

Items/Session 8

Building decision- making and policies for gender equality should start by respecting the right to participation and decision making- a special focus on vulnerable women. The case of Albania

Speech by: Bardhylka Kospiri- Deputy Minister of Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in Albania

Dear colleagues and participants,

I am here today as the Deputy Minister of Albania, a women with disabilities in a high level of political representation. This happened for the first in Albania only after '90s, only after almost 25 years of transition of Albania from a communist country to a democratic country.

This shows that the government of Albania has been open for unusual business to tackle both gender equality and issues of people with disabilities, by promoting and direct representation at the highest level of policy and decision-making. This shows a real example on how a government can and should show real commitment to gender equality and to empowerment of women with disabilities to participate, influence and ensure that policies on gender equality are inclusive and tackling the most vulnerable women.

My personal engagement and participation to decision- making levels mean that:

- As a women with disabilities I can influence development of policies addressing the most vulnerable women, the silent women who are voiceless and suffering in my country;
- As a mother with disabilities I can influence policies which could improve the situation and lives of all mothers and parents raising children with disabilities who are very often not heard and not seen;
- As an engineer with disabilities I can influence in developing policies which influence the building of accessible services and accessible environment;

- As a former activist of civil society, I can create space and an enabling environment where civil society voice is heard and good practices developed are considered in the development of policies in my country for both women and man and in particular for the most vulnerable women.

The Government of Albania has made gender equality a top priority, in the belief that the country cannot make significant progress if gender equality is not integral to all national and local development strategies.

Equality between men and women is fundamental for a just and democratic society, a society that is built on the premises of the law.

A number of developments in Albania over years in the legislative area and development of three important laws:

- The law on “Gender equality in the society”,
- The law on “Measures to address domestic violence” and
- The law on the “Protection from Discrimination”

are important as they set the basis for the protection of human rights, in line with the international conventions and EU standards where Albania aspires to be part soon. These laws are established through a very proactive civil society, through lobbying of activist women and direct engagement of women into those discussions.

However, we do recognize that it is not enough to have laws in place, we need to ensure that those laws are implemented and are influencing positively the lives of women.

One of the most important objectives of the government is “***to increase participation of girls and women in decision-making***”. Creating equal opportunities for participation means respect for human rights and is an expression of high levels of democracy.

Today we are proud to say that there is a meaningful qualitative and quantitative increase of women representation in public and political processes.

World Economic Forum recently published the Gender Gap Index and we were happy to see that Albania moved up with 25 places. The report praised especially the representation of women in decision-making and politics as well as increased access to employment and vocational education.

Albania has established gender quotas in the Electoral code – therefore affirming that at least 30% of all elected officials should be women. Only 7% of the Parliamentarians were women in 10 years ago, while today women make 21% of the Parliament.

Women ministers make one third of the government today as we speak.

But these achievements have not been easy for women; it took a lot of efforts for them to break gender stereotypes; the mentality that women are not “born to make politics”.

Such achievements are attributed to capacities, talents and hard work of many women in Albania; at the same time to the good partnership with man leaders. This is important to keep in mind- man are our partners and we need to take this fight together.

A special role in the participation of women and decision making is being played by the Parliamentaries Women. In 2013 they initiated the creation of Women Alliance in the parliament of Albania, an alliance that has lobbied for some important laws and policy actions in regard to advancement of gender equality agenda.

There is still a long way to go– women should be able to participate in decision making and policy development process at local level. We still need to do a lot more to make sure that women in rural areas and local communities are engaged.

Recently, we have undertaken a number of policy changes to be able to support in particular women in difficult situation.

- The welfare assistance is provided to women instead of the man, who is the head of the household. Such decision is based on the evidence that women use better the economic assistance to help the family and children cope with the poverty. A bonus to every child attending school and having vaccine is introduced as well, with the main purpose that children are targeted in a specific manner.
- Another important policy is related to encouraging women and girls in rural areas and from vulnerable groups to vocational education. The government of Albania decided to provide free of charge vocational education for all girls and women from 18-25 years old.
- Such policy is hoped to affect the access to employment for women in more skilled jobs required by the market.
- 50 % of the Albanian women still do not access at all the labor market. Another issue with female employment relates to the unpaid work; females are involved in unpaid work activities significantly more than males, specially 91 % versus 40 %.

Women and girls with disabilities and from vulnerable and excluded groups

Dear colleagues

I want to stop for a while and stress out the focus on the most vulnerable women: women with disabilities, Roma women etc.

The right to participation in decision making and policy making of women and girls facing any type of disability or coming from excluded communities should be seen as a Human Right which requires an intentional approach.

Structural barriers, mentality, lack of information are very often unjustified reasons to let those women out from any process of decision making. Our practice in Albania is developing in such direction.

We recently passed in the Parliament the law on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The process of establishing the law went through a lot of

consultations with women representing women with disabilities as well as with civil society.

The right to participate is a fundamental value in a democratic society and is becoming an integral principle of the political development processes of Albania.

As a ministry we've used, innovative ways and approaches to make sure that girls and women do comment and have a say in different processes such as : the development of the Beijing and CEDAW reports, the national strategies for social protection and social inclusion.

But consultation alone is not enough – participation should happen every month, every week, every day.

Participation should become an institutional culture. Women and girls should have a safe place to speak at both central and local level and the government layers should make sure that they truly hear all concerns and ideas.

As a deputy minister, I believe that I can influence that development of inclusive policies and advancement of gender equality in Albania ensure that diversity is seen as a value and is appreciated and respected in spite of ethnicity, physical or mental conditions, religious, age, and sexual orientation, as equally as any deputy minister with the full capacity and with all my heart.

I thank you for your attention.

Thank you