

**GOVERNMENT AS AN INSTRUMENT OF VIOLENCE
TOWARDS WOMEN. THE INTERPLAY OF
TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL
LEADERSHIP IN BUKHARA (UZBEKISTAN)**

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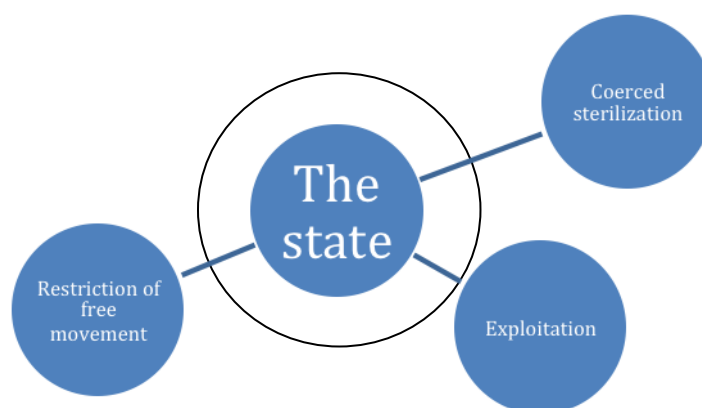
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Abstract

Women's rights in Uzbekistan are not acknowledged by the government and not discussed in the society. There is often a huge gap between the official standards of women's rights and everyday life in the consciousness of women.

The scope of this research is to look at how the Uzbek government oppresses women's rights by exercising its abuse in three ways:



The violence is exercised by Uzbek government with the help of the traditional institutions, such as *mahalla*, which adapted from a community neighborhood organization to become the government's watchdogs. The nongovernmental women's organizations are represented as nontraditional forces that try to fight for women's rights in Bukhara region but without much success.

As the research has shown, the traditional and authoritarian state is an obstacle for

- a) Women to fight for their rights
- b) NGO's to establish a significant presence and influence the government's policies

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Introduction

Since declaring its independence in 1991 the Uzbek government has taken measures to demonstrate a stable gender situation in the country. The image that the government and local media presented of women in Uzbekistan reflected stable gender relations and constructed a symbol of motherhood. Nevertheless, today women's rights are violated not only by domestic manifestation of violence but also by the state policies directed towards subjection and abuse.

Under Soviet rule the government discouraged many traditional customs favoring men over women¹. However, since the post-Soviet transition many of these customs have gained more power and attained the Uzbek government's favor.

The strong shift in women's rights has occurred because of the economic problems that resulted in less affordable education and social support services. As a result, women have been more vulnerable to poverty than men as the employment rate for men was higher. Such conditions have led to the increased susceptibility of women to abuse at home as well as at the working place.

The emphasis on protecting women's rights arrived in Uzbekistan with the independence of the post-Soviet state and has never been regarded as a homegrown social movement. After the collapse of the Soviet Union women's right became en vogue within the human rights agencies. In fact the whole post-Soviet region of Central Asia was keen in partnering with international organizations once they started providing money for the projects which work on increasing the status of women. The former Soviet Union offers many relevant examples of how the position of women had been altered. Within this context, in Russia the women's NGOs have emerged as one of the potential social movements and have received much monetary encouragement from the West (Kuehnast 2004). The women's movement in Kyrgyzstan has given rise to more than 20

¹ Human Development Report 2010

women's NGOs, 13 of which form the Association of Crisis Centers of Kyrgyzstan (Marupova 2009).

The nongovernmental organizations, which emerged in Uzbekistan after it gained independence in 1991, struggled for women's rights and tried to intervene into the policies of the state. It was the NGO's who introduced the problem of gender inequality to the local community and defined its shortcomings. Over the past five years the gender gap in Uzbekistan has increased dramatically leading the government to stop participating in the GDI (Gender Development Index) survey that is conducted by international agencies.² As a result little research regarding the current status of women's rights is publicly available.

The women's NGOs argue, that in order to increase their position women should establish strong outside contacts and support to escape from injustice at home and in the society. The nongovernmental organizations presented themselves as activists and grass-root movements, which were strongly motivated to bring democratic regulation into the traditional society with regards to gender based violence. However, many activists found contradictions, such as the inability of women to establish strong ties with the NGO community and the lack of practical implementation of democracy ideals such as openness, freedom, and civic liberty. The cultural context as well as authoritarian government serves as a major obstacle for the democratic development of the society. The work of nongovernmental organizations undermines the authoritarian regime of the government therefore they are perceived as an unnecessary link and as a Western attempt to break the traditional values in the Uzbek society.

My previous research was on the advocacy methods organizations provide for the victims of domestic violence in Uzbekistan. The results of my research have shown that the organizations have a hard time working due to the strong cultural context and political unwillingness to openly

² See Appendix 1

discuss let alone eradicate the problem of violence. There is a lack of deeper engagement and linkages of the various levels between the main agencies: the NGO, the community and the state. However, the women's nongovernmental organizations have made several efforts to combat the problem and tried to implement the advocacy methods in the community (Marupova 2009). The research concluded that three major problems serve to constrain the successful work of nongovernmental organizations:

1. The Uzbek government uses GONGO's (Government Owned NGOs) to filter and control the work of NGO's.
2. The Uzbek government blocks the funding from donors to the women's organizations.
3. Most Uzbek women are not aware of their rights making it difficult for the organizations to work and deliver their message.

Today the work of the nongovernmental women's organizations is restricted by two more factors – the increase of state authoritarianism and the emergence of traditional institutions, such as *mahalla*, which provide help for the local population. *Mahalla* is a neighborhood community or the local governance unit, which performs such activities as conflict resolution, community management and ceremonies (weddings and funerals). This type of organization has existed in Uzbekistan for centuries, however after the country gained independence, the *mahalla*'s value and imposition of its policy increased. The Uzbek government claims “*mahalla* is a traditional institution, which policies are directed towards revival of traditional values and thus, bring peace to the community” (Karimov 1996:32). The Uzbek society is not “homogeneous” (Abdullaev 2005:270) and the clash between *traditional* and *nontraditional* is represented by two types of institutions – the *mahallas* and women's NGOs.

The objective of this research is to look at the state as one of the primary sources of violence towards women, which exercises abuse by inflicting coerced sterilization, restriction of free movement and exploitation. The research will investigate how women's nongovernmental organizations and *mahalla* deal with the problem of state abuse and how they influence state politics towards women in the city of Bukhara. How do advocacy discourses shape/change gender relations in the society that preserves Uzbek values and traditions? What measures are taken in order to prevent gender-based stereotypes? What is the position of women's organizations vis-à-vis traditional cultural institutions, such as *mahalla*, which has become the neo-traditional community?

In this research I will argue that the government of Uzbekistan imposes violence on women in the country's periphery, such as Bukhara, and achieves high support from the traditional organization *mahalla*, thus the attempt to give women rights and create a stable civil society is unsuccessful and will continue to be as long as traditionalism thrives in the society. Any attempt by an NGO to contest the government and its "watchdogs" results in a series of negative consequences to the NGO and prevents actual benefits to women's rights from occurring.

Due to the lack of data, the unknown status of women's rights in Uzbekistan is a major concern. This research will contribute to the gender discourse in Central Asia, and in Uzbekistan in particular.

Methodology

The hypothesis on which the work is based came from the deductive reasoning of the research because the thesis statement was constructed on the basis of the collected material. I used qualitative research methods because it involves human experience within an Uzbek cultural framework. The qualitative methods I use in the research include the observational research, semi-structured interviews, follow up interviews and archival search.

The structural approach I apply is important because it reflects the structural relationships between the state and the studied community, where the civil society organizations are represented as intermediaries.

I selected Bukhara, the fifth largest city in Uzbekistan, because it reflects a representative mix of the government, *mahalla* and NGO policies that are common to the periphery of Uzbekistan. The sampling strategy was purposive, because I obtained information from both the representatives of *mahalla* and non-governmental women's organizations. Interviewing state officials directly would have brought considerable personal danger. As a precaution I found it important to interview local women who could give reliable information on their interaction with the government.

The research is inclusive because it represents the voices of the studied community and of groups of people no matter whether they come from the marginalized group or not. The research deals with representatives of three *mahallas*, nongovernmental women's organization "Oydin Nuri" and women, who reside on the territory of Bukhara. All together 16 respondents were used in the research. In order to make the process easier I contacted the representatives of the women's NGO before the trip to Uzbekistan, who afterwards gave me additional contacts of other interviewees in private. One of the major roadblocks to this type of research is that the respondents view the use of Internet and phone communication with suspicion and fear.

During the interviews I followed the ethical guidelines as a feminist geographer because of the sensitivity of the topic. Overall the questions varied from 24 to 27 and contained different content tailored according to the place and respondents. I tried to use less culturally and politically threatening questions for the representatives of *mahalla*, due to the fact that they are government affiliated institution. An example of the variations is the following. I asked the NGO: How do you think the government impedes your work? Now compare this to the question designed for the mahalla: What do you think about the government policies related to women's rights within Bukhara region? The reasons for adjusting the questions are twofold, first if I asked the *mahalla* a question that could be interrupted as politically threatening then the interview would have been stopped. The second reason to ask the *mahalla* a more subjective version was to try to obtain the most open response possible.

I was very concerned about my positionality and the role as a researcher, and my identity as an Uzbekistani woman helped me to build the rapport with the respondents. During the interviews where I had permission I used a recording device. After collecting interviews I transcribed them carefully without any distortion. Once I covered the interviews and transcribed the material, the next step was coding the data and breaking the respondents' answers into several categories in order to make the overall responses to the questions clearer. The Uzbek government seeks to actively conceal the problem of women's rights so I had to ensure the interviewees that the information they shared would be kept confidential. I used pseudonyms to refer to my respondents in the research. Interviews are only one part of a multi-method approach to the formulated research question. The observational research took place in the *mahallas* and women's organization Oydin Nuri and the notes were carefully logged in the field journal. The observations also took place in the National Bank of Uzbekistan, where I tried to obtain information pretending to be a customer. As I followed ethical guidelines, the information was not recorded on a device, but stored in my memory until transferred to the field journal.

The archival search and the literature review represent the comprehensive study of the printed and on-line materials on the topic. I investigated local newspaper “Bukhara news” which contained information on how government reflects on the role of women in the country. However, the local mass media barely discusses the problems related to women’s issues. To fill any gaps in the material I attempted to use the social media, such as YouTube, however this resource is not operated to a large extent in the country. The officials block the access of politically sensitive information in Bukhara, therefore the social media research was performed after my return to Budapest.

The literature review illustrates the analysis of the previous research done on the topic and contributes to the construction of the theoretical framework.

Chapter 1: Historical Background

The republic of Uzbekistan is located in the Central Asian region and borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. It is divided into 12 *viloyats*³, with the capital in Tashkent. The population of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2011 is roughly 28.1 million⁴. The approximate estimate made by UN shows that by 2050 the population of Uzbekistan will be 40.5 million. The birth rate in 2011 is 17.43 per 1000 and the population growth rate is 94%⁵. The Human Development Index (HDI) in Uzbekistan in 2010 was 102⁶ and Gender Development Index (GDI) in 2010 wasn't available. The main indicators of HDI are life expectancy, gross profit and standard of knowledge. The main indicators of the GDI are estimation of inequality between men and women in the above-mentioned indicators of HDI.⁷

The Asian Development Bank report shows that the approximate level of poverty in Uzbekistan is about 27%. This is official data, provided to the ADB by the government's statistical committee leading one to assume that the real level of poverty is much higher than published by the administration. Overall out of the total population of Uzbekistan 60% live in the rural areas. Of those inhabits about 70% are vulnerable to poverty with more than 30% more of men and women are engaged in the agricultural sector.⁸ These factors can draw us the regional picture of the country and assume that poverty prevails in rural areas.

The city of Bukhara is located in the South of Uzbekistan and comprises the nation's fifth largest city with a population of approximately 270,000 people (2009 census). The population

³ Translation from Uzbek: viloyat is region

⁴ This information was derived from the CIA *World Factbook*

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html>

⁵ To compare, the birth rate in Russia in 2011 is about 11.09 per 1000.

⁶ See Appendix 2

⁷ The Asian Development Bank Report 2005

⁸ The Asian Development Bank report 2005

consists of Uzbeks and Persian speaking Tajiks. Bukhara is one of the largest tourist cities in Uzbekistan and the tourist industry brings the largest amount of profit to the city. Nevertheless, the economic conditions of Bukhara do not appear to be promising. The population's vulnerability to the state politics is very high yet there is very little resistance to the existing regime.

The economic conditions in Bukhara are a major determinate of the level of gender violence in the city. For the three past years the salaries have been paid on the debit cards, representing an attempt of the state to control the economy. In reality people do not have an opportunity to access their money in the form of cash from the card, as there are no ATM machines in the city. As an outcome, there is little cash in the population's hands, and this is one of the reasons, besides poverty, for men to leave the country and work abroad. Women end up being more susceptible to governmental repressive policies since they are more likely to remain in Uzbekistan.

In order to take cash you have to go to the director of the bank and ask his permission, then if he agrees, you can do so. And 30% of your money is taken (Excerpt from the interview with bank worker Ulugbek, 47 years old).

According to the interviewees the 30% fee is a bribe to the corrupted officials. Another peculiar thing is that the prices on the market are different for those who buys with debit card and for those who buy with cash.

For example you buy oil for 4,000 sum (\$3 dollars) if you buy it with cash, and you buy it for 6,000 sum (\$4.5 dollars) for debit card. Such price is high for us, if for example my salary is 320,000 sum (\$120 dollars) a month. (Excerpt from the interview with Muhlisa, 34 years old.)

Since men leave the city to work abroad, they send remittances in cash (mostly US dollars) to their families. The exchange rate for the US dollar and is very high on the Bukhara black market⁹. It is profitable for the black market to maintain the high exchange rate for US dollar because many people live on the remittances their relatives send from abroad and can only

⁹ One US dollar is 2.400 UZ sum

exchange their money on the black market. Consequently, those, who live on remittances, are better off financially than those whose salaries are paid by the government.

As a result of transition to the rural economy, women have received less beneficial conditions in terms of access to the key productive resources i.e. education, healthcare, and childcare. The economic and demographic tendencies have led to the overflow of low-experienced force. The abundance of uneducated workers has contributed to a shift to the small farm households and rising vulnerability of people on the informal labor market.

The 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan prohibits all forms of violence or discrimination and serves as a guarantee of equal rights for all people. Article 18 states: “All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have equal rights and freedoms, and shall be equal before law, without discrimination by sex, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, convictions, individual and social status.” Yet in reality, women constitute the most vulnerable part of the population, as they are subjected to the men’s authority, which is traditionally accepted in the society.

During the Soviet period, the attempts to modernize the Uzbek society were made by force and caused a partial elimination of extreme Islamic norms. The examples of imposed modernization were Khujum (the forced unveiling of women in Central Asia) in the 1930s, educational policies and Russification (Tuhtahodjaeva 2000).

Despite the efforts of the Soviet system, the position of women was challenged in 1992-94, and the appearance of the first nongovernmental women organizations indicated that women were against the traditional society. Due to their dominance in the public sector, women were strongly affected during the period of transition. The wages were not paid for several months and therefore their participation in networks was at risk. Because of the closing of schools and kindergartens, increasing work in the households and additional unpaid labor women, more than

ever needed mutual support. The discourse produced by the scholars, activists and international donors construct women as the natural and inevitable group of victims in the economic transformations period (Ghodsee 2004). This led to the participation of women only in one NGO instead of several.

1.1 Back to Traditionalism

The preoccupation with “traditionalism” has been discussed in many scholarly works regarding Uzbekistan and its culture. Many followers of the modernization theory tend to think that “traditionality” keeps the nation away from the development path and civil society. Hegel, de Toqueville and Gramsci addressed the structural relationships between the state and civil society institutions. “The capabilities of the modern state in an era without developed democratic systems necessitated some form of social counter-weight which civil associations helped to provide” (Whaites 1998:344). On the contrary, the traditional view of the state and civil society suggests that an authoritarian state is a prerequisite for the emergence of civil society (Jefferies 1993). The political forces in Uzbekistan demonstrate that regardless the degree to which democratic procedures have been introduced, the traditional “bureaucratic-administrative politics” of super-powerful state authority have been preserved (Abdullaev 2005:267). Speaking about traditions, we must include the archaic perceptions of women at home and the increasing role of traditional institutions or *mahallas*. The Uzbek government perceives the nongovernmental organizations as “retraditionalizing” (Abdullaev 2005:268) and breaking the social as well as political structure.

The official state ideology forms one of the most important dimensions in the formation of national identity and mentality. Article 12 of the 1991 Constitution declares: “The Republic of Uzbekistan develops on the basis of diversity of political institutions, ideologies, and opinions. No ideology can be established as a state ideology”. However, in the next decade after the

proclamation of independence, the goal of Uzbek government has been to establish the “ideology of national independence”, which is based on the “centuries-old traditions, customs, language, and spirit of the people” (Abdullaev 2005:270).

According to a study conducted by Abdullaev (2005:271), the preservation of traditionalism in the ideology of Uzbek government consists of the following components:

- 1) It has inherited the conservative elements of the earlier Soviet ideology: the role of the head of state as the main ideologist and methods of conducting propaganda
- 2) It appeals to the past (to the ancient and artificially constructed history) of Uzbekistan and invokes national traditions.

Clearly, in such an atmosphere, the emergence of the nontraditional nongovernmental organizations found resentment by the state apparatus. The formation of the conservative ideology led to the increasing vulnerability of women in the country, due to the fact that the ideological principles consider society, as well as the state to be patriarchal.

1.3 The stereotypes

Uzbekistan is very patriarchal and traditional in its societal structure and keeps to the socially, culturally and traditionally established order that is defined in the society as appropriate. Portraying gender on the general picture of society, the man is perceived to be the breadwinner and woman has to keep the household. The girls usually live with parents and marry young. The minimum legal age of marriage for women is 17 and for men 18. The Uzbek cultural norms prohibit the discussion of sexual matters prior to marriage and discourage such discussions with women regardless of their marital status. Related cultural norms support rapid childbearing after marriage and large families, particularly for ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks (Buckley 2006). Law prohibits polygamy and if it is practiced it is punished by three years of imprisonment. As it was

previously stated, men are considered to be the breadwinners and in majority of the households, men are the only decision makers about family expenses.

The local media plays a crucial role in the proliferation of the stereotypes in Uzbek society. According to Marfua Tukhtahodjaeva, the former chair of the “Women’s Committee” of Uzbekistan, local media provide information on the activities of women’s organizations and *mahalla* as well as discusses moral and ethical problems facing women in the family context. “The followers of the traditional model of development emphasize the “special” destiny of an Uzbek woman using false statistical data, myths about the past, misinterpreted information about the weak feminist movement in the East, by appealing to women’s “natural and biological” needs, they demand the revival of polygamy and hold up to shame the amorality of the West” (Tukhtahodjaeva 2000:142).

Deniz Kandyoti (2007) in her study of Central Asian and in particular Uzbek community shows what is so traditional about the region. The social order is manifested in patriarchal community and gender hierarchies within the households, the prevalence of arranged marriages and the central role of *mahalla* and mosques as socializing agencies, which compete with the nongovernmental women’s organizations.

Consequently, the stereotypes play a crucial role in the formation of the perceptions in Uzbek society. Unfortunately, the stereotypes are taken into account in decision making both on the domestic (home) and governmental level.

Chapter 2: The Formation of Civil Society in Uzbekistan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West immediately started the promotion of “democracy” in the region, free of the Soviet rule. The non-governmental organization became a legitimate political player and many NGOs gained a high degree of success.

There is a controversial debate on the emergence of civil society on the territory of Central Asia, and in Uzbekistan, in particular.

In terms of post-colonial criticism, the concept of civil society in the transition of Central Asian's countries and the ex-Third World to democracy, along with a set of the rhetoric of human rights, it is rather ambiguous. Civil society calls for active-educated citizens with the potential to oppose the nation-state and local elites, to support changes of political regime and the emergence of neo-liberal market economy and the dismantling of "traditional society" (Shakirova 2008:2).

The formation of the civil society in Uzbekistan needs to be investigated from “outside”. Currently, in Uzbekistan civil society does not correspond to the competing institutions of freedom of speech but a society associated with the building of democratic institutions (Masaru 2009). When speaking about civil society and democracy assistance in general terms, some scholars and activists tend to refer to the Western pattern of civil society and then create the same type of society in the Central Asian region. Trying fit Uzbekistan into a model is troublesome because it possesses certain characteristics and must follow a unique path of development. The economic and social indicators also vary according to the chosen path of development. Masaru (2009:338) claims that it is necessary to understand “how the local conception of civil society is formed in relation with history, culture and power relations of the studied country.”

Before addressing the notion of civil society in Uzbekistan it is important to look at its political conditions. The political regime is authoritarian which serves as a major hindrance for civil society, by making it a target for the existing political regime.

The nongovernmental organizations are the instruments of civil society, as they set a particular frame for development. In Uzbekistan non-governmental organizations are a relatively

new phenomenon and have provoked suspicion on the part of both local and governmental officials, because controlling their actions is difficult. Many activists say that the term *non-governmental organization* is sometimes understood as *anti-government organization* (Jones 2000). In the case of Uzbekistan the separation of the state and civil society represents a strong confrontation. Islamov (2003:59) states that “before the appearance of civil society, and today, the state has always presented itself not only as a strong, independent and active participant but also as an initiator and organizer of reform”.

The international organizations’ community in Uzbekistan has engaged in considerable debate about how to interact with the government and GONGOs (Government Owned NGOs). Here the whole set of activities can be put into question: what is the reason for nongovernmental women’s organizations to exist if they continue to be governmental? The existence of the so-called third sector is completely overlooked by the government, especially if they touch such culturally sensitive issues as gender roles (Marupova 2009). The promoting of Western-style women’s rights may create a negative reaction in areas where it looks like a continuation of forced Russification/Sovietization or the oppression of local traditions (Berg 2004).

Public officials in Uzbekistan tend to criticize the “radical form of democracy” (Masaru 2009:342), which might lead (as they think) to the collapse of traditional societal norms. The women’s organizations are seen as parts of women’s liberation movements, which is a threat to traditional cultural institutions.

Today sustainable development includes a gender component and according to many gender activists (e.g. Katz, Kuehnast, etc.) using the gender component helps to target women as important participants of the development paradigm. However, Abramson states that treatment of gender in development has some weaknesses in its isolation from other instruments of development. “Furthermore, in removing “women” as a category from the diverse set of social

relationships – marital, familial, neighborly, and occupational - in which they are involved, it is so easy to portray women as being a singularly powerless and homogeneous group” (Abramson 2006:10).

2.1 Civil Society Participation in the Advancement of Women

As it was previously mentioned, the state officials do not welcome the independent women’s movements. The process to register a nongovernmental organization is very difficult. Therefore it creates a variety of legislative obstacles for the women’s organizations to perform their activities (CEDAW pre-session 2009).

It is rather problematic today to get funding for an NGO. Before 2004 there were about 3,000 NGOs in Uzbekistan, but according to the 54th decree of the Cabinet of Ministers, issued in early 2004, ‘On Measures for Effective Calculation of Funding for Technical and Humanitarian Aid and Grants Received from International and Foreign Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations’: “In order to prevent the possibility of and to close the channels for money laundering, all funds from international grants must be transferred to the Uzbekistan National Bank or Asaka Bank” (United Nations Development Programme report 2008:27). This decree in effect meant the freezing of funds for NGOs who in order to access their funds had to obtain permission from various committees at the Central Bank and the Cabinet of Ministries. These committees are to assess whether or not the project supported by international donors is useful to Uzbekistan, whether or not the NGO’s project activities are in any way different from the activities of government bodies, and whether or not it duplicates the efforts of government bodies or GONGOs (Government Owned NGOs). The investigation committees consist only of

persons from government bodies and the justice system. Because of this tough control, many NGOs were closed.

Another reason for closing was the re-registration that ran in 2004-2005. Before the re-registration many NGOs were sponsored through the US embassy. The Swiss embassy is also a donor for several gender programs in Uzbekistan however the government controls the way the women's organization receive money and the assets are frozen that is why the US and Swiss Embassies became the political target of Uzbek government (Marupova 2009).

Chapter 3: The *Mahalla* and the “gap” – as compared to Western NGOs

The old cultural institutions in Uzbekistan, such as *mahalla* are highly valued within the local community. Historically, they have been important in solving various questions related to the daily life of people. These institutions are very common on the whole territory of sedentary Central Asia, and organize the communal activities, solve conflicts and negotiate in case of internal conflict within the society (Masaru 2009). Structurally, they differ from nongovernmental women's organizations, because they are related to the government. The “homegrown survival strategies” (Abramson 2006:2), the traditional institutions, deserve much attention and trust of local community.

Mahalla is a very unique unit of Uzbek culture and represents a neighborhood self-governance. The role of *mahalla* increased after Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991. *Mahalla* represents blocks of densely organized single-family dwellings and manages communities that range in size from a few hundred to several thousand people. The *mahalla* can be located either in the private house or in the apartment blocks, but the former is more common for Bukhara. *Mahallas* are staffed mainly by volunteers. The *mahalla* chairman (occasionally chairwoman) and secretary, however, are paid. The chairman, although elected, is subject to government approval. A council of elders (*aksakals*) informally advises the *mahalla* chairman and takes part in mediating conflicts. The *mahalla* in Uzbekistan can be compared with the Court of Aksakals¹⁰ in Kyrgyzstan in the way of problem solving which is assumed to be conducted in a peaceful manner. I believe that institutions like *mahalla* in Uzbekistan and Court of Aksakals in Kyrgyzstan only engrain the stereotypes. *Mahalla* is an institution that is led by religious principles in which it is stated that woman cannot interrupt her husband. This means that the

¹⁰ Court of elders

cultural influence is very strong and provides an environment highly suitable for stereotypes to thrive.

Due to the historical traditions and mentality of people, the significance of *mahalla* has been restored as an important citizen self-government organization and symbol of humanism, respect and goodness (Masaru 2009). Due to its familiarity with the local needs of Uzbekistani people, *mahalla* is perceived as surrogate of the civil society institutions. Therefore, public officials and local community do not give much attention to the “westernized” NGOs, making their effectiveness less powerful, than that of the *mahalla*.

Since Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, the force of “Eastern democracy”, embodied in the mahalla, has driven the development. The “Eastern democratic principles” are related to the more traditional people, which make it different from the “neoliberal West” (Masaru 2009:339). President Islam Karimov (1996:8-9) states “in fact, the traditional Oriental culture, which our people have been nurturing for thousands of years, and which are seen to retain, differs a great deal from its Western counterpart and the ideology of national independence is able to oppose the harmful influence of individualism...formation of a citizen of high moral standards is a work for all.”

Sievers argues, that historically, *mahalla* representatives mobilize people because they are only ambiguously nongovernmental, and because their efforts are non profit, *mahalla* resembles the institution of “Southern NGO”, namely those non-advocacy grassroots organizations, primarily in the Southern Hemisphere, which coordinate local development and provide services not otherwise provided by the state. The fact that they are locally oriented makes *mahalla* a potential facilitator of development (Sievers 2002:148).

Another point of contention is that the Islamist interventionists see *mahalla* as the tool of revival of Islamic culture and traditions, while Western donors are interested in growing civil

society institutions, therefore they try to recast *mahalla* as an NGO (Sievers 2002). This process leads to the clash due to the conflicting reality between local authorities and Western donor community.

Besides *mahalla*, there is another social formation, called *gap*¹¹. From old times women in Uzbekistan used to gather together and solve the problems they face. This kind of gathering is very popular in Central Asia. Andrea Berg (2004) points out, that *gap* is an informal network in Uzbekistan, which serves as a space for the exchange of aid and experiences. It is also important to hold such meetings for women because almost all formal organizations were and are headed by a man, which is why the gatherings are psychologically and socially beneficial for women. Women who are enrolled in *gap* have to pay small amount of money for their membership, varying according to the income and living standard.

Many activists tend to compare *gap* with an NGO, however there are strong differences. NGOs are dependent on the foreign funding while *gap* exists due to the resources of its members (Abramson 2006). As *gaps* do not have access to Western donors, they are separated from their influence, thus do not carry the “feminist” ideology. Consequently, people trust *gap* more than NGO.

¹¹ Translated from Farsi: *gap* is talk

Chapter 4: Government as an instrument of violence towards women

Throughout the empirical analysis I will show how the state abuses women's rights in Bukhara and describe the interplay of the three actors involved in the process of regulating the gender problem: the state, the *mahalla* and the NGO. There is a clash between the *mahalla* and NGO in problem solving issues, which is going to be explored in the following chapters.

The transition period of 1991 introduced a different structure of a political system in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The following reforms were made in order to step on the path of independent development. The creation of democratic institutions, such as parties was one of the priorities of the state apparatus and the establishment of the free market assumed the improvement of the economic conditions in the country. The transition assumed the move from the past towards the liberal democratic principles. However, these attempts did not occur without encumbrances. The open market economy is a confusing phenomenon in Uzbekistan, because the state controls the market and sets restrictions to establish private enterprises. Social problems, such as inequality, gender based violence and migration appeared soon enough after state officials declared an independent and “outstanding” path of development in the country. As time has shown, to transition to modern development became more complex than expected due to the clash of traditional and modern institutions of power.

In the following paragraphs I would like to explore the dimensions in which the state engages in violent actions towards women in Bukhara:

- 1) Coerced sterilization of women
- 2) Restriction on free movement
- 3) Forceful exploitation

4.1 Coerced Sterilization of Women

“The government supports women very much...we don't have any problems in our society...”
(Excerpt from the interview with *mahalla* representative Dilnora, 32 years old).

This phrase explains the stagnancy and the unwillingness of the government to react to the problems in Uzbek society. Moreover, the government uses its policies as a tool for creating the instabilities and disturbances that promote an unjust role for women. In the next paragraphs I will discuss how the gender component is incorporated into the politics of the state.

One of the ways the government influences the attitude towards women is by regulating the birthrates. The population of Uzbekistan grew differently according to the various circumstances. The population rate has always been high, however in 2009 the rate reached a highpoint, thus terrifying the political and social systems of the republic. Therefore, the government took on the task to slow the growing birthrates. The decision was issued to implement a policy of voluntary sterilization of women above the age of 35, which then turned into coerced sterilization. A similar campaign was enforced in the early 1990s, however after resistance from the population within the capital city Tashkent, it was eliminated. After several years the president Islam Karimov decided to implement the policy again. On February 15, 2010 the Health Ministry issued decree # 40, which states about the procedure of the VSS (voluntary surgical sterilization) and describes “hysterectomies as a safe and effective form of contraception if performed properly and orders provincial health officials to offer voluntary surgical contraception at hospitals. The hysterectomies, which involve the partial removal of the uterus, should be conducted only by experienced physicians, free of charge, and with the consent of the patient.” The government selected the regions where it could meet as little resistance as possible. Thus, the population of Bukhara became the target of the revived state policy. The main justification for the policy was the cost savings of performing the surgery verses paying the social support package for the mothers and newborns.

The crucial fact here is not so much the intention, but rather the reality of the process itself and how the medical personnel performed when the first wave of sterilization came into force.

We were in the big bus going to the *kishlaks*¹². The sanitary conditions did not bother anyone, we had to work without any investigations of the patient. The crew had nurses who sometimes forgot to tell the women about the consequence of the surgery. Of course such kind of surgeries did not end well and women had bleedings as consequences. So, these were the unsuccessful attempts of the government to stop births. However the sterilization is also not a relief. Let me tell you how the process is going on. From my personal experience I want to tell you that every doctor should force at least two women in one month to make a surgery. If a doctor doesn't do so he will have problems, such as fine, or even withdrawal from the job. (Excerpt from the interview with gynecologist Umida, 54 years old)

The law is not a good solution to the problem of overpopulation in Uzbekistan, because of the way it is implemented. Besides the unsanitary conditions provided by government run hospitals the policy also is an extreme violation of women's rights because in many instances the consent of the patient is not obtained in order for the doctors to meet quota. Also, the law damages family relations, since most of the surgeries are performed secretly to prevent the families from finding out.

If the woman agrees to do so, it is kept in secret. Nobody should know, especially the husband and the mother-in-law. If somebody finds out, there will be a clash, a conflict. (Excerpt from the interview with Umida, 54 years old).

Different organizations, such as *mahalla* and women's work places, provide support for the governmental policy by verifying the documents that ensure the surgery has been done. The following excerpt from the interview tells a story of a woman who had to have a surgery done in order to get a job.

I wanted to apply for the job, since my husband's salary was not enough for our family. When I came there, the director asked me to show the document which states that I cannot have children anymore. So, I did this surgery, and got the job. My husband found out and divorced me. He wanted to have a son. (Excerpt from the interview with Muhlisa, 34 years old)

The law sets the threshold of 35 years of age arbitrarily and is therefore senseless. In Uzbekistan it is common for women to have at least three children before reaching the age of 35 so that the aim of reducing the number of children is not achieved through this policy. Instead

¹² Translated from Uzbek: *kishlak* is village

this law is an extreme violation of women's reproductive rights because it controls women's personal choice.

I would never want to have this surgery done. I have three children now, but who knows what happens. One of my friends told me the story that our neighbor's house got on fire and her children died. Of course she wanted to have kids, but our government does not give this opportunity...what should we do? (Excerpt from the interview with Nodira, 29 years old).

By implementing this policy the Uzbek government violates not only the rights of women who are supposed to undergo the surgery but also the doctors, who execute the policy under a strict quota control of the officials. The reality of this law is that women end up caught in the crossfire of both the states demographically driven ideals and the patriarchal family's expectations.

4.2 Restriction of Free Movement

According to the Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." Along with the international obligations, the Constitution of Uzbekistan, Article 29 states that "a citizen of the Republic of Uzbekistan has the right to freedom of movement across the state, to enter the Republic of Uzbekistan and exit from it, except for in cases restricted by law." In Uzbekistan, the personal freedom of an individual is restricted by the passport reform¹³, introduced which clearly states that "citizens of Uzbekistan should pass the passport control and have an exit visa, which is valid for two years, and guarantees the right to leave the country." Obviously, the Uzbek government violates not only international obligations but also its own Constitution.

¹³ President I.Karimov's decree on the passport system in the Republic of Uzbekistan, effective as of 23 December 1994

In 2008 the president of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov issued a decree “On combating trafficking in humans”. Three years later, on 1 April 2011 the local administration of the Bukhara region issued an amendment to the decree, which stated that every woman, aged 16 to 35 years must have a written permission of her parents or husband to leave the country¹⁴.

In brief, a woman has no right to decide whether she wants to leave the country or not, however the local administration states that this is the right way to combat human trafficking and prostitution. This is how one of the respondents explains the practical problem.

I am 24 years old and I study in Russia, getting my bachelors. I came here to visit my family and wanted to extend my visa to leave the country. But currently I have major problems, because I need my parent's permission to leave Uzbekistan. My parents are divorced, and I have a legal document, however the local administration does not want to take it into consideration. They say that I need to find my father and get his permission but I have no idea where he is, because my parents divorced long time ago. I cannot leave the country now, I missed my classes in my school, I don't know what to do. (Excerpt from the interview with student Nigina, 24 years old)

The poverty in which people live in the Uzbekistan provinces, such as Bukhara, leads many parents to approve of their daughters being engaged in prostitution and permit them go abroad to work so the family can receive remittances.

The government tries to fight with prostitution..This is reasonable..I am working in the kindergarten as a director and every week we have a gathering in the local administration building.. We gathered couple of days ago and the main question was that about eight thousand girls from Bukhara were returned from the United Arab Emirates, where they were working illegally as prostitutes. The saddest fact here that most of them were 14-17 years old..Now we are obliged to provide psychological and medical help to them. (Excerpt from the interview with director of the kindergarten Galina, 47 years old).

The government seeks the easy way out in combating social and economic problems by violating the rights of its citizens. Most attempts to approach state officials result in more misunderstandings and greater danger for the victims of their repressive politics.

4.3 Exploitation

Uzbekistan is the largest cotton producer in the Central Asian region. According to the Uzbekistan statistical committee (2007) the country holds the fifth position in producing and the second position in exporting cotton in the world.

¹⁴ The Decree issued 1 April 2011 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Bukhara Region

Each year, the government and local administrations organize a cotton season, which starts in September and ends in November. The exploitation of women during the cotton season is a widespread phenomenon in the periphery of Uzbekistan. Following the president's decree about forced cotton gathering, the local government administration of Bukhara sets strict quotas for local communities. Due to labor migration to Russia and Kazakhstan, men comprise the least part of cotton gatherers. Women are the majority of the population who participate in the cotton gathering and comprise up to 75 % of cotton gathering population (Alimjanova 2002).

In the following interview a doctor explains how she is torn between her regular work and following the state's orders.

I gather cotton every year...I am a doctor and obviously don't have to do that, but I cannot refuse because I am afraid to lose my job. The local administration tells us to close the hospital for the period of cotton season because all doctors are there, gathering. But what the patients should do? And if I don't want to go due to the health problems, I am not that young as you see, I have to pay. (Excerpt from the interview with doctor Saodat, 57 years old).

Besides the cotton season, there are many *hashars*¹⁵ happening twice or three times a week. The women whose positions are paid from the state budget (doctors, nurses, teachers) end up cleaning the city streets for free.

¹⁵ Translated from Uzbek: *hashar* is cleaning

Chapter 5: *Mahalla* and its Gender Policy

“Your homeland begins with *mahalla*”
Uzbek proverb

Mahalla and women’s nongovernmental organizations react differently to the government policies that were described in the previous sections. The *mahalla* supports the government and leaves almost no space for the NGO intervention. The policy and intervention of *mahalla* into the gender arena is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Throughout this research I have referred to *mahalla* as the traditional institution, which stands for the fundamental unit of Uzbek society. Along with promoting *mahalla* as a traditional institution, the Uzbek government supports it as a decentralized structure of governance, providing the population the right for decision-making. There are now approximately 12,000 *mahallas* in Uzbekistan, each containing between 150 and 150,000 households, and 65 *mahallas* in Bukhara (Human Rights Watch Report 2003)

The Uzbekistan law states that citizens have a constitutional right for self-governance through local gatherings. After Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991 *mahalla* was given a lot of privileges, such as control over population and some decision-making processes.

The secretary and the chairmen of the *mahalla* receive their salaries from the government while the other staff members are volunteers. The staff also collects money from the community for specific occasions, such as maintenance works and seasonal celebrations. The funding that is given to *mahalla* by the government for the general population is often kept in the bank and cannot be used by *mahalla* staff. In order to access the funds the staff must navigate a series of bureaucratic procedures that eventually require the consent of the local government officials. In essence the staff is merely an advisory board to the local government because they are at mercy of the officials. The pretention of being the autonomous form of self-governance permits *mahalla* the possibility to request financial support from international organizations that seek to

promote the “civil society” in Uzbekistan, yet in reality the donors’ money is flowing into the government’s budget.

Mahalla gives support for women in terms of the social support package for the newborn. The amount ranges from 30,000 sum (\$12 US dollars) to 100,000 sum (\$42 US dollars) per month. This amount is not enough even to buy the basic necessities for the child. The package is only given to those women who have had the sterilization surgery and do not intend to have more than three children. Along with the social package, *mahalla* supports poor families by giving away old clothes. Not all families are eligible for getting this as well, because the final decision is made by *mahalla*.

Although little material support is given, *mahalla* is a convenient conveyor of traditional norms. For example, *mahalla* encourages the premarital investigation of the “cleanness” of the bride, a highly subjective tradition that seeks to find out whether a girl is a virgin or not. If the bride is suspected not to be “clean”, she might never get married and live a life in shame. The groom’s family, especially the mother-in-law, demands such kind of investigation, partly because of the norms dictated by the *mahalla*.

Thus, *mahalla* is an addition to the governmental tools of violence. Regardless of its policies, women still tend to refer to the *mahalla* in cases of violence in their families. The tradition of “worshipping the husband and father and the state” does not give the woman a chance to go to the crisis center or women’s NGO. The *mahallas* and NGOs have a slight hint of cooperation, however *mahalla* representatives do not report the cases of violence to the crisis centers.

Chapter 6: Crisis Center “Oydin Nur” and its Gender Policy

The majority of population perceives the NGOs in Uzbekistan as outsiders. Here we have to take into consideration the fact that an NGO as a formation is relatively new for Uzbekistan as well as for other post-Soviet states. The activity of women’s organizations is perceived as the emergence of feminism, the relation to which is quite ambiguous.¹⁶ The misunderstanding of women’s organizations’ work is caused by the lack of education, or from the other side, to the poor performance of the NGOs work and their limited cooperation with the local community and the government. In Uzbekistan non-governmental organizations are a relatively new phenomenon and have provoked suspicion on the part of both local and governmental officials, because outside forces can be perceived as aggressive.

The organization Oydin Nuri¹⁷ in Bukhara runs both the crisis center and the shelter. It was introduced in 1999 under the initiative of the teachers from the Institute of Higher Education in Bukhara and serves the efforts of civil society to implement a new method in conflict prevention. The Chairwoman, Mavlida Salikhova, who used to be university teacher, decided to establish her career by being women’s rights activist, runs the Oydin Nuri. The center also has a lawyer, psychologist and an advisor on women’s rights. The staff of Oydin Nuri is voluntary and receives no compensation for their work. International organizations such as the World bank, the Asian Development Bank fund the programs. The stated mission of the organization found in their year 2000 handbook on page 24 is the following:

- Supports, creates and organizes programs on protection of girls and women against violence
- Provides psychological and law consultations to women
- Leads seminars and training to increase human rights and law literacy among women
- Creates informational products on violence issues

¹⁶ The UNDP Report 2008

¹⁷ Translated from Uzbek: Oydin Nuri is the light of the moon

- Provides private telephone service for women who experience violence in families or neighborhood. The service is provided by highly qualified specialists who render psychological and law consultations to the women

Oydin Nuri's mission is to raise the status of the women in society. Because of the official denial of the women's abuse by the state, the crisis center has been continually overcoming hardships. This is how the Oydin Nuri's chair, Mavlida Salikhova explains the problem.

We are not favored by the government. We try to do what we can, but sometimes it is not enough. We have hard times defining who we are, because we name ourselves crisis center, however for the government there is no crisis. I am waiting for the time when we could interfere into the policies of the government and at least give recommendations for improvement (Excerpt from the interview with Oydin Nuri's chair Mavlida, 59 years old).

The government is mistrustful towards the activity of the civil society organizations, such as Oydin Nuri.

The organization tries to establish partnerships with other NGOs as well as with traditional institutions in Bukhara and all over the country. However these attempts are not welcomed by the government, therefore, the initiatives of the NGO to publicly establish its opinion are restricted.

Chapter 7: The Clash between the Traditional and Nontraditional Leadership

In this chapter I will emphasize the interplay of the traditional and nontraditional powers. The traditional powers are represented by the state and *mahalla*, and civil society organizations are nontraditional affiliations perceived to be breaking values of the national identity of the population. After Uzbekistan gained independence the advocacy was imposed by a variety of international and nongovernmental organizations, however this represented a great challenge for them to set a stable ground for the further development. Under the regime of authoritarianism, the possibility for the stable existence of NGOs is very low, because the authoritarian structures penetrate into and transform their evolution. Thus, it can be assumed that there is little possibility for the nontraditional structures to appear on the local arena along with the indigenous power practices.

Institutions such as *mahalla* are supported by the government in a way that it perceives them as “democratic institutions” which help to bring the country to the international arena. The legal message of the government is supplemented in the traditional community organizations. The President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov in his book “Uzbekistan: National Independence, Economy, Politics and Ideology” states

Mahalla is an important feature of our society that is based on the idea of collectivism, the unity of communal interests and the priority of public opinion. Therefore, *mahallas* play a major part in democratizing society and realizing its main principles, foremost that of social justice. Today, there is no other entity more knowledgeable about the financial situation of local families and their spiritual and cultural interests. *Mahallas* are the fairest and the most credible mechanisms for social support of the population and should become a reliable support and effective instrument of reform in our society (Karimov 1998:54).

The President gave great praise to the *Mahalla* because as an institution it manages civic responsibilities under the control of the government. Using the “spiritual and cultural interests” in Uzbek society, the government is able to further proliferate its preferred stereotypes.

The subordinate position of *mahalla* towards the politics of the government illustrates the reluctance of this organization to perform certain measures against violent actions of the state. The representatives of *mahalla* do not usually report the cases of violence to the crisis centers, or women's organizations, which are oriented towards mutual support and interaction. The *mahalla* is a mechanism of legal and authorized tool of violence, which the state uses, relying on the fact that people trust it and would not use supplementary forms of obtaining justice, such as nongovernmental organizations.

Why do we need somebody to dictate what we should do? We know our people and our mission is to support them..The *mahalla* is what is needed for our people and especially our women. The government will always choose what is better for the society..."(Excerpt from the interview with *mahalla* representative Gulnora, 31 years old).

The *mahalla* representatives tend to think that the ideas of the liberal democratic institutions such as NGOs poison the local mentality and destructively influence the situation. On the contrary, the nongovernmental organization Oydin Nuri supports the initiative of autonomous existence and providing women help on the side of the neutrality towards the government by advocating for their rights.

The *mahalla* claims to be the neo-traditional community, independent of the government, and existing to close the gaps in civil society discourse. As *mahallas* gained support in society its opportunities for enlargement grew significantly. The *mahalla* chairman or chairwoman are never elected by the community itself but appointed by the local administration, called *hokimiyat*. That being said, *mahalla* is under the total control of the executive branch of power. In the absence of control by the external forces, *mahalla* representatives easily manipulate the amount of social package for the poor. The right to distribute the package gives *mahalla* privileges to control the behavior of the population forcing people to choose to either give up their rights or be withdrawn from receiving money.

According to the code of *mahalla*, this institution is devoted to the support the local community, and to maintain the stability in the neighborhood. However, women's rights are cast aside and not considered as crucial. Thus, the *mahalla* is responsible for violating women's rights by implementing the government's policies on the local level. This means that *mahalla* has transformed into the government's watchdog from its roots as simply a neighborhood committee.

Currently, there is little chance that *mahalla* would fight against the government to promote women's rights in Uzbekistan, due to the fact that *mahalla* is required to assist the government in carrying out its functions. If somebody in the neighborhood would speak out against the politics of the government, that person risks losing their job and even their personal freedom. Women, who are not satisfied with the activities of the government, cannot report to *mahalla*. The only activity the *mahalla* can perform without the governmental permission is assisting in weddings and funerals.

As it was mentioned above, *mahalla* is not eager to cooperate with the local women's organizations for two major reasons, money and politics. The *mahallas* are in direct competition with other local charities for funding from the international donors. Also, a partnership with a controversial local women's organization could result in a loss of trust from the government. The women's organization in Bukhara Oydin Nuri is willing to discuss the problem of violation of women's rights by state and *mahalla*, however they are restricted from doing so. The control from the government and its agencies is spread over the women's NGOs and does not let them perform their work properly.

We exist due to the permission of the state...We try to send the message to the international organizations about how the government abuses the rights of women in Bukhara, but our hands are tied and there is no possibility to do so. (Excerpt from the interview with NGO representative Munira, 58 years old).

The Oydin Nuri along with the international development agencies try to make suggestions for the improvement of the women's situation in Bukhara, however these reports go

through the deliberate checking from the governmental agencies. The women's NGO have to choose the slogans that are politically and culturally correct in order to reach the audience. The *mahalla* and the government are not willing to see and appreciate the birth of the civil society in the country. The state officials do not welcome the women's nongovernmental organizations and are blame them for the bringing "feminist" ideas to the society and breaking traditional cultural norms. The liberal ideas that the organizations propose are seen as a threat to national mentality.

Conclusion

The research has proven that women undergo abuse by the Uzbek government in Bukhara which implements the policies of coerced sterilization, restriction of free movement and exploitation. The main obstacles for women to resist the policies of the government are the traditional society and the authoritarian regime of the state. In addition to women's rights abuse, the traditionalism and authoritarianism impede the work of women's nongovernmental organizations. The position of the women's nongovernmental organizations vis-à-vis the *mahalla* is relatively low since the latter is under the governmental protection. Mahalla does not provide the proper advocacy for women who suffer from the governmental abuse since it is subordinate to the government. That being said, mahalla is not a civil society institution, because it is not autonomous and does not influence the state policies.

Neither *mahalla* nor laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan protect women from the abuse by the government. The critical fact about Uzbek laws is that they violate the women's civil liberties. The research has shown that there are considerable discrepancies between what is shown on paper and what is the reality of the situation. The way the laws are executed goes against most of the International Conventions, additionally to the main document of the Uzbek Republic – the 1991 Constitution.

The government does not take into account the democratic development of the society based the civil expressions of free will and the freedom of expression. As such, women's rights in Uzbekistan attracted significant attention from local and international NGOs who designed projects but could hardly implement them together with the government and local communities. Any attempts by nongovernmental organizations to publicly discuss the women's rights in the country are banned by the state officials. Because of this, the NGOs adopt specific slogans in order to be culturally and politically correct. The adoption of such slogans sometimes let the organization reach their audience. The traditional institution *mahalla* has been given more

privileges than the liberal civil society organizations. The government pretends to have the sustainable civil society, relying on mahalla and referring to it as to the “neo-traditional” community. Yet the efforts of the state and mahalla to show the international community their outstanding achievements in bringing democracy to the region do not find similar ground with the NGOs and grass root organizations.

The one sure conclusion that comes from the analysis of materials is that women’s rights abuse is real in the Uzbek society and it is very hard to fight because the government assuming the role of father of the nation reinforces ancient family traditions, myths and stereotypes of the role of women. As long as traditionalism thrives in Uzbek society and is present in the government’s structure, women’s rights will remain insignificant.

Recommendations

The problem of women's rights abuse and the barriers to NGO participation in Uzbek society could be helped using the following recommendations:

1. Culturally – the women's organizations should adapt to the local cultural context while still trying to implement the advocacy methods that are better than the status quo. Although it seems impossible that the Uzbek culture would change and accept all the innovations that are brought by the organizations the best method for change in this situation is to take small steps in right direction.
2. Politically – the success of the policy implementation depends on how the organizations are perceived therefore they should have the legitimate status of crisis centers and not hide their activities under the umbrella of politically appropriate slogans. The crisis centers should publicly lobby for democratic and transparent interactions with the government.
3. Internationally – the government should let the women's organizations obtain grants that are given by the international organizations. The international assistance should directly go to the organizations that are trying to raise the opportunities for women and eradicate the women's rights abuse. Also this would allow international partnership to develop organically that could provide stability and credibility.

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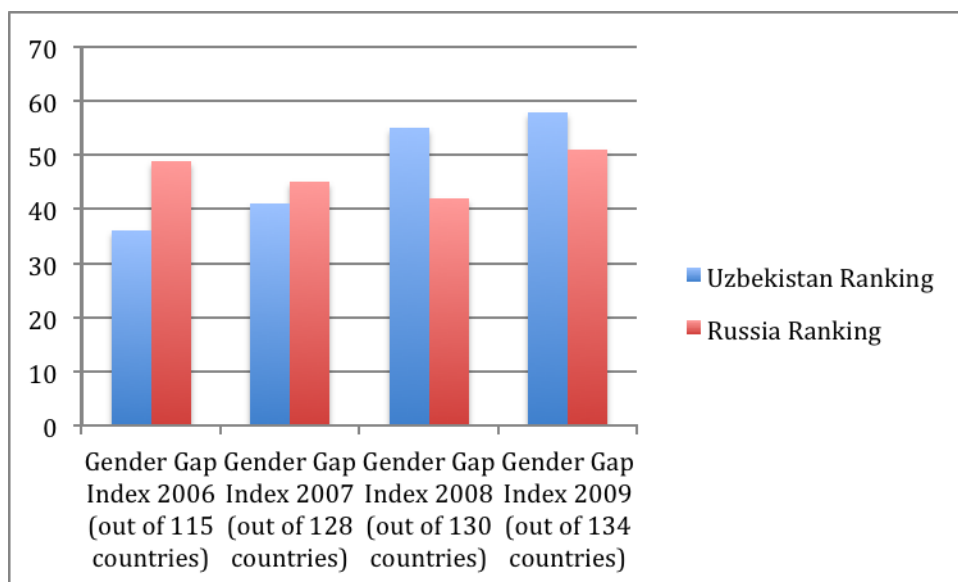
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Appendix 1

Comparison of gender gap: Uzbekistan and Russia

Source: <https://members.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2009.pdf>



Appendix 2

Human Development Index 2011

Source: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/UZB.html>

