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SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Second Meeting of the SPECA Project Working Group on Gender and Economy

9-10 July 2007
Geneva, Switzerland

REPORT

1. The Project Working Group on Gender and Economy (PWG) of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was established by the SPECA Governing Council (Baku, June 2006) with the objectives to raise awareness of policymakers that gender equality is an economic asset, exchange good practices in the gender and economy area, and develop pilot projects for which the SPECA PWG provides guidance on country priorities.
2. The main objectives of the second meeting were (i) to discuss the preliminary results of the stocktaking study in gender and economy area from country perspective; (ii) to identify the areas for pilot projects including further research and work on indicators; (iii) to agree on the macroeconomic and statistical framework for research and indicators; (iv) to discuss communication channels among all stakeholders involved in promoting gender aspects of National Development Strategies (NDSs) in the context of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)¹.
3. The meeting of SPECA PWG on Gender and Economy was opened by the UNECE Executive Secretary. Welcome address was delivered by the co-chair SPECA WG Group on Gender and Economy/Adviser to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Both speakers underlined the role of SPECA as a platform for regional cooperation.
4. The meeting was attended by more than 30 participants from several SPECA member countries: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Representatives of donor countries, Norway, Finland and Israel, and representatives of UNECE, UNESCAP, UNDP, UNIFEM, UNICEF, ILO, ITC and World Bank as well as a number of international experts also participated in the meeting.
5. The participants agreed that mainstreaming gender into regional economic cooperation is a challenge, which requires a multi-stakeholder approach and closer inter-agency cooperation. The meeting itself was a step forward in this direction, providing a platform for discussion among

¹ The project is implemented in cooperation with UNESCAP and SPECA Project Working Group on Gender and Economy, under the umbrella of the Inter-regional Development Account project on social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals.

representatives of national gender machineries, economic line ministries, and researchers as well as international organizations active in the region.

6. The meeting discussed the links between gender equality and NDSs from national perspective. The participants agreed that despite considerable progress made in mainstreaming gender into NDSs, many areas, especially economic ones, remain gender insensitive largely due to insufficient awareness of policy makers that gender equality is an economic assets and due to the lack of sex-disaggregated statistics and indicators.
7. The meeting reviewed the stocktaking study prepared by UNECE Secretariat. The study was positively received and the discussion centred around the study revealed the need for policy-oriented research and improving gender-disaggregated statistics in the areas of employment and self-employment, informal sector and migration, reforms of the welfare system and pensions, and access of men and women to economic assets and opportunities. In particular, it was emphasized that government plans should have clearer gender indicators and gender analysis should be included into budgetary policies at national (NDSs) and local levels (regional and sectoral strategies).
8. In this context, the participants emphasized that the issues are equally relevant for all SPECA member countries and called for pilot projects in the areas listed above as part of the implementation of the UNECE Project “Mainstreaming Gender to Reach Millennium Development Goals”, which aims at providing a roadmap on how gender can be incorporated into the economic parts of the NDS and how targets and indicators can be set to measure progress in achieving equality of economic opportunities.
9. The meeting also noted that SPECA member countries have already a number of good practices, which can be extended on the regional level using SPECA as a platform for integration and exchange of ideas. To ensure that gender is an integral component of development, the meeting emphasized the importance of working in collaboration with other SPECA Project Working Groups in such areas as statistics, trade, ICT, water and energy, and transport. The meeting called for strengthening the support for SPECA PWG on Gender and Economy.
10. The meeting also acknowledged the experience of international organisations working in SPECA region and possibilities of building synergies between UNECE project “Mainstreaming gender into economic policies to reach MDGs” and international projects.
11. In this context, the meeting emphasized the importance of creation of a regional knowledge hub focusing on economic aspects of gender as an interactive platform for exchanging of good practices among SPECA member countries, a stronger cooperation with international organizations and financial institutions working in the SPECA region, as well as promoting awareness that gender equality is a necessary component for sustainable economic development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12. All participants agreed that SPECA Project Working Group on Gender and Economy (PWG) provides an excellent platform for addressing gender and economy issues, as SPECA member countries face similar problems in ensuring equal economic opportunities for men and women.
13. The meeting emphasized (i) the need for a stronger link between gender equality and National Development Strategies (NDSs), especially their economic parts and budgetary commitments; and

- (ii) the role of gender statistics as a prerequisite of mainstreaming gender into economic policies.
14. In this context, the meeting agreed that Multi-Stakeholder Network consisting of policy makers, statisticians and researchers is a good modality for the work of PWG and projects implementation.
 15. The participants reviewed stocktaking desk study and provided inputs and commentaries for its finalisation.
 16. The members of the Multi-Stakeholder Network came to conclusion that despite considerable progress made by SPECA member countries, more work is needed in the following areas: (i) labour market, including self-employment and entrepreneurship, (ii) access to economic resources, including land ownership issues, (iii) the impact of welfare system reforms, with particular focus on pensions, and (iv) crosscutting issues of poverty alleviation and rural/urban disparities.
 17. In this context, the meeting agreed that (i) main directions for the implementation of the Development Account Project “Mainstreaming gender into economic policies to reach MDGs” (DA Project) will include pilot projects in the areas listed above, and combining policy oriented research and work on statistical indicators; (ii) proposed macroeconomic and statistical frameworks are well chosen for policy oriented research in the area of gender and economy.
 18. Participants agreed that many international organisations and financial institutions active in SPECA region (UNDP, UNIFEM, and ADB) accumulated experience in the area of gender and economy, and therefore DA Project implementation will aim at adding value to the less covered areas and will build on the existing activities and expertise of the partner organisations.
 19. The meeting emphasised that expertise in several areas available at national level can be extended to the SPECA region; therefore a creation of a knowledge hub in gender and economy area is necessary to share good practices and project results.
 20. Participants emphasized that the work of the PWG on Gender and Economy is multidimensional and should be closer linked to the work of other SPECA Project Working Groups and SPECA process, especially in the context of the SPECA Governing Council meeting and the Conference “Central Asia and Europe: a New Economic Partnership for the 21st Century” (Berlin, 13-14 November 2007).

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