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ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE

**MEETING OF THE
SPECA WORKING GROUP ON GENDER AND ECONOMY**

**Tuesday, 20 September 2011, 10am-2pm
Palais des Nations, Salle S4, Geneva**

REPORT

1. The Working Group on Gender and Economy (WG) of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was established by the SPECA Governing Council in 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 WG provides guidance on country priorities. It is jointly supported by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).
2. The Working Group on Gender and Economy met on 20 September 2011 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The meeting was held in conjunction with a policy seminar on Women's Entrepreneurship Development in Central Asia on 19 September 2011 which was organised with the support and active participation of the Working Group.
3. The purpose of the meeting was to review activities over the period 2010-2011, share examples of gender-sensitive economic policies in Central Asia, identify priorities, including project proposals for new activities and agree on a workplan for the period 2012-2013.
4. Participants included representatives from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and experts and representatives from Israel, academia, UNESCAP, and UNECE (see Annex I for the full list of participants).
5. The meeting was opened by Ms. Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point of UNECE and Ms. Anna Coates Officer-in-Charge, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section, Social Development Division, UNESCAP. It was chaired by Ms. Madina Jarbussynova, Ambassador-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan.

6. The Progress Report for 2010-2011 was presented by Ms. Malinka Koparanova, UNECE, covering the following main areas of activity: (i) capacity-building activities to support women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region; (ii) assessments of the business environment for women entrepreneurs; and (iii) fundraising for new project activities (for the full report, see Annex II).
7. Ms. Mazal Renford, Director of the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center (MCTC) in Israel reported on the joint biannual UNECE-MCTC workshops on support systems for women in small business at national and local levels and information communication technologies. Ms. Renford enumerated the successes of the eleven joint UNECE-MCTC workshops held to date in promoting poverty eradication and increased family income by means of training, educating, and the skills enhancement of women in the establishment and running of micro, small, and medium enterprises.
8. Following the presentation of activities in 2010 and 2011, participants took the floor to share recent developments in gender-sensitive economic policy development in the region complementing policy discussions initiated during the Policy Seminar on Women's Entrepreneurship Development on 19 September 2011. The key recommendations that emerged from the discussion were as follows:
 - a. There is a need for the development of a consistent set of indicators regarding women's entrepreneurship that can be monitored across all economies in the region. In order to properly assess the business environment for women entrepreneurs and more effectively advocate for economic policy change that supports women entrepreneurship, there must be consistent indicators based on reliable data to support these activities.
 - b. The simple provision of financial resources to women entrepreneurs is not enough to promote entrepreneurship. Programmes designed to support women entrepreneurs should include the provision of capacity-building opportunities such as financial and business literacy trainings.
 - c. Networks of Women's Business Associations must be built up and operationalized within each country as well as linked across borders in order to increase the Associations' opportunities for information-sharing and trade.
 - d. Gender-sensitive policymaking trainings for civil servants should be prioritized in order to enhance the way state structures first recognize and then integrate gender issues and into the policy measures that are adopted by the region's governments.
9. UNECE presented two project proposals for discussion with the members of the working group. Both projects aim to strengthen institutional support for a supportive business environment for women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region were presented and discussed by participants.

10. The first project proposes to develop a capacity-building and networking programme for women's business associations. It would provide training sessions to women's business associations in the SPECA region, with the goal of enhancing the capacity of the associations to advocate for the needs of women entrepreneurs at the policymaking level and also to enable the associations to provide effective business training and support services to women entrepreneurs in their respective countries. The networking programme would serve as a platform for women's business associations in the region to connect, build their relationships, exchange experience and information, and to develop new cross-country collaborations.
11. The second project proposes to develop tailored trainings to enhance the capacity of government officials to mainstream gender in economic policies in SPECA member countries. While gender trainings for civil servants, in general, have become more wide-spread across the region, they are often only offered on a voluntary basis. This project proposes to integrate gender analysis of various policies into existing training curricula for policy makers on a permanent basis. It would thus strengthen the capacity of governments in Central Asia and South Caucasus to train policy makers to formulate and implement gender-sensitive economic policies via their increased knowledge of the gender-based differences in economic opportunities and challenges as well as an increased ability to conduct gender impact assessments and gender-responsive budgeting in their policy planning and implementation.
12. Both proposals were welcomed by participants as important and highly relevant to the groups' objectives of promoting gender-sensitive economic policies in the region. MCTC indicated interest in partnering in the development of training programmes.
13. Participants highlighted the importance of extensive needs assessments of both the needs of women's business associations and women entrepreneurs in general and to address these in project design and implementation. It was further suggested to widely disseminate information about the projects, once implemented, and to use project reports to raise awareness among both policy makers and women about the benefits of gender-sensitive policies and how to take advantage of them. Finally, participants underlined the need for gender-disaggregated statistics and it was proposed to engage in a process of developing sets of indicators around women's entrepreneurship, and actively encourage governments to include questions about women's entrepreneurship development in their nationally representative surveys.
14. The proposed Work Plan for 2012-2013 included continuation of the promotion of gender mainstreaming into economic policies, further support through capacity building, and a region-wide forum for women entrepreneurs to be organized in 2012 (Third Forum for Women Entrepreneurs in the UNECE region).
15. Building on the successful cooperation with the Centre for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre since 2006, training workshops in

- support of women's entrepreneurship in Central Asia are expected to be continued in 2012 and 2013.
16. A key activity for the Working Group in 2012 and 2013 is securing funds for the two project proposals discussed and approved during the meeting on 20 September 2011 (as outlined above).
 17. The Co-Chairs invited country representatives to provide comments and feedback on the workplan for 2012-2013 and all country delegates considered the proposed Work Plan to be highly relevant to the needs of their countries and supported the activities listed in the Work Plan for 2012-2013. In the interest of further cooperation, the Co-Chairs outlined the need to continue the active exchange of information and lessons learned from other countries in the area, as well as the need for further investigation into potential donor organizations and/or NGOs to collaborate with for the implementation of the sub-regional workshops for women's business associations.
 18. The proposal to develop standardized indicators for women's entrepreneurship development that will be monitored in the region was revisited and supported by all of the country delegates present.
 19. Closing the meeting, the Co-Chairs expressed satisfaction with the achievements of the Project Working Group on Gender and Economy during the reviewed period and encouraged the members of the Project Working Group to continue to cooperate in implementing forthcoming project activities, as well as to continue to act generally with state machineries on the position of women to achieve gender equality. Ms. Jarbussynova, Chair of the Working Group on gender and Economy meeting and other participants present at the meeting expressed their appreciation to the UNECE secretariat for their efforts in organizing the meeting as well as the activities of the Working Group for 2010-2011.
 20. Ms. Malinka Koparanova expressed her sincere appreciation to all the representatives for their active participation and cooperation which made this event successful.
 21. The Work Plan for 2012-2013 was agreed upon.

ANNEX I - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- Afghanistan Prof. Sayeda Mojgan Mostafavi
Technical and Policy Deputy Minister
Ministry of Women's Affairs, Afghanistan
- Azerbaijan Ms. Sadagat Gahramanova
Deputy Chairperson
State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs, Azerbaijan
- Kazakhstan H.E. Ms. Madina Jarbussynova
Ambassador at Large
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan
- Ms. Zhamilya Nurmagambetova
Chief expert at Department of Entrepreneurship Development
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- Ms. Rimma Zhunussova
Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan Ms. Aina Mambetova
Expert of the Section of Gender Issues
Ministry of Labour and Employment, Kyrgyzstan
- Tajikistan Ms. Gulbukhor Gulyamova
Chief Specialist
Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Tajikistan
- Experts: Ms. Mazal Renford
Director, Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center (MCTC)
MASHAV-Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation, Israel
- Ms. Tatiana Bozrikova
Chairperson, Public Organization 'Panorama' in Tajikistan and research coordinator of the Assessment of the Business Environment for Women Entrepreneurs in Tajikistan
- Ms. Gulbanu Aubekerova
Chairperson, West Kazakhstan branch of the Independent Association of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and research coordinator of the Assessment of the Business Environment for Women Entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan

UN Secretariat

UNESCAP Ms. Anna Coates
Officer-in-Charge, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section, Social
Development Division

UNECE Ms. Malinka Koparanova
Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point

Mr. Jamil Kasimov
Gender and Economy Programme

Ms. Sarah Ann Thomas
Gender and Economy Programme

Ms. Lisa Warth
Associate Expert
Gender and Economy Programme

ANNEX II - ACTIVITIES REPORT 2010-2011 AND WORKPLAN 2012-2013

SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy

Gender equality objectives continue to be of great importance in the economies of Central Asia. Engendering economic policies is crucial to advance women's economic independence and empowerment and to achieve gender equality. It also makes economic sense from the perspective of innovation, employment and sustainable growth.

The SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy is committed to support its member countries in developing gender-sensitive policy responses to economic challenges. It aims to enhance women's economic opportunities and to promote gender equality in Central Asia, contributing to implementing the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and to reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In line with its Terms of Reference, the Working Group on Gender and Economy: (i) raises awareness that gender equality is a smart choice for economic policy through policy oriented research, exchanges of good practices and preparation of policy guidelines and recommendations; (ii) develops pilot projects in selected areas, in particular gender-sensitive policies for the development of SMEs and gender-sensitive budgets; and (iii) promotes cross-sectional linkages and synergies with other relevant areas of SPECA activities, such as statistics, trade, and information and communication technologies.

The Working Group on Gender and Economy met on 20 September 2011 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. In addition to reviewing activities over the period 2010-2011, the group shared examples of gender-sensitive economic policies in Central Asia, identified priorities, discussed project proposals for new activities and agreed on a workplan for 2012-2013.

Activities carried out in 2010-2011

Capacity-building activities to support women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region

As in previous years, and in line with the workplan for 2010-2011, the Centre for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre, in cooperation with UNECE, have continued to run biannual international training workshops on "Support systems for women in small business at national and local levels" (13-29 April 2010 and 7-24 March 2011) and on "Women entrepreneurs and information communication technologies" (2-19 August 2010 and 7-20 December 2011).

The capacity-building workshops, held in Russian, are targeted at women entrepreneurs from Central Asia. They provide support, guidance and managerial tools on the use of new technologies in the management of small businesses. They further address government institutions in charge of small and medium-sized enterprise development at national and local levels, women's business associations and other civil society organizations to build their capacity to strengthen the support environment for women entrepreneurs. To date, 252 professional women have participated in these trainings. Over the years, the training scheme has not only

played an important role in strengthening the support for women entrepreneurship but has also facilitated networking among women entrepreneurs across Central Asia.

In March 2011 the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre and UNECE organized a high-level policy seminar on “Promoting Innovative Entrepreneurship”, which related to government policies aimed at fostering innovative enterprises. A part of the discussion was dedicated to the design and implementation of gender-sensitive policies in order to enhance the participation of women in the innovation process.

Assessments of the business environment for women entrepreneurs

With the financial support of the Governments of Finland and Sweden two assessments of the business environment for women entrepreneurs were conducted in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in 2010-11. These assessments generate new knowledge and improve our understanding of the gender differences in the perception of the business environment and of gender-specific factors and constraints to entrepreneurship development. They analyze the achievements and perspectives of women’s entrepreneurship development in pilot countries in Central Asia with the purpose of developing policy recommendations for the improvement and further development of entrepreneurial opportunities for women in the region.

A national workshop was organized in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in May 2011 to consult key stakeholder groups on women’s entrepreneurship development and to share preliminary research findings of the study on the business environment for women entrepreneurs in Tajikistan.

A policy seminar on women’s entrepreneurship development in Central Asia was organized on 19 September 2011 in Geneva to disseminate the findings of the research, identify gender gaps in entrepreneurship and discuss the policy measures needed to increase women’s economic opportunities in the region. The seminar brought together 45 policy makers and representatives from women’s business associations, finance institutions and international and regional institutions active in Central Asia. The documentation for the policy seminar is available on the UNECE website (www.unece.org/gender/policyseminar). The seminar was organized in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme Regional Office for Europe and CIS in Bratislava with the active participation of the members of the Working Group on Gender and Economy.

Fundraising for new project activities

A key challenge for the working group is securing funds for joint project activities. The Secretariat developed two project proposals in 2010 and 2011. These projects were discussed and approved by the group at the Working Group Meeting on 20 September 2011 and are presented in more detail below.

Planned activities for 2012-2013

Capacity-Building

Building on the successful cooperation with the Centre for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre since 2006, training workshops in support of women's entrepreneurship in Central Asia are planned for 2012 and 2013.

Forum for Women Entrepreneurs

UNECE plans to hold the Third Forum for women entrepreneurs in the UNECE region in 2012. Women entrepreneurs from SPECA member countries will be invited to actively participate.

Fundraising for new project activities

Funds are currently sought for two projects proposals outlined below which could be implemented in close collaboration with the Working Group in 2012-2013:

1) Strengthening institutional support for women entrepreneurs through business associations in SPECA countries

The proposed project would contribute to strengthening an enabling business environment for women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region through a capacity-building and networking programme. It would cover four sub-regional training workshops for women business associations in the SPECA region. These workshops would strengthen the capacity of women's business associations to: (1) advocate the needs of business women to policy makers, and (2) provide business training and support services to women entrepreneurs in their respective countries.

2) Enhancing the capacity of governments in Central Asia and the South Caucasus to mainstream gender in economic policies

The project would develop and provide tailored gender trainings for economic policy makers. While gender trainings have become more wide-spread across the region, they are often only offered on an ad hoc basis. In order to achieve gender-sensitive economic policies, it is important to integrate gender trainings into existing training curricula for policy makers on a permanent basis. This project would address this challenge in three steps: first, by developing a training module which is tailored to the practical needs of economic policy makers; second, by delivering trainings to government trainers to use the module, who would then, in a third step, train economic policy makers to formulate and implement gender-sensitive policies.

Gender and Economy	Time Frame
Training workshops on support systems for women in small business in Haifa, Israel to strengthen the business environment for women's entrepreneurship in Central Asia	2012 + 2013
Two training workshops on the use of information and communication technologies targeted at women entrepreneurs in Central Asia	2012 + 2013
Fundraising for new project activities	2012
Third Forum for Women Entrepreneurs in UNECE region	2012