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CENTRAL ASIAN CONFERENCE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On July 3 and 4 of 2014, 82 participants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan met at the conference “Gender Equality, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Development” in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, part of WECEF’s “Women’s International Empowerment”. The conference was organised and facilitated by WECEF’s partners STA and ALGA.

Aynuru Altybaeva of the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan welcomed the participants and ensured the audience about the importance given by the parliament to gender equality legislation and women’s role in development, she noted that Kyrgyzstan has an active network of women legislators who support gender equality initiatives across different parties. The gender focal point, Nazgul Beysheeva of the Ministry of Social Development of Kyrgyzstan, presented existing legislation on gender equality. Aisuluu Amanova, the representative of the Ministry of Economy, presented the recently adopted National Strategy on Sustainable Development which includes 23 gender equality indicators to ensure women’s key role in sustainable development of the country.

Sascha Gabizon of WECEF International welcomed the participants in the name of the organisers from Civil Society. She highlighted that gender equality is a prerequisite for development, for sustainable development in Central Asia, and introduced the project “International Women’s Empowerment” funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Development Cooperation. She shared best practice results of the women’s empowerment project which are incredibly positive: with little money women have created great value, increased income from farming, water and energy services, and production and regional trade of these local products – being an engine for the local economy. At the same time, in all countries women still face specific barriers, regarding contracts, taxation, divorce, marriage, access to credit and resources. Women’s

empowerment projects are however still too scarce. The lessons from these local experiences will be linked to the national strategies and policies in Central Asia, as well as the global process on developing a new post2015 sustainable development agenda.

Sascha Gabizon presented the latest development of the global policy process and intergovernmental negotiations on a new set of goals to follow-up on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). She presented lessons from the MDGs and the proposed goals by the High Level Panel on post2015, and the zero draft of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. In the following discussion, the participants discussed how priorities of Central Asia were reflected in these proposed goals.

Raushan Sarsembayeva, the head of the Kazakh National Women's Council and also the Association of Business Women of Kazakhstan, presented their work on support for women entrepreneurship. The deputy of the Coalition of NGOs of Tajikistan gender researcher Alla Kutekova from Tajikistan presented the analysis of women's lack of access and control of productive resources, in particular land, seeds, and credit. The representative of a local CSO, Youth Ecological Centre, partner presented best practices of rural women's income generation activities. The head of the water association, presented how she had developed the organization which was now providing clean drinking water at affordable costs and subsequently she had been elected into the local authority council.

Sabine Machl of UNWOMEN Kyrgyzstan presented their latest publication "Gender and Climate Change" developed in cooperation with WECF Partner BIOM and UNDP. UNWOMEN's only country office for Central Asia is based in Kyrgyzstan, supporting the national government with gender policies, analysis and project implementation. UNDP Kyrgyzstan presented the consultations carried out in Central Asia with stakeholders.

The participants worked in four groups developing recommendations for integrating Central Asian priorities into the draft "Sustainable Development Goals". They presented recommendations for strengthening targets on rural women's empowerment, rights of internal and external migrants, right to land, sexual and reproductive health and rights, control over water resources, unpaid care work, evaluation and accountability, decent work and equal pay for work of equal value, mountain ecosystems, priorities for landlocked countries, integrating gender in national strategies on climate change and sustainable technologies.

The participants discussed the need for bringing a stronger joint voice from Central Asian civil society, and proposed to create a "network of networks" to share information and coordinate policy responses on all the themes of the new SDG/post2015 development agenda, and the development of mechanisms to nominate regional representatives to participate in regional and global policy processes.

The conference and its participants were covered widely in the main online media and on television in Kyrgyzstan.

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