

Success of women's movement activists in Kyrgyzstan

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The 2005 national parliamentary elections resulted in dramatic consequences: the composition of Parliament – all 75 members – was completely male. The single-gender parliament, which existed for about three years, not only created a precedent of marginalizing women from the key national decision-making body, but also contributed to the regression of the national legislation. It was exactly during this parliamentary term that efforts to introduce polygamy and criminalize abortion were undertaken. Eventually, Parliament rejected such proposals after lobbying pressure by women groups and gender activists.

The situation was aggravated further because women were also excluded from the decision-making process in the executive branch. In addition, there was a shift in implementing public gender policy towards the 'family'. This took place due to the reorganization of the separate body on gender equality (Secretariat of the National Council on Women, Family and Gender Development in the President's Office) and the transfer of its functions on gender policy implementation to the Social and Economic Policy Unit of the President's Office.

Right after the parliamentary elections, a group of women activists and feminists launched a lobbying campaign to implement the basic provisions of CEDAW. They lobbied to create a Special Representative of the President on Gender Development in Parliament, the introduction of gender quotas into the election laws and a number of specific mechanisms to integrate women into executive bodies.

Women activists organized a meeting with the President to promote their package of proposals and proposed nominees for the new Special Representative of the President position. The women's group advocated for a famous lawyer, one of the drafters of the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On Domestic Violence', Dr. Anara Niyazova. The lobbying strategy turned out to be timely and was successful. The President supported the women's groups' proposals and Dr. Niyazova began activities aimed at promoting gender equality policy in Parliament.

The Special Representative of the President on Gender Equality succeeded in implementing the following objectives:

- A mandatory gender review of all legal acts being adopted;
- A gender review of several draft laws;
- To organize parliamentary hearings on gender issues.

From 2005 to 2008, the women activists changed their strategy and introduced new lobby actions into their tactics. STA (a NGO) initiated an information campaign to prevent a so called 'conservative attack' on women's rights, which included efforts to criminalize abortions and legalize polygamy. Yet, the key objectives at that time were changes in the election laws to support women's political leadership.

Following numerous discussions at various levels among women's groups, a decision was made to fight for the introduction of 'zebra principle' both in the Election Code and the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On Political Parties'. The stages of the lobbying campaign included a national civil society forum, participation in Parliamentary hearings, charitable actions for children and parents under the slogan: 'Different moms are needed in and important to politics'.

As a result of the lobbying campaign, gender quotas were introduced into the Law 'On Political Parties'. Thus, in the 2007 elections, the fourth convocation of Parliament saw women represent 27 percent of the representatives, from all political parties (Ak Jol, Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan). These new women candidates work closely with gender experts and promote gender equality policy in the decision-making process.