

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


Kosovars, who have only limited access to information and public processes.

IFES Ltd has been active in Kosovo since 2000 with European funding (DFID and OSCE) to assist marginalised communities in Kosovo in making their voices heard and to take an active part and ownership in building Kosovo's democracy. From the start, IFES Ltd's approach has been 'kosovarisation' from the grassroots, based on long-term, step-by-step and inclusive capacity building. Each of the many communities in Kosovo has its own needs and concerns and requires targeted and tailor-made responses. IFES Ltd's methodology is centred on a multi-ethnic and gender-balanced pool of local outreach trainers and a province-wide network of partner NGOs. The trainer teams consist of local experts, reflect the ethnic composition of Kosovo and interact with citizens exclusively in their local languages. Trainers have specialised in working with target groups such as ethnic communities, women, youth and people with disabilities.

The trainers and partner NGOs have launched several large-scale information campaigns to engage rural and disadvantaged communities in dialogue about the roles of voters and active citizens and most recently about the applicability of basic human rights in Kosovo, an unprecedented activity in the province. Each seminar lasted for at least one hour and produced intense discussions with participants. IFES Ltd educated voters for all three elections in Kosovo since 2000, culminating in a campaign that reached over 90,000 voters in close to 90% of all villages in Kosovo in only 10 weeks, ahead of the 26 October 2002 Municipal Elections. Carefully designed deployment plans ensured that almost 50,000 voters reached were from non-Albanian communities, including 99% of all villages in mainly Serb North Mitrovica.

IFES Ltd also started the first-ever Kosovo-wide citizen advocacy campaign in early 2002. Trainers encouraged citizens to identify their community needs and provided them with the tools to actively lobby their authorities. IFES Ltd monitored over 250 advocacy cases, most of which have since been implemented successfully. One third of all cases were of inter-ethnic character, often bringing Serbs and Albanians together to advocate for a common need. As a result, the IFES Ltd programmes contributed to bringing citizens closer to their local government, which is an achievement in a society with no previous experience in accessible government and active citizen participation.

The IFES Ltd trainer pool is the only single resource in Kosovo that is able to reach all areas and villages of the province in large-scale endeavours and under demanding timelines. It is also the only group that has developed firmly entrenched contacts directly and exclusively with rural and disadvantaged communities. Consequently, demand for this resource has increased: the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) has repeatedly used IFES Ltd's trainer pool for its outreach activities and surveys. OMiK has recently tasked IFES Ltd with a four-month citizen empowerment programme to develop citizen guides and assist citizens in effectively using governmental and judicial channels. IFES Ltd has started using its outreach methodology in other countries in Southeast

Europe and the Caucasus and hopes to contribute to the integration and empowerment of marginalised groups on a larger scale. 

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SALVADORANS WITH DISABILITIES MONITOR ELECTION ACCESSIBILITY


by Keenan Howell

More than 100 Salvadorans with disabilities were trained and accredited to monitor El Salvador's March 16 legislative and municipal elections in an historic effort to study and document whether citizens with disabilities have an equal opportunity to exercise their right to vote. The observer teams visited polling stations in San Salvador and Santa Ana and presented a report to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador, identifying architectural and administrative barriers



to full participation and recommending specific reforms to ensure greater electoral access for people with disabilities. The human impact of the effort cannot be quantified but emerged in anecdotes told by the observers, many of whom reported a new level of dignity and self-esteem. One observer said that his family had never before seen him as capable of participating in such an activity.

This unique effort was undertaken by the Cooperative Association of Pro-Integral Rehabilitation Independent Group (ACOGIPRI), a Salvadoran NGO that specializes in disability issues, with the support and cooperation of the TSE, as part of IFES' Global Initiative to Enfranchise Citizens with Disabilities. It was funded through a grant from the Swedish government.

The election observers included citizens with physical disabilities, including the blind and the deaf, marking the first time in El Salvador's history that citizens with different disabilities came together in a proactive effort to make their electoral system more inclusive. As Eileen Giron Batres of ACOGIPRI stated, "Democracy can only be built with the participation of all, otherwise democracy is not genuine." To learn more about the IFES disability initiative, see www.electionaccess.org. 

Keenan Howell is the IFES Press Officer.