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# TAJIK JOURNALISTS SHOULD MAKE UP THEIR OWN MIND ON GENDER ISSUES

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*Despite the presence of around 70 women's NGOs in the country, the Tajik men journalists show little interest and little understanding of gender issues.*

"Remove this gender off my wife's neck," was the riposte of a capital city journalist during the monitoring of gender issues reporting in Tajikistan's mass media. What was the reason for such a resolute riposte? On the surface, it is simple. The gender topic in Tajikistan's media has a 'one-way direction'; it has a more feminism rather than an impartial approach to current issues. Initially, 'genderization' has enveloped the female part of the population: this was facilitated by programmes of international and women's non-governmental organisations which, due to the republic's situation, took the reins of government into their hands, yet not without men's 'aid'.

## **NUMEROUS WIDOWS**

The republic's military events contributed to women movements' activation. Widows, now totalling around 25,000, have to head their families as well as those women whose husbands earn their living abroad or are unemployed. This is proven by the fact that some types of entrepreneurship, shuttle-trade in particular, have been developed by women. All these facts contributed to the growth of women's activities, and men, paradoxical as it is, remained aside. Indeed such a situation could not remain neglected by the strongest factor and caused a burst of indignation. This is testified by journalists' discussions which flared up on *Oila* newspaper pages and focused on woman's role in the society. I do not excuse those men whose stance appears patriarchal, but they are understandable. However, most of the articles on this theme belong to women journalists while their brothers-in-pen, the men, just neglect same. But why? Because, initially, the 'gender' concept was regarded as exclusively a women's issue; so it was exactly in this way that it was covered in the media. The trans-regional 'The Media and the Society' pilot project confirmed this.

## **WOMEN UNDER-REPRESENTED IN MEDIA**

On the one hand, this fact underlined the reason to hold a monitoring among journalists on how they report gender issues in Tajikistan's media and on the way they understand the issue. Journalists from all the regions were involved. On the other hand, it was supposed to initiate a concrete plan of working with journalists, taking into account the degree of journalistic level and understanding. It was revealed during the poll that women make up only about 30% of Tajikistan's mass media workers. Some regions do not have any at all; e.g. the Kulyab District has no women journalists and the picture is exactly the same in the regions under republican jurisdiction (Lenin, Gissar, Shakhrinaus and Tursunzade). The Sogdian Province, where there are about 20% of media women, ranks second after the capital. The lack of women journalists in the regions is explained by their remoteness from the centre and the lack of higher educational institutions. In addition, this job is still dangerous and, therefore, women do not dare undertake this 'men's job'. Besides that, journalism is not regarded as a prestigious job. Meanwhile, women are subject to genderization, but men are a race of their own. That is why virtually only women attend gender seminars held by different organisations.

**MALE JOURNALISTS HAVE TO MAKE UP THEIR MIND**

The next stage in journalists' work was a seminar for the capital city media on Gender Issues in the Media which took place in March. It was held by the Gender in Development NGO and supported by Great Britain's Know-How foundation. Unfortunately, women once again were in the majority, although initially the participation was predicted to be equal. What is it: the lack of understanding or the unwillingness to understand the issue? The latter is more likely. Today, more than 70 women's NGOs are operating in the republic while there is not one men's NGO. Who is to be blamed? Probably the men, journalists in particular, should reconsider their stance and decide whether or not to be with 'Gender'.