

POLITICAL PARTIES IN TAJIKISTAN REACH OUT TO RURAL WOMEN

by Anthony C. Bowyer

The problems of women in Tajikistan are numerous, ranging from limited rights vis-à-vis men, trafficking, drug abuse, multiple and undocumented marriages, and unequal educational opportunities. Moreover, women's participation in the political sphere has eroded in the 12 years since



independence. In the aftermath of the 1992-1997 civil war, many "traditional values" resurfaced concerning a woman's place in society. The 2000 elections to the Majlisi Oli (national parliament), the first national legislative elections held since the war, produced 13 women deputies, or 14.8% of the 88-member parliament. Most women deputies were from the ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), which has held power in Dushanbe since the 1994 election of President Emomali Rakhmonov. The percentage of women representatives in local legislatures is even lower.

As part of its ongoing program of political party development, between January and March 2003 IFES Tajikistan conducted six *Women in Politics* seminars to encourage political parties to address gender equality as a top national priority, regardless of party ideology. The seminars engaged rural women's political activists in Khojand, Qurghonteppa and the outlying regions of Dushanbe. IFES political party consultant Foster Tucker led the discussions and trainings, which also featured a number of prominent women leaders from the public and private sectors as guest speakers. Representatives from local branches of all six officially registered political parties attended each seminar, along with members of non-registered parties and movements.

Discussions at the seminars covered the problems of women and poverty; education, women and health; violence against women; women and the economy; women's participation in governance and decision making; mechanisms to institutionalize improvements in the status of women; women and human rights; women and mass media; women and ecology; and trafficking issues. The rights and roles of young women were also discussed, a theme IFES has pursued in all of its work in political party development and school-based civic education. Altogether, more than 50% of the 175 participants were women.

With less than two years remaining until the next elections to the Majlisi Oli, intensive training is crucial to support women's rights to participate equally in elections, particularly on a local level. Continuing to facilitate dialogue between men and women political leaders is also an important means of promoting gender equality. Perhaps most pressing, however, is the need to promote gender equality in all aspects of life in Tajikistan and make women aware of their equal rights. IFES' efforts to promote such awareness by mobilizing local gender equality advocates would seem to be a good start. **EI**

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INTEGRATING DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO

by Carmina Sanchis Ruescas and Tim Bittiger

Over the past three years, Kosovo society has been in a process of reorientation, faced with challenging political and economic realities in the province. A divide has crystallised between a majority that is integrated into mainstream public life and a number of minority groups that are increasingly marginalised and left uninformed.

Discrimination in Kosovo mainly runs along ethnic lines, and the ethnic Serb community has been most affected. The few Serbs that have not left the province (now estimated at 5% of the population) live mostly in enclaves protected by NATO's Kosovo Force with limited freedom of movement and access to information. In addition, a variety of smaller ethnic groups (4%), including ethnic Turks, Muslim-Slav Gorani and Bosniacs, Catholic-Slav Croats, and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, face limited access to public



services, exclusion from the job market and other forms of discrimination.

Marginalisation in Kosovo affects other disadvantaged groups, too. Women still play a minor role in male-dominated public life. Youth constitute over 50% of the population but are not being involved in the development of Kosovo's future. People with disabilities are usually hidden and forgotten in traditional Kosovo society. There is an ever greater divide between urban citizens and the vast majority of rural