CLIMATE CHANGES: GENDER ASPECTS IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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We underscore that women have a vital role to play in achieving sustainable development. We recognize the leadership role of women and we resolve to promote gender equity and women empowerment and to ensure their full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all level.

Introduction

The Women’s Movement has become the most significant social movement of the 20th century. It was international cooperation, sharing of experience, and solidarity expressed through joint actions that helped accelerate the formation of the global women’s movement and ensure gradual integration into the international agenda of priority objectives aimed at the achievement of gender equality and equity through improvement of women’s condition. The most important international documents in the field include:

- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- Beijing Platform for Action (1995);
- 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace in the Twenty-first Century (2000);

Currently 187 countries have ratified the CEDAW Convention including Russia in 1981, while the USA still has not ratified. According to the UN more than 120 countries, with Russia being among them, adopted their Gender Equality Action Plans. Clearly, there can be no single universal and comprehensive instrument that would ensure the achievement of gender equality in every country. However, a well-organized women’s movement capable of articulating interests and concerns of women and transforming them into political demands is a necessary pre-requisite for the women’s voice to be heard.

Gender perspective on Climate Change and Health

The relationship between Climate, Weather and Health became prominent in the past fifteen years. Climate scientists were able to pinpoint human activities as being at least partly responsible for the global warming that was observed during the last century. It has also become clear that even with the application of the most drastic measures to stop emission of greenhouse gases, climate will...
continue to change for many decades on account of past emission. Climate change scenario will have an impact on food security, freshwater supply, rural and urban settlement and their infrastructure.

Since the 1980-s researches found sex–based differences in the biology of males and females and this gender dimension of climate change was tangentially broached on the occasion of the session of the Conference of the Party (COP), more active since COP-8(2002, New Dalhi). Policymakers and health professionals enacted to mitigate and adapt to its impacts with the aim of developing gender sensitivity approaches with regards to mitigation, measures adaptation projects and national regime.

Gender equality responses may involve new partnerships within and beyond the Health sector. This is very important with regards to development of International Human Rights, and in this situation the Right to Health, which is specifically protected by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Key International Treaties related to Climate Changes-Convention on Climate Changes and The Kyoto Protocol pay specific attention on gender’s aspects. While the progress of development is very slow, it is essential to include gender’s aspects in negotiation between countries on post – Kyoto period, after 2012. At the same time, gender equality is not something of importance to women only. It requires partnership between men and women. Economic transformation together with ongoing changes in the global environment creates prerequisites and unique opportunities for building and strengthening such a partnership.

Recently adopted international documents are increasingly including provisions on the last generation of human rights - right to health, women rights, children rights, right to water. Now we are developing next Human Right- Human Right to Peace – Santiago Declaration. Text of this International Document, which we hope will be open for ratification in June 2012, has a few articles on Women’s Rights as well as gender equity.

**Challenges of climate change, health and gender equality in Russia**

Climate change is also affecting Russia, though it is going to affect different parts of the country in different ways. The impact will be especially strong on Russia’s extensive permafrost and forests. Russia is responsible for 17% of the gas emission of the Countries of the Annex I of the Convention and ratification by Russian Federation of Kyoto Protocol was very important. This is the result of bad economic activity and the most important factor here is amount of energy consumption. Industrial countries such as France and Germany have 5.1 -6.1 ton per capita, while Mali and Bangladesh only 0.3- 0.4 ton per capita. Russia energetically consumes more than 8 ton per capita, while its economy is less developed than French or German.

The average annual temperature in Russian Federation in 2009 was 2.1C, which is higher than historical average since 1886. Some of the fastest and most significant climate changes are
taking place in Arctic region, resulting in melting sea ice, thawing permafrost and thinning snow cover. Warming is especially clear in the Arctic during the winter, while record high temperatures are also became common. Indigenous minorities often remain engaged in traditional occupations that are vulnerable to climate change. Residents in Arctic face significant challenges in accessing health care services. At the same time the Arctic region is being exposed to new infection diseases that are able to move northwards with warming climate. In this region the impact of climate on natural focal infection also occur against backdrop of other changes in the environment, including shifts in environment and socio-economic conditions (tick-born encephalitis, malaria, West Nile Fever, Botulism, Parasites, Lambliaisis, Opistorchsis, Tularemia). Medical professionals are studying gender aspects of these changes over last few years. We have several good researches assessing the impact of climate change on health, and a very important study on reproductive health of woman and man for different group of citizen in our North. In Institute of General Pathology and Pathofisiology we have an excellent study “Gender differences in the development of subclinical atherosclerosis in patients with early sign of cerebrovascular insufficiency”.

Formally gender discrimination in Russia is prohibited, however in real life it exists in all areas of Russian society. One of the key reasons of this situation is arguably poor elaboration on and protection of gender equality in our domestic national legislation. The Russian Constitution, as adopted in 1993, contains two articles that establish legal regime of gender equality: Article 19, paragraph 3, which provides that ‘man and woman shall enjoy equal rights and freedoms and have equal possibilities to exercise them’, and Article 15, which states that all international instruments signed and ratified by Russia, are an integral part of its legislation, and take precedence over national law. Respectively the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified by Russia in 1981) are compulsory on the territory of the country and have to be appreciated in every decision of the public authorities. The Labour, Family, Criminal and Administrative Codes of Russian Federation elaborate on the principle of equality, however this legislation fails to provide on the definition of "discrimination against women". To address this gap since 1998, women’s NGOs, together with the Russian State Duma Committee on Women, Family and Children unsuccessfully lobby for the adoption of the draft national law "On state guarantees of equal rights, freedoms, equality and equal opportunities for their realization," which would contain such a definition. Recently adopted in 2011 Federal Act N 323-FZ "On the basis of the health of citizens in the Russian Federation" also failed to refer to and expand on the gender dimension in its non-discrimination clause, despite active lobbying for it by the civil society.
**Addressing challenges**

For an external observer looking at Russia from abroad it is very difficult to understand why we have so many challenges in relation to Human Rights, corruption and instability. But we were affected by Cancer of Communism much longer than other countries and our ‘recovering’ is going much slower. We understand that only through educating people on their rights to health, clean water, safe environment, good sanitation, protection of their land and culture we can build a strong civil society where they become actively involved in the Protection of our Earth, Climate and Biodiversity. Adaptation to climate change is not something that must “start from scratch”, but rather is an incremental process that could be based upon a long experience of previous culture. What is new is the need to react much more rapidly because of the impact of human activity on climate.

Challenges of gender equality, its legitimizing and enforcement in Russia are continuously addressed by the civil society organisations. The most significant contribution on raising attention to this issue is being made by a Consortium of Women's non-governmental organisations in Russia, bringing together 186 Russian NGOs. One of the founders of the Consortium is Medical Women’s Association. Consortium periodically prepares shadow reports to the official reports of the Russian Federation to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The role of medical professionals in the field of advocacy and education on the human right to health is particularly important from the perspective of gender equity, since the greatest proportion of women working is in public health service (85%).

While the reality presents huge challenges for us in Russia, there is a lot of effort has already been made and much remains to be done. We translated and published a book by Brigit Toebes “Right to Health in International Law” in 1998. We have several publications and reports during our scientific meetings and conferences. For example we are planning to have a special round table “Role of medical professionals of the development of Democratic society” during the International Conference “New technology- XXI Century” (October, Spain). Recently International Federation of Health and Human Rights organisations published a report on the Right to Health in Russia by Natalya Pestova which elaborates on the women’s right to health and environmental aspect of health. We are working together with European MWA, European Women’s Lobby, and International Federation of Health Professional for health and Human Rights. Special greetings and thank to Dr. Waltraud for her work with us since 1993, Dr. Roslaie Bertell from USA and Dr. van Es- their help and attention uncountable. Currently we are going to translate a new book “Right to Health in Laws of EU countries”.