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**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION IN CENTRAL ASIA**

**Sub-regional consultation**

**22-23 October 2014 Almaty, Kazakhstan**

***OUTCOME DOCUMENT***

1. Twenty years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, the governments of the Central Asian countries, multilateral and donor institutions, and civil society organizations remain committed to advancing and empowering women, following the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). Many positive developments across Central Asia have been made in each of the twelve critical areas of concern in the BPfA, and there are examples of progress from each country. At the same time, common challenges to achieving gender equality remain, and in some cases new patterns of discrimination are emerging.
2. We, the participants of this sub-regional consultation, reaffirm the importance of the BPfA as a blueprint for further reform, for policy development and for project implementation, especially in the context of setting gender equality goals under the post-2015 development agenda.
3. We recognize that there are significant areas of progress among the Central Asian countries, and we agree to undertake efforts to identify the key features of such effective practices so that they can be replicated and scaled-up.
4. We also acknowledge that there are common areas in which progress towards the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been uneven and which require increased attention and support. We identify priority actions to address these gaps in the coming years.
5. We reaffirm our commitment not only to take action at the national level but also to improve cross-border information exchange and cooperation in order to advance a Central Asian agenda for women’s empowerment.

**Achievements and Progress**

***Women’s Economic Empowerment and Social Protection***

1. Integrating gender considerations into national economic and social policies and planning processes (such as in poverty reduction strategies and anti-crisis measures) has helped to focus attention on the factors that contribute to the feminization of poverty. Efforts have been made to increase assistance to groups of women who are especially vulnerable to impoverishment or socially excluded, such as single mothers, elderly women, women with disabilities and women migrant workers.
2. Gender-sensitive legal and policy reform have contributed to a more equitable distribution of key economic resources (e.g. land, property, and financial capital, such as wages, pensions and microcredit).
3. Effective initiatives to empower women economically have focused on increasing their access to employment opportunities, primarily through the promotion of entrepreneurship and self-employment and job creation schemes. Partnerships among government, donor and international organizations, financial institutions and civil society organizations, have been an important means of empowering women economically.
4. Women still face difficulties in obtaining business education, and marketable skills, and in accessing: new technologies and material resources (equipment, raw materials), financial services, such as loans, consulting services and training, information and knowledge- all of which are necessary for opening small and medium enterprises. These problems are particularly critical for rural areas where educational seminars and training are held infrequently and there is limited access to information that is necessary for entrepreneurs, such as about legislative changes and the regulatory framework for entrepreneurship.

***Women’s Representation in Policy and Decision-Making Positions***

1. National legislation on women’s advancement and gender equality provides for mainstreaming gender in strategic planning and policy development and for equal representation of women and men in leadership positions in public office. Temporary special measures, including quotas, goals and targets, to improve women’s access to policy and decision-making positions have contributed to an increase in the number of women in elected office (national parliaments).
2. Various national mechanisms to improve the status of women have been created to implement programmes with the same goals. Strategies and action plans on gender equality and the advancement of women have been elaborated. Some statistical data has been disaggregated by sex.

12. Mechanisms for funding programs and projects on women’s advancement have been developed, and there is financial support for gender research and sex- disaggregated statistics. Pilot programmes on gender education have been conducted.

13. Initiatives to improve the leadership skills of women and girls, and to support female politicians, have provided an important means of ensuring that there are qualified female candidates to fill leadership positions made available through special measures.

14. The mass media has expanded its informational and advocacy activities in respect to women’s political participation and in particular has increased awareness of women’s political rights.

***Prevention and response to Violence against Women***

15. Reforms have strengthened the legal and policy frameworks to prevent and respond to specific types of violence against women, primarily domestic violence.

16. Specific laws, policies and action plans on violence against women have led to the development of interagency response mechanisms and also created a framework for coordination among government structures, especially between law enforcement and civil society.

17. Support and services for victims/survivors of violence against women have increased at the national level and encompass telephone hotlines, legal and psychological counseling, medical assistance and temporary shelters and safe houses. State funding for services that are rovided by non-governmental women’s organizations is also considered an effective approach.

18. Efforts to raise awareness of violence against women and counteract negative attitudes and stigmatization of victims/survivors have been carried out at the local and national level through public campaigns and education programs. One indicator of the effectiveness of such efforts is an increase in the number of women who contact telephone helplines or apply to support centers.

***Reproductive Health***

19. Health systems have been strengthened to deliver better perinatal, obstetric and maternal health care, which has contributed to a decline in maternal and child mortality.

20. An increase in the availability of family planning services and modern forms of contraception appears to be correlated to a decrease in the abortion rate. However, such services are still not accessible to vulnerable populations of reproductive age, specifically rural women, adolescent girls, disabled women, HIV-positive women, migrants, and internally displaced women.

21. Gender considerations have been incorporated into programs to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, with special attention to antenatal HIV screening and prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

22. Efforts are ongoing to expand screening for and early diagnosis and treatment of breast and cervical cancers, particularly to women in rural areas. Effective initiatives have combined improving medical care with awareness campaigns targeting women about self-examination and health services.

23. Increasing religious radicalization in the region reinforces patriarchal relations within the family, which negatively impacts women’s realization of their reproductive rights- in particular, family planning and the use of contraceptives by women of reproductive age. Resistance by religious organizations to information and educational initiatives on reproductive and sexual health aimed at youth and adolescents is a factor in the increasing rate of teenage pregnancies and abortions.

24. Early marriage, which is often accompanied by domestic violence or coercion such as bride kidnapping, is a serious violation of women’s rights and also has negative effects on girls’ health, in particular their reproductive health.

***Governance, Rule of Law and Access to Justice***

25. A legal framework has been established for the protection of women’s rights at the national level.

26. Training and sensitization of some justice sector actors, such as law enforcement officers and judicial personnel, on the rights of women and girls and good practices in responding to violence against women, has increased their awareness and capacity to respond appropriately to human rights violations.

27. National level human rights bodies (such as Human Rights Commissions) and civil society organizations have served as important links between women and justice sector institutions; they have provided women with an additional means of protecting their rights.

28. Legal counseling and legal literacy programs have provided practical support that has enabled women to access courts or other justice mechanisms.

***Women, Peace and Security***

29. The adoption of national action plans for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on women, peace and security (WPS) is a significant step towards recognition of the gendered impacts of conflict and for mainstreaming gender in the security sector and in peace processes.

30. Networks of women peace activists in Central Asia are an important resource in terms of developing a group of women with skills to serve as mediators in peace processes.

31. Efforts have been made to establish a Women Peace Corps to ensure women’s effective participation in peacebuilding processes and in promoting security and stability in the region as well as to support women as change agents in the prevention and resolution of conflicts at the national and regional levels.

32. The legislative framework that is necessary for the promotion of women’s participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes is in place in all the Central Asian countries, along with an increase in public understanding and recognition of need to promote international commitments on WPS.

33. Civil society institutions have experience supporting government actions in the implementation of international commitments relevant to WPS.

34. The institution of mediation is being actively developed and it includes women’s participation in the capacity of mediators.

35. There is a positive experience of conflict resolution in the region, including with the participation of countries, which are guarantors of peacebuilding processes. In addition, there is also experience of rapid response and rendering practical assistance to women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

**Recommendations in response to the existing challenges and gaps**

***Women’s Economic Empowerment and Social Protection***

36. Further development of indicators to measure women’s economic autonomy, such as access to financial resources, to technology and to opportunities for effective land use, for the household, and use of land as property, as well as the number of women in vulnerable employment (such as the “working poor” in the informal economy) is needed.

37. The use of gender-responsive budgeting should be promoted to ensure that investments are made in education, healthcare and social protection schemes. Such gender budgeting exercises should also be used to monitor resource allocation and spending on promoting gender equality.

38. Poverty alleviation plans should not be limited to income-generating programs but should include enhancing women’s knowledge of their rights to own and control economic resources, as well as capacity-building and empowerment to exercise their rights. Women and other vulnerable groups should be considered not only as beneficiaries but also as agents of change.

39. Within initiatives to improve women’s access to the labor market, a greater attention should be devoted to enabling women to balance unpaid domestic responsibilities with formal employment. This has to be done through the development of social infrastructure (preschool institutions, including seasonal programs for rural areas, day care centers for children, including for children with disabilities, services for personal assistants to people with disabilities) as well as through the development of models for greater involvement of men in childcare and housework.

40. Further attention should be devoted to removing barriers to women and girls, including those who are impoverished, living in rural areas, with disabilities, refugees and others, to accessing professional education, including vocational training and education in non-traditional skills and new technologies that are in demand in the labor market.

41. Invest in the education of girls and women at all levels of secondary, higher and vocational education as a means to promote women’s economic empowerment. Advocacy on the elimination of gender stereotypes that limit women’s and girls’ access to education at all levels is needed.

42. Labor law, policy and social protections should be extended to protect the interests of girls and women working in the informal economy. Effective measures are needed to legalize the informal sector of the economy.

43. Measures are needed to improve working conditions for women and to eliminate discriminatory employment practices (including gender bias in recruitment, hiring, promotion and remuneration, occupational segregation and sexual harassment in the workplace), based on a model of social partnership. Special attention should be paid to decreasing the gender wage gap, not only through wage increases, but also by removing restrictions to women’s career advancement.

44. It is important to improve rural women’s access to education on the basics of a market economy by conducting training courses and providing microcredit and grant opportunities, as well as technical assistance in sourcing funds and seed capital to support rural women and to provide emergency assistance to households headed by women.

45. In the context of the feminization of labor migration, there is a need to implement gender-sensitive migration policies with a focus on measures for safe labor migration and the provision of social services (professional training, improved access to health services, funding for legal assistance in destination countries, etc.). It is necessary to expand measures that address the needs and interests of family members of migrant workers, both in the destination country and the country of origin, in particular for women and children.

46. Actively use temporary special measures, such as quotas and advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, in order to increase women’s representation in senior positions in economic decision-making, in both the public and private sectors.

47. Women's economic empowerment should be a priority in post conflict settings. Equal access to property and land ownership and inheritance rights should be agreed as part of mediation processes and in peace agreements. Additionally, State mechanisms to increase the competitiveness of women in the Central Asian countries in primary labor markets should be improved.

48. Because private enterprise in the Central Asian countries generally has an undefined structure, it is recommended that networks of partner civil society organizations, which will continue to serve as centers for the coordination of activities to promote the business community and associations of women entrepreneurs, be created and strengthened. Such regional cooperation on the development of female entrepreneurship will contribute to strengthening regional networks of women leaders, expand their knowledge of available mechanisms, support their efforts through exchanging information about their successes and failures in the economic empowerment of individual women, and about socio-economic opportunities for their families and for poverty reduction throughout the Central Asian region.

***Women’s Representation in Policy and Decision-Making Positions***

49. Stronger measures are needed to increase women’s representation in the political sphere and in decision-making positions to a minimum of 30%. Special measures, such as quotas, should be extended to the legislative branch (parliament), to the executive branch of government, and to political parties, and such measures should all be made mandatory.

50. The capacity of national mechanisms to coordinate gender policy across government agencies should be strengthened. Further efforts are needed to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in policies and programs, as well as in all levels of government, especially at the executive level, with adequate funding from the State budget for the relevant structures to fulfill their mandates. Establishing gender focal points in public offices is a good practice that should be replicated.

51. Within the legislative branch, support should be given to the establishment of parliamentary committees or working groups that can take a lead role in promoting gender equality through legislation. It is also necessary to develop mechanisms for the implementation of relevant legislation.

52. Greater attention is needed to the qualitative aspects of women’s representation, such as increasing their capacity to form and lead committees and to advance a gender equality agenda and to improving collaboration between female parliamentarians and the national mechanisms.

53. Gender education should be integrated into the curriculum of educational institutions, beginning with primary schools and ending with institutes for retraining and skills development. State funds to create such educational programmes should be allocated.

54. State strategic planning which includes gender perspectives and mandatory gender budgeting and gender expertise of legislation should be supported. Improvement of gender research and statistics is a necessary precondition.

55. To strengthen regional cooperation between women’s organizations involved in the political empowerment of women, a regional network should be established (“G5”), which will serve as a unified virtual resource and regional database of politically active women for their capacity building and promotion.

56. Participation in election observation in the region with the goal of monitoring women’s participation in elections should be enhanced. Work with regional organizations and international agencies on advancing the status of women should be strengthened.

57. Monitoring of implementation of state policies on the advancement of women, with a special focus on inhibiting the revival of patriarchal tendencies in society and improving gender education in general and improving in particular girls’ access to quality education, has to be improved to ensure reaching of expected targets and results within the planned timeframe.

***Prevention and response to Violence against Women***

58. Undertake assessment of prevalence of violence against women and girls on a regular basis to ensure further timely and efficient measures to prevent and address violence and protect women and girls from violation of their rights.

59. Ending tolerance for violence against women and implementation of a clear “zero tolerance” policy has to be prioritized. Men and boys should play a greater role in combating attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate violence against women.

60. Ensure that laws on violence against women are effectively implemented by addressing such factors as women’s lack of access to legal mechanisms and fear of approaching law enforcement agencies, limited protection measures under the law, failures to uphold the law, and continued impunity for perpetrators.

61. Comprehensive services for survivors of violence should be expanded and made accessible to all women who have experienced violence. Effective models should be replicated, multi-sectoral cooperation and national referral mechanisms for survivors of violence should be strengthened, coordination should be strengthened and adequate funding should be provided.

***Reproductive Health***

62. Family planning services and the provision of modern contraception to women from vulnerable groups of the population, including displaced women, should be secured by the State. Family planning services should include awareness raising, counseling and provision of a wide range of modern contraception, including emergency contraception for informed choice by clients of family planning services.

63. It is necessary to develop a package of sexual and reproductive health services focused on the needs of the vulnerable groups, including labour migrants, refugees, stateless, etc., to ensure the availability of such services both within the country of origin and in the destination country.

64. The overall quality and accessibility of reproductive health programmes, including special programmes aimed at the prevention of the child marriage for girls who are at risk or who have already married, especially in rural areas, should be improved. Steps should be taken to prepare specialists in the treatment and counseling of adolescent girls. Information on the negative effects of early marriage and pregnancy should be introduced into the school curriculum.

65. A comprehensive range of services should be developed to respond to gender-based violence committed against women and girls that takes into consideration their specific needs in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

66. Measures should be taken to institutionalize youth-friendly services for adolescents. These services should include family planning services, access to modern contraception, treatment of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) and safe abortions, and should provide information and counseling on sexual education and empowerment of girls to negotiate safe sex practices.

67. Innovative programs should be introduced in the region on transforming gender stereotypes and norms and on behavioral change strategies in family relations. Engaging boys and men should be a key component of programs on sexual and reproductive health (contraception and safe sexual behavior), STI and HIV prevention, maternal health, family planning, prevention and combating violence against women and girls (early marriage, bride kidnapping, marriages arranged by parents), and the care and education of children.

68. With the trend in the spread of HIV through sexual contact among young people, programs that respond to HIV, should prioritize the specific needs of women and girls, through the allocation of additional funding to voluntary counseling and testing as part of reproductive and sexual health services, and through eliminating gender inequalities that make them vulnerable to infection.

69. National household surveys should include data on the age of women and men at the time of marriage, in both legally registered marriages and unregistered religious marriages and cohabitation.

70. It is important to collect data about consequences of gender-based violence include unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, maternal mortality, miscarriages, stillbirths, late access to antenatal care, premature birth, fetal injury and low birth weight (in preterm infants). The data have to be used for formulation, monitoring and implementation of the policies in the area of reproductive health.

***Governance, Rule of Law and Access to Justice***

71. Undertake gender-sensitive reforms of the entire justice chain to ensure that women and girls are guaranteed both formal and substantive equality.

72. Strengthen the capacity of Human Rights Commissions and civil society organizations to monitor women’s access to justice and to advocate for gender-sensitive law reform, including attention to the needs of vulnerable groups, and to implement measures to eliminate gender stereotypes and harmful traditions, which put women in a subordinate position as compared to men.

73. Provide greater support to legal organizations that have the capacity to advocate for legal reform that will improve women’s access to justice, including by allocating a separate line in the State budget for the implementation of projects on women’s legal empowerment.

74. Develop a system of legal assistance that is accessible to women, especially women in rural areas or from marginalized groups, and ensure that legal aid lawyers are competent in providing legal assistance to women in criminal, civil, family and economic matters.

75. Develop curricula on women’s human rights, as well as on specific issues that disproportionately affect women such as violence against women, starting with the primary school level. Ensure that such courses are also integrated into legal education and professional training for lawyers.

76. Expand specialized services for women who have experienced violence in order to improve their access to justice and to reduce attrition. Such services and responses should be based on recognized good practices (e.g. the “one-stop shop” model of integrated assistance) with the allocation of adequate resources from the State budget.

77. Take measures to increase the number of qualified women in key justice institutions, especially in law enforcement. Ensure equal rights and opportunities for the promotion of women in law enforcement and security authorities.

78. Invest in strengthening gender-sensitive mediation mechanisms and ensure that women are included as decision-makers and mediators.

79. Bring national legislation into compliance with international human rights standards regarding equal marital age for men and women, introduce legal responsibility for conducting child marriages, and prohibit kinship marriages.

80. Introduce the following definitions into national legislation: “*discrimination*”, “*direct discrimination*”, “*indirect discrimination*”, “*gender discrimination*”, “*sexual harassment*”.

81. Introduce the practice of using CEDAW provisions in judicial decisions.

82. The governments of Central Asia should develop and implement an effective system of awareness raising for women and girls about their fundamental rights and means of protecting their rights. Translate manuals and legal material into the languages spoken by the majority populations in specific regions of Central Asia.

83. Improve the legal literacy of women and girls in the areas of family law and the importance of the legal registration of marriages and births to protect women from early and polygamous marriages and to ensure their protection in the event of divorce and division of property.

84. Introduce family courts in order to strengthen protection of women’s and children’s rights.

***Women, Peace and Security***

85. As there is inadequate attention to and a lack of application of the CEDAW Committee General Recommendation no. 30 on women in conflict and post-conflict situations as the key document that delineates recommendations for the realization of obligations under UNSCRs on WPS, countries have to be strongly recommended to regularly report on progress in implementing the General Recommendation no.30.

86. Existing challenges related to natural resource management, particularly cross-border resources, require joint decision making process that include women as equal decision makers.

87. Provide adequate protection on the territory of receiving countries to women and girls who leave their countries of origin because of conflict and mass violence. Provide access to services related to education, health care, etc. on the territories of receiving country.

88. Prevent further growth in the trend towards religious movements and interpretations of religion that are especially radical and alien to Central Asia, especially trends to promote norms about the ”proper” behavior of women. Ensure religious education of the population that includes raising awareness of all recognized world religions.

89. Provide adequate budgets for the implementation of National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 on WPS to ensure effective implementation of the international commitments.

90. When conducting a global review of progress in implementing UNSCRs on WPS, the nonbinding nature of the resolutions should be addressed and a clear mechanism for their mandatory implementation and reporting should be introduced.

91. Ensure the participation of civil society organizations and women peace activists in the development, implementation and monitoring of national action plans on women, peace and security. Allocate sufficient funds to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such national action plans.

92. Invest in building the capacity of women to serve as mediators and leaders in peacebuilding and conflict prevention by promoting the exchange of experiences and through support for a regional forum of women peacekeepers. Support initiatives of women peacekeepers (e.g. the creation of a “peace train”, promotion of people’s diplomacy, etc.).

93. Use special recruitment measures to ensure that women participate meaningfully and formally in peace negotiations, as peacekeepers and in the security sector.

94. Include monitoring of violence against women, especially sexual violence against women and children, as a human rights violation, in assessments conducted during periods of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

95. Introduce issues of WPS into the agenda of regional/interstate organizations, especially those who have memoranda of understanding with the UN. Promote the creation of Women’s Councils within these organizations.

96. Ensure adequate representation of the region of Central Asia in the work of UN committees on human rights, in particular the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

97. Impose a deadline for addressing the issue of stateless persons and irregular migration (by 2020).

98. Resume the practice of creating civil society advisory councils under the UN country team in each country, with the participation of no less than 50% women.