviation programmes are more effective when they include a gender perspective and are specifically designed for women and other vulnerable groups. This case study examines the lack of the gender dimension in a public project at the local level as well as the efforts of civil society to achieve development without exclusion.

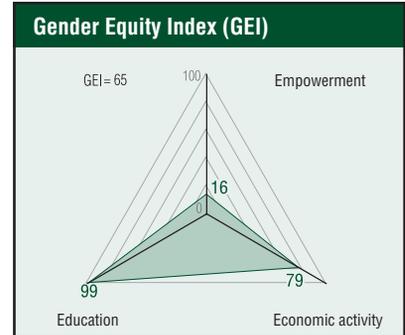
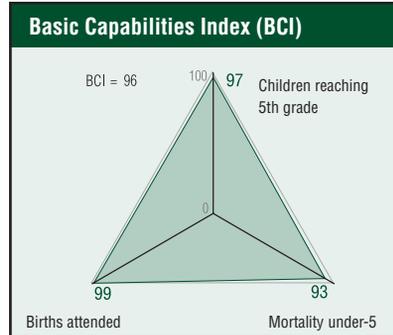
### Women's Federation 'Status'

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Considering the gender dimension is essential for achieving economic and social development with equity. The inclusion of special gender programmes within public budgets should be part of the gender planning of governmental actions. Kazakhstan is taking its first steps in this direction, and civil society has a decisive role to play in constructing a society of equal opportunities. The Women's Federation 'Status' is undertaking a project called the "Public Council for a Gender Budget", which is aimed at expanding knowledge on the principles of gender budgeting among civil servants, members of Parliament, and NGOs at the local level. The project is part of the organization's National Action Plan on the Improvement of the Status of Women (1999).

The project focuses on the implementation of the Government's poverty reduction programme in Ust-Kamenogorsk, an industrial city in the *oblast*<sup>1</sup> of East Kazakhstan<sup>2</sup>. The two tools for measuring the extent of gender budgeting are the gender sensitivity of the actors involved in the programme's implementation and the impact on its beneficiaries.

The evaluation of the implementation of this programme at the local level has shown that the civil servants involved in the budget process are not informed about gender budgeting. Therefore, it is no surprise that the programme in question is not gender-sensitive, despite the fact that gender considerations are mentioned in the introductory section of the programme document. Among the principles of poverty reduction outlined in this introduction, the seventh principle clearly refers to the need to consider region, gender, age and other aspects. Obviously, it is the most vulnerable groups of a population who have the greatest need for a fair distribution of resources and public goods, as well as access to public services.



In Ust-Kamenogorsk, the most vulnerable group is made up of women over the age of 40 with low scores on health indexes and with one or more minor dependent children. Despite having spent a considerable length of time in the work force (18 years and more), these women have been either employed temporarily, self-employed or unemployed for more than one year, and as a result, their income is variable and occasional. Most of these women speak Russian but not Kazakh, and the only social support they have are regressive pension savings. Many of them have approached public and private employment services and NGOs in search of advice and assistance. Roughly 70% of their requests are related to seeking assistance to find permanent employment, whereas the remaining 30% were directed at obtaining social benefits in healthcare, help for taking care of sick and disabled family members, protection from domestic violence, and information about emigrating to Russia, among other services.

### Specific needs

The goals and targets of the poverty reduction programme are aimed at the local population as a whole, but do not specifically address the needs of those whose income is below the poverty line, most of whom are women. At the time the programme started, the average per capita income of the poor population was KZT 1,871 (USD 12), which represented 12.5% of the per capita nominal income of the urban population. In 2003, according to official statistics, 8,000 people (2.6% of the population) were living below the poverty line. The main expected outcome of the programme

is to reduce the number of poor people by 3,000 between 2003 and 2005. However, the programme provides no disaggregated data by gender, age, or health status.

Another major obstacle is that the information available is not sufficiently specific. For example, it is not clear if all 5,604 people registered at the local employment centre could be considered poor. Half of the female population of Ust-Kamenogorsk suffers from anemia, but it is not known how many of these women are in fact poor. The latest statistical data show that over a third of Kazakhstani women have anemia, and the proportion is higher in Ust-Kamenogorsk, which is a major contributing factor to the high rates of infant and maternal mortality in the region. Infant mortality was estimated at 20.6 deaths per 1000 live births in 2004, while maternal mortality reached 64.8 deaths per 100,000 live births the same year. The implementation of a treatment programme, including iron deficiency anemia prophylactics, would help to decrease maternal and child morbidity and mortality in the region.

### Unspecific data

Unlike the stated principles of the poverty reduction programme, the selected indicators do not take into consideration gender, age and other factors frequently related to poverty. These indicators include the number of targeted social assistance recipients, the number of housing support recipients, the number of microcredit recipients, the number of people trained for a new profession, and the number of people provided with social service employment.

1 Administrative division or region.

2 Eastern-Kazakhstan Oblast Program on Poverty Reduction (2003-2005).

Within the programme, the basic actions aimed at the development of infrastructure include primary healthcare, food and water quality control, the strengthening of preschool facilities, roads, transport and others. Actions focused on poverty reduction are implemented through activities for income generation, as well as access to basic social services such as healthcare, education, and social support for the poor.

Although public expenditures on the social sector continued to grow between 2003 and 2005, actions for income generation have been under-financed. The possibilities of obtaining increased income are doubtful. Temporary social service employment could hardly be considered as a serious poverty reduction tool, due to its short duration and low effectiveness (only 10% of the unemployed find a permanent job).

The list of programme beneficiaries includes young people who are neither studying nor employed, children from low-income families, orphans, single elderly poor people, disabled people, and members of marginalized groups. None of these categories has been gender-disaggregated. Hence, the difference between girls and boys or young and elderly women and men has not been taken into consideration.

For instance, there is a clear need for specific preventive measures for young women, since many of them become involved in street prostitution and sexual exploitation (not necessarily in foreign countries, since the situation is widespread within Kazakhstan). This leads to the increase of sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancies, abortions and loss of reproductive health.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The existing poverty reduction programmes have a low effectiveness because they target the population as a whole and do not focus on the specific population group of those living below the national poverty line. At the same time, the gender specificity of the poor population has not been taken into account.

In each of the groups of potential beneficiaries, the needs targeted and actions implemented should be differentiated by gender. This would considerably increase the effectiveness of public expenditures on poverty reduction in both economic and social terms.

The civil servants involved in the budget process have to be informed about the principles of gender budgeting. For this, they need to receive special training. The Kazakhstani network of NGOs, in cooperation with international experts, is prepared to organize the necessary training.■

## BUDGET ISSUES

Thirteen years after gaining independence, Kazakhstan has transformed itself from an agriculture-based republic of the Soviet Union to one of the fastest-growing economies in the region. Recent years have also witnessed improvements in budget processes and in civil society participation in the budget. However, much room remains for further improvement.

In April 2004, Kazakhstan Revenue Watch of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan held an international roundtable conference at which civil society groups discussed the need to strengthen Parliament's role in the budget process. Problems cited by members of Parliament at the forum included their lack of budget knowledge to analyze the President's draft budget, their inability to hire external experts to help them do this job, and the limited time they have to review the draft budget, negotiate amendments with the Government, and approve the budget. However at the moment there is a green light for gender budget initiatives.

Kazakh legislation clearly states what budget information should be made public and provides penalties for violating the people's right to information. In 2005 a civil society organization, the Tax Standards Formation, compiled a list of these legal requirements in the report "Analysis of Expenditures on Healthcare, Education and Social Protection in the Budget of Almaty City".<sup>1</sup> However, this legislation often does not work in practice. Public officials sometimes hide cases of misappropriation and embezzlement or resist cooperating with civil society.

Also, only a limited number of Kazakh NGOs are involved in the budget process given the lack of knowledge about the budget, inexperience in dealing with the appropriate officials and difficulties in obtaining professional legal assistance when authorities refuse to provide the required information.■

Gender Budget initiatives in CEE/CIS Region  
Network of East-West Women

1 Available from: <[www.taxpayers-kz.freenet.kz](http://www.taxpayers-kz.freenet.kz)>.