

GENDER EQUALITY: WHY IT MATTERS, AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: *To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Attention to gender policy is increasing in Uzbekistan*

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For the last five years, our country has been paying great attention to the issue of gender equality. Gender equality is one of the important issues that the United Nations is paying special attention to and the need for support is recognized.

The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has been focusing on women's and family problems since the first days of his work as the head of state. As a result, in the past period, a number of regulatory legal documents were adopted to ensure gender equality and improve the social living conditions of women. In turn, the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" adopted on September 2, 2019 is a legal guarantee of women's place in society. This Law was developed in accordance with the decision of the head of our state on March 7, 2019 "On measures to further strengthen guarantees of women's labor rights and support entrepreneurship."


As stated in Article 1 of the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men", the purpose of this Law is to regulate relations in the field of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

The law also defines the concept of gender. Gender is a social aspect of the relationship between women and men that is manifested in all spheres of society's life and activities, including politics, economy, law, ideology and culture, education and science.

Therefore, the concept of gender does not represent only the interests of women. Perhaps, the boldness of both sexes to pursue their dreams and goals, gives them the same opportunity to improve the quality of life. Therefore, one of the important requirements of any developed democratic society is the provision of equal rights of women and men.

Indeed, today in our country, provision of all conditions for women to fully realize their potential has risen to the level of state policy. In Uzbekistan, a number of laws, decrees and decisions of the President on ensuring women's rights, in





particular, on gender equality and protection of women from violence and oppression, on strengthening the status of women's entrepreneurship development, have been adopted.

Adequate institutional measures for gender equality are also being taken. Currently, the Committee on Women and Girls and Gender Equality Issues has been established within the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This new structure is working to harmonize international standards in national legislation to ensure women's rights and eliminate all forms of discrimination.

To sum up, the issue of strengthening the position of women in society in order to achieve gender equality in our country is a constant focus of the state and society. After all, this important factor is the main foundation for strengthening the family, raising the young generation with a high intellectual level, and ensuring the stability of the society.

What happens if gender equality is not ensured? Inequalities faced by girls can begin right at birth and follow them all their lives. In some countries, girls are deprived of access to health care or proper nutrition, leading to a higher mortality rate. As girls move into adolescence, gender disparities widen. Child marriage affects girls far more than boys. Globally, nearly 15 million girls under age 18 are married every year— or 37,000 each day. Marrying young also affects girls' education. About one third of developing countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to entering both primary and secondary school.

How does gender inequality affect women? Disadvantages in education translate into lack of access to skills and limited opportunities in the labor market. Women's and girls' empowerment are essential to expand economic growth and promote social development. The full participation of women in labor forces would add percentage points to most national growth rates— double digits in many cases.

Are there any other gender related challenges? Yes. Worldwide, 35 per cent of women between 15-49 years of age have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. 1 in 3 girls aged 15-19 have experienced some form of female genital mutilation/cutting in the 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East, where the harmful practice is most common with a high risk of prolonged bleeding, infection (including HIV), childbirth complications, infertility and death. The Spotlight Initiative, an EU/UN partnership, is a global, multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).






But, why should gender equality matter to me? Regardless of where you live in, gender equality is a fundamental human right. Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of girls and boys. Investing in education programs for girls and increasing the age at which they marry can return \$5 for every dollar spent. Investing in programs improving income-generating activities for women can return \$7 dollars for every dollar spent.

What can we do to fix these issues? If you are a girl, you can stay in school, help empower your female classmates to do the same and fight for your right to access sexual and reproductive health services. If you are a woman, you can address unconscious biases and implicit associations that form an unintended and often an invisible barrier to equal opportunity. If you are a man or a boy, you can work alongside women and girls to achieve gender equality and embrace healthy, respectful relationships. You can fund education campaigns to curb cultural practices like female genital mutilation and change harmful laws that limit the rights of women and girls and prevent them from achieving their full potential.

Positive gender socialization for girls and boys: Discriminatory gender norms are arguably the most challenging of all barriers to gender equality. These entrenched modes of behavior and thinking govern every aspect of how a child is socialized, from birth through adolescence – how they dress, what they eat, the subjects they study. And they can fuel lifelong inequalities between girls and boys, and persistent inequities in society as a whole. Confronting such harmful stereotypes can be a force for transformative change for women and girls. UNICEF has therefore identified positive gender socialization as a flagship area of work and a key route to meeting SDG 5 and United Nations ‘common chapter’ results on gender equality. Programming in this area is taking place in 120 UNICEF country offices, in all regions. Key strategies used to engage communities include Communication for Development (C4D, also referred to as social and behavior change communication, SBCC) and engaging men and boys as gender allies to challenge biased thinking and behavior.

Conclusion Gender relations, like all social relations, are multi-stranded: they embody ideas, values, and identities; they allocate labor between different tasks, activities, and domains; they determine the distribution of resources; and they assign authority, agency, and decision-making power. This means that gender inequalities are multi-dimensional and cannot be reduced to some single and universally agreed set of priorities. Any attempt to do so will run the danger of being





either too narrow (as the MDGs have been accused of being) or a wish list that is too long and complex to act on.

However, gender relationships are not internally cohesive. They contain contradictions and imbalances, particularly when there have been changes in the wider socio-economic environment. Consequently, a shift in one aspect of social relations can initiate a series of changes in other aspects, with unpredictable consequences. To that extent, it could be argued that each of the three indicators embodied in MDG 3 has the potential to make a difference. Each can bring about immediate changes with longer-term consequences. Indeed, the same could be said of any set of policies that seeks to improve women's access to resources. Some may be more strategic than others, but all have transformatory potential as long as the change in question is a genuine expansion of women's choices, rather than a token gesture of paternalist benevolence.

However, this article has also argued that unless provision is made to ensure that policy changes are implemented in ways that allow women themselves to participate, to monitor, and to hold policy makers, corporations, and other relevant actors accountable for their actions, this potential is unlikely to be realized. Women's access to education may improve their chances of a good marriage or their capacity to sign their names on a document, but unless it also provides them with the analytical capacity and courage to question unjust practices, its potential for change will be limited.


Women's access to paid work may give them a greater sense of self-reliance and greater purchasing power, but if it is undertaken in conditions that erode their health and exploit their labor, its costs may outweigh its benefits. Women's presence in the governance structures of society clearly carries the potential to change unjust practices, but if the women in question are drawn from a narrow elite, if they have been invited rather than elected, and if they have no grassroots constituency to represent and answer to, their presence will be only a token one.

The question, therefore, is to what extent the international community is prepared to provide support to women at the grassroots - support which will ensure that they have the collective capabilities necessary to play this role.

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