

Impact of the financial crisis on women in Central Asia

Impacts on women of the global economic and financial crisis are yet not differentiated and thus are not addressed. Cut in trade, leading to cut of textile production with majority female employees, reduction of remittance is leading to increase of their job insecurity, significant reduction of women's income, increase of their vulnerability to greater gender discrimination, to reduction in access to education and health services. Women entrepreneurs have fewer opportunities to get access to financial resources. Number of women in decision-making bodies remains low. The regional politics is not addressing women's concerns and challenges created by the global financial crisis. Low level of attention to women's status in State plans for recovery, lack of data collection on women's status, of special stimulus packages for women, of special funds for supporting women from vulnerable groups such as rural women or women and families living on remittance, low funding of State National plans for gender equality is a result of the weak state machinery for gender equality, which should play a key role in regulating or diminishing impact of crisis on women. Poverty Reduction Strategies don't include compensation Negative tendencies in Central Asia remain in 2010¹. Impacts on women of the global economic and financial crisis are yet not differentiated and thus are not addressed.

Unemployment is one of the biggest challenges. In Tajikistan loss of job is mentioned as one of the consequences of the global crisis by 30% of households, and only half of the members able to work have jobs². In Kazakhstan. in the second quarter of 2009 the number of unemployed females increased by approximately 31.4% more than the number of unemployed males with respect to the previous year³. In Kyrgyzstan women lose jobs in garment sector, in trade sphere. There is no real statistic data showing a scale of this tendency.

Lack of jobs is leading to labor migration. Scale of migration in Isfana town in Batken province of Kyrgyzstan is dramatic. Nazym, a woman from Isfana, told that on her street out of 53 households 51 have from one to five family members as migrants. During the last years in 43 families from one till five family members returned home because of reduction of jobs and employment opportunities in migration⁴.

This led to severe reduction of remittance. For all Central Asian countries remittance is playing a significant role in economy of families. Decline of the remittances flow is affecting families back home, mostly poor women and children. Reduction of remittance in Tajikistan on 35% in 2009⁵ has especially beaten women-headed households.

Reduction of the remittance as one of the major family income leads to reduction of poor household spending – women will continue to compensate for these losses with their own (unpaid) labor, losses in career, and the burden on them will continue to increase. All this leads to greater income insecurity and increased burdens of family care.

¹ "Main Macroeconomic Indicators of the Commonwealth Countries." *Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS*.

² Bozrikova, Tatiana. Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Households in the Republic of Tajikistan (based on Results of Survey).

³ Gavrilovic, Maja, Caroline Harper, Nicola Jones, Rachel Marcus, Paola Pereznieto, and Karlagash Binazarova. "Impact of the Economic Crisis and Food and Fuel Price Volatility on Children and Women in Kazakhstan."

⁴ Jalilova, Nazym. "Remittance and Migration in Isfana." Personal interview. 6 June 2010.

⁵ Bozrikova, Tatiana. Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Households in the Republic of Tajikistan (based on Results of Survey).

In Tajikistan research of households in crisis period showed households were reducing consumption on 20%⁶. About 30% of households in Tajikistan are borrowing money and have debts. In some provinces of Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan) 62% of households borrowed money for food, in the capital of Tajikistan 67.2% of households rarely eat meat in the last six months⁷.

Kazakhstan, Central Asia's largest economy, is not taking any steps for protection of women affected by crisis. In Kazakhstan the share of the poor represented by female-headed households increased by 10%, pointing to an increasing vulnerability of female-headed households⁸. The problem is particularly acute where incomes are already low, which is particularly common in: large families (with many children), families with disability in the household, single parent families (especially female-headed ones), families with disabled children and migrant families⁹. Common coping strategies in crisis-affected households include reducing expenditure on food and shifting consumption patterns to eat cheaper, less nutritious food; cutting back on medicines, self-treating or delaying seeking medical attention; getting into debt; and taking on additional informal income-generating activities. In areas where water quality is poor, people indicated that they may start to cut back on bought water¹⁰.

Low wages in the situation of prices increase is another problem. Women work for less money than men. Report on Impact of the Economic Crisis and Food and Fuel Price Volatility on Children and Women in Kazakhstan (2010) showed that because of the crisis women face discrimination in terms of pay and employment, women's earnings are 62% of men's earnings¹¹. Even in sectors with a high share of female employment (health care, education and public administration), male labor is paid 18% to 28% higher than female labor¹².

Loss of the value of local money for women mean losses in purchasing power and it leads to significant worsening of quality of food, access to healthcare, increase of homecare work, and care for children, elderly, and sick family members. For example, Uzbekistan devalued the sum by around 15% in May 2009¹³. In Kazakhstan Inflation, projected to be 11%¹⁴. Kazakhstan had decline in living standards of poor. Families are already experiencing declining living standards, owing partly to inflation, the devaluation of the tenge (Kazakhstan currency), rise in prices of essential commodities, and reduced income or loss of income. In Kyrgyzstan minimal wage for 2010 is 500 soms (11 US dollar)¹⁵ and one kilogram of meat is about 150-250 soms. For this high altitude country meat is a necessary food item, reduced meat consumption leads to anemia among poor women in Kyrgyzstan. This is a special danger for pregnant and lactating women.

In Central Asia poor women suffer also from lack of state budget for childcare facilities. For the example in Kyrgyzstan number of preschool institutions dropped from 1,696 in 1991 to 412 in 2006. Today, for example, in one small town Isfana in the south of Kyrgyzstan out of 12 kindergartens only two operate now. Lack of kindergartens impacts on women's household duties, increases physical, moral, financial, psychological burden on women.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gavrilovic, Maja, Caroline Harper, Nicola Jones, Rachel Marcus, Paola Perezniето, and Karlagash Binazarova. "Impact of the Economic Crisis and Food and Fuel Price Volatility on Children and Women in Kazakhstan."

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mitra, Pradeep K. "Impact and Policy Responses: Caucasus, Central Asia and Mongolia."

¹⁴ "Global Crisis Forces Kazakhstan to Cut 2009 Budget." Asia News. 17 Apr. 2009.

¹⁵ Law on Republican Budget of Kyrgyz Republic for 2010 and Forecast for 2011-2012 from 29 January 2010

Shrinking opportunities for decent employment, poverty, lack of financial resources available for households led to increase number of rural girls and young women entering sex industry in the capital of Kyrgyzstan. There is no statistics but conversations with women in shelter "Asteria" for sexual workers show that rural girls are visibly more now in this sector since 2008¹⁶. There are even cases when an under aged girl is supporting a family with her earning. "The women of middle and half-a-middle class were added on the turf. The reason is social economical crisis and the problems accompanying to it – bankruptcy of enterprises, joblessness, decrease of incomes, necessity to pay credit interests, which was taken before in the period of economic growth. It can't be measured on how massive it is, because such statistics simply doesn't exist, but there are prostitutes, who returning \$2000 bank loans by instrumentality of their bodies¹⁷."

Economic, financial, social status of women, their wellbeing and human rights are worsening not only due to the financial crisis at the global level, but due to the internal instability or poor governance. For example in Kyrgyzstan political turmoil and heavy ethnic conflicts in April and June 2010 dramatically worsened women's challenges. Kyrgyzstan Ministry of economic regulation announced in July 2010¹⁸ that economic losses in southern provinces because of ethnic conflicts comprise 25.4% of the GDP¹⁹.

Twenty-eight-year-old Bagdadgul lived in a refugee camp in the agricultural field in a suburb of Osh city in a synthetic tent without bottom in +30C temperature with other 20 people in this tent. She is seven months pregnant, she ran with her two children: a 6.5-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. She is one of 450 Kyrgyz villagers from a village Jany Turmush, Kara Suu district, Osh province, who ran during ethnic conflict in a desperate fear of attacks from Uzbeks. When she felt bad and had high blood pressure she went to a maternity house in Osh city in Cheremushki. In this maternity house she – a refugee woman – was asked by a doctor to bring her linen, to buy medicine for her kidneys, and was given also a list of medicines to buy, and also she was not given any food and any treatment. So she left this maternity house and went back to the refugee camp. In the camp where I met her she was drying old mattresses, given as a charity for her, the whole night it was heavily raining, the charity tent was just a symbolic shelter with all floor full of water, she and her children slept whole night on wet mattresses without linen, all their shoes and clothes were wet, but luckily the day was hot and they dried them. In the camp there was no toilet, no kitchen, no food supply. She is a poor rural Kyrgyz woman, without social insurance, without any anti-crisis assistance, forced to leave her house to find a safe place for her children and taking care of them.

Sairash, a 34-year-old woman with two children on 11th June ran from her apartment during the ethnic conflict and she found only a sleeping place in nights in relative's house in suburb of Osh. Her husband lost his job because Osh road police department where he worked was fired during the conflict, she has no job too, and they don't have any savings. They were scared to go back to the rented apartment and besides they had no money to pay for this apartment. Now she and her two small children sleep during the nights with her far relatives and during the day she is

¹⁶ Anonymous Sexual Workers (clients in Bishkek Shelter). "Changes in Life of Sexual Workers during Last Two Years." Personal interview.

¹⁷ "Crisis and Commercial Sex." *Better.kz*. 8 Aug. 2009.

¹⁸ "Ministry of Economic Regulation of Kyrgyz Republic Has Corrected Anticipated Indicators of Socio-economic Development for 2010 and Forecasts for 2011-2013." Ministry of Economic Regulation of Kyrgyz Republic.

¹⁹ Ibid.

in search for any food to give to her children. I met her waiting to get food from humanitarian assistance in a refugee camp in Kirpichnya district of Osh city.

Kyrgyzstan province Issyk-Kul depends heavily on tourism. Political unrest led to significant reduction of household income from tourism in 2010 in Kyrgyzstan. Issyk-Kul provinces' households were making their major earnings for the whole year during three months of summer. Altynai, a woman in Issyk-Kul village, who gives for rent her rooms for 300 soms in normal years, now searches desperately clients for 100 soms. Her garden with fruits was also bringing her income, but again she has no clients to sell her fruits.

Trade in Kyrgyzstan is significantly reduced in June 2010²⁰ in comparison with June 2009 on almost 35%. Osh trade turnover reduced on more than 52%, Djalalaabad turnover accordingly on 24.1%, and in Batken province – on 24.6%²¹. Trade decreased much more and women suffered from this, because in the retail trade women comprise about 70% of all working in this sector (220,000 people)²², and an April-May 2010 brought a 55% reduction of trade turnover with income losses for women.

About 50 women working in small markets in Osh – a southern city of Kyrgyzstan – for example had to go to a protest to a Municipal administration on 24th June 2010 with demands to open markets where they make earning for their families. Osh markets were not operating more than two weeks and women working in small markets were left without any financial means of survival. Some of them had practically nothing to eat. They were ready to risk in time of emergency in order to bring food to their homes.

For example, **Larisa**, a 38-year-old single mother, a woman selling warm imported garment from Korea in the Dordoi market in Bishkek, lost 10% of her income and had to fire one of the two sale staff in October 2009. She works 50% in wholesale and 50% in retail sphere. Her colleagues in the wholesale rows had 50% cuts. She had to reduce working time: during December 2009-February 2010 she worked half day instead of the whole working day. Larisa worries about the future work because of the high rate of the US dollar to the local currency, and possible changes in the tax fees. In June after the political turmoil and ethnic conflicts she didn't make orders to Korea because she was not sure how things will go in the country. Some of her wholesale clients are from the South of Kyrgyzstan – Kara-Suu district, and after June events it was not clear how trade will go with them. Larisa annually gives her container from April till end of July of mid-August for rent for USD 800. This year because of the political turmoil, she has to reduce this renting price to USD250 in April and in June even for this price there were no traders to take it.

Not only foreign and internal trade was touched. Official data shows tremendous decline in production of the sewing industry in Kyrgyzstan – industry with 90% of women workers²³ – June 2009 production comprises only 59.8 % of the volume of June 2008²⁴.

²⁰ June 2010 in Kyrgyzstan heavy ethnic conflicts in Osh and Djalalabad provinces.

²¹ "Ministry of Economic Regulation of Kyrgyz Republic Gives Express Information of National Statistical Committee on Main Republican Socio-economic Indicators for January-June 2010." Ministry of Economic Regulation of Kyrgyz Republic.

²² Panomarev, S. "Role of Women in Trade in Kyrgyzstan." Personal interview. 26 June 2010.

²³ Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2009.

²⁴ Socio-economic Status of Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2008.

From global and national crises suffer not only poor women; women in business also lose as economic development agents. Sewing industry's production suffered from this unrest too: border with Kazakhstan, a gate to Kazakhstan market, was closed for industrial products since 8 April till July 2010. Stock grew and foreign orders on production of garment were reduced. Ninety eight percent of owners of sewing workshops in Kyrgyzstan are women. Women, who practically developed a new textile industry in Kyrgyzstan, made it a serious income generating activity with huge contribution to GDP, are not assisted by the State. The State Program of Entrepreneurship Development in Kyrgyz Republic for 2009-2011 is not sensitive to women's needs: it is not identifying any special steps for protection of women as vulnerable group to the impact of crisis. It doesn't mention support to the textile industry, where women are losing jobs or businesses and need more support. For example, about 70% of orders for garment were lost after April 2010 because Kazakhstan stopped making orders and Kyrgyzstan business women were not able to send even garments that were already produced for order²⁵. Stimulus package doesn't exist as a reality²⁶.

National statistical committee of Kyrgyzstan in its express information on 9th July 2010 on major indicators of the social and economic development doesn't include sewing industry at all, demonstrating zero attention to this women's business sphere.

Let me share some examples from a successful sewing shop where women didn't lose jobs.

Burul, a 42-year-old female, owner of the medium size sewing workshop, managed to find new orders from Russia to replace orders from Kazakhstan. Women comprise 95% of workers. Women have to be creative. So she kept number of working women and didn't really fire her female workers and kept salaries at the same level. She has not heard of any governmental support or any stimulus packages or measures for lessening her losses. State has not reacted on the reduction of orders anyway. Women from this business now expect one help from the state: opening of the border to industrial products. Women in her workshop earned in 2008 3000-4000 soms; in 2009 and 2010 earnings became 4000-5000 soms per month. Working women in her shop are from villages, they are coming to work just from street, without any training and women owners **train girls and spend a lot of resources to train them free of charge because** there are no vocational or any other training possibilities for her employees. **Women-workers don't have any signed contracts or labor agreements, they don't receive social protection.**

Sewing workshops don't have support for women-workers in times of crisis²⁷. Women-workers at periods when sewing workshop stops its work are not paid salary and any subsistence or allowance, they don't receive any social insurance, when women become pregnant – no money is paid and she is losing her job. Working hours are at least 12 hours and sometimes they work non-stop with few hours for sleep in the shop in order to earn money. Women's health is impacted by more working hours, increased family care burden – poor working women in garment industry simply don't have time for rest and leisure, increase in food prices leads to growing malnutrition and health deterioration.

Guljash, a 31 one year old woman worker in a sewing workshop has two children. In her family there are two working members and she supports six people with her money. She works from 8 AM till 9 PM with short 10-20 minutes intervals for eating. She has no paid vacation. In 2008 her monthly salary was 12,000 soms (Kyrgyzstan currency) or USD 270, and in 2009 it was 14,000 soms or USD 300. She is a migrant from a mountainous province Naryn.

²⁵ Ismailova, Burul. "Changes in Sewing Industry." Personal interview. 7 July 2010.

²⁶ Panomarev, S. "Role of Women in Trade in Kyrgyzstan." Personal interview. 26 June 2010.

²⁷ Ismailova, Burul. "Changes in Sewing Industry." Personal interview. 7 July 2010.

Another female worker in sewing workshop, Nazgul, is 23 years old, and she has one child. On her income she is supporting nine people in her family. In 2008 she earned monthly 6000 soms, in 2009 – 7000 soms and in 2010 – 10000 soms. She is from Chui province.

Aigul works in Bishkek in a small sewing workshop. This 28-year-old woman has two children, and she earns about 4000 soms (USD 90) monthly in 2010. She is also a migrant from other province in Kyrgyzstan, Issykul.

All these women-workers are internal migrants – meaning they don't have their own or their family's houses or apartments to live in and they need to pay rent for accommodation. From this money they also often send money for their parents in provinces.

Their employers don't pay for maternal leave, for social insurance, no vacation, no health care allowances. They consider full year employment even when they have to stop working for weeks or months when owners of the sewing shops don't have orders for garments from Russian and Kazakhstan, or other countries. Often women-workers have to work more than normal 12-13 hours per day, they stay 24 hours in the sewing shop and work 20 hours with four hours of sleep in the working space – this happens in times of quick and urgent orders when they earn more.

During instability of employment, when many sewing shops are closed, women have to quickly find another similar job.

All these female-workers reduce or cut spending on clothes, leisure, and self-care. Twenty percent of women lost jobs in their sector during 2008-2010.

The issue of impact on the global and national crisis on women is not discussed at all in Kyrgyzstan among state officials as well as among decision-making bodies in the business sector itself²⁸. Number of women in decision-making bodies remains low: in the Association of Businessmen of Kyrgyzstan out of 77 members only five are women and in the Coordination Council of this association out of 19 only five are women. In the Union of Entrepreneurs there no women in the leadership.

New country Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) of the Republic of **Tajikistan** developed in 2010 doesn't include compensation mechanism for the women's losses from the global financial and economic crisis. Anti-crisis Plan of Actions of the Government of Republic of Tajikistan 2010 doesn't include any significant measures for protection of population and poor people. This plan was also criticized for its lack of feasibility; state was not able to create planned 150,000 additional job places attractive for people²⁹. Kazakhstan has a well-established social assistance program and, as part of the crisis response, the number and size of benefits have been increased, including child benefit, birth payments, unemployment pay and TSA³⁰. **Kazakhstan's** Anti-Crisis Plan (ACP) excluded certain vulnerable groups, such as informal sector workers and migrants, from the program, and women may not benefit proportionately because the primary sectors where job creation is targeted (construction, communication and infrastructure) are male dominated³¹. Anti-Crisis Program of Kazakhstan allocated \$1 billion for credits to SMEs, but we see from the

²⁸ Panomarev, S. "Role of Women in Trade in Kyrgyzstan." Personal interview. 26 June 2010.

²⁹ Bozrikova, Tatiana. Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Households in the Republic of Tajikistan (based on Results of Survey).

³⁰ Gavrilovic, Maja, Caroline Harper, Nicola Jones, Rachel Marcus, Paola Perezniето, and Karlagash Binazarova. "Impact of the Economic Crisis and Food and Fuel Price Volatility on Children and Women in Kazakhstan."

³¹ Ibid.

report to UNICEF that “It is not clear, however, how accessible the loans are for small entrepreneurs, especially women in rural areas”³².

The regional politics is not addressing women’s concerns and challenges created by the global economic and financial crisis. Agenda of such meeting of the following regional bodies as III Astana Economic Forum, Summit of EurasES, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Community, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) don’t have any hint on women’s losses. At the regional level in Central Asia there is an intensive integration process but it excludes women’s issues.

Various international funds are in process of creation but national beneficiaries and national communities are not aware of them, and are not involved, and, consequently, they will be hardly useful for poor and vulnerable and for local business women because they are not based on local women’s needs assessment. “World Bank Group’s Gender Action Plan will allocate its financial resources in 2009 to assist in ensuring that WBG responses to the crisis maximize women’s income, especially in those countries where women and girls are most vulnerable to the effects of the crisis”³³ – Kyrgyzstan business women and their association for example are not aware of this plan. How WB will do its planned action without local women? The same is with the UNDP – Action plan for gender responsive crisis recovery at the country level. Where is money for **cushioning impact on poor women?**

Low level of attention to women’s status in State plans for recovery, lack of data collection on women’s status, of special stimulus packages for women, of special funds for supporting women from vulnerable groups such as rural women or women and families living on remittance, lack of funding of State National plans for gender equality is a result of the weak state machinery for gender equality, which could and should play a key role in regulating or diminishing impact of crisis on women. For example in Kyrgyzstan Country Development Strategy (CDS) for 2009-2011 only stated lack of coherence and integration of gender disaggregated indicators and importance of gender sensitive measures in sectoral politics and programs in Kyrgyzstan, and recognized formal not substantial approach to implementation of National Plan of Action from ministries and state agencies³⁴. CDS of the Kyrgyz Republic while including gender equality as a priority allocates no financial resources for gender equality.

It is obvious that women lose during the crisis because of their gender. Gender analysis of the global and current national crisis is essential for strengthening gender equality, which is more at risk now and for protecting women human rights. Stimulus measures, policy coordination and adjustments, and monitoring of systemic risks for maintaining financial stability of households, of poor urban and rural women are not in the real agenda of decision-makers in the region. You won’t see these combinations of word in policy dialogue.

Intersectionality of gender, income, poverty status if not addressed will be one of the growing factors that make women more vulnerable to the crisis and recession. In times of crises an urgent need in women in decision-making becomes obvious – patriarchal models of decision-making is blind and not capable to see and address such needs as women’s rights.

³² Gavrilovic, Maja, Caroline Harper, Nicola Jones, Rachel Marcus, Paola Perezniето, and Karlagash Binazarova. "Impact of the Economic Crisis and Food and Fuel Price Volatility on Children and Women in Kazakhstan."

³³ Buvinic, Mayra. "Impact of Financial Crisis on Women and Families."

³⁴ Kyrgyz Republic. Country Development Strategy (2009-2011). Bishkek, 2009.

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