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## **Transición, privatización y género en Serbia. Impacto sobre el mercado de trabajo**

### **RESUMEN:**

En este artículo, exploro el impacto de la privatización y el ajuste estructural sobre las desigualdades de género en Serbia. En primer lugar, investigo el relativo grado de bienestar de las mujeres serbias durante el proceso de transición y la reforma del mercado de trabajo. Todas las cifras de otros países postsocialistas, así como otros análisis de la situación en Serbia, muestran una paradoja de la democracia. La transición aumenta las desigualdades económicas entre hombres y mujeres, y entre las mismas mujeres, especialmente en lo que respecta a las oportunidades de búsqueda de empleo.

En el proceso de transformación en Serbia ya no se garantiza el pleno empleo. Se espera que la transición en Serbia conduzca a un incremento del paro, resultado de una caída de la demanda de empleo por un lado y, por otro, del aumento de los demandantes de empleo. Bajo unas circunstancias de paro habitualmente elevado, son de esperar igualmente cambios estructurales en el empleo. Los cambios conducirán probablemente a un aumento de la temporalidad y el empleo estacional y bajos salarios. Las mujeres perderán sus oportunidades de empleo por parados varones. Son de esperar algunos efectos positivos de estos cambios, aunque no beneficien a todos por igual. Además, todos los cambios llegan con retraso. En el

corto plazo, el paro se mantendrá en tasas elevadas y los salarios bajos. Las mujeres con mayor formación todavía tienen oportunidades de empleo en los nuevos sectores en expansión. Sin embargo, solo podremos considerar como ganadoras a un grupo reducido de ellas en el conjunto de perdedoras de los cambios económicos.

En este artículo, parto de la perspectiva teórica de Género y Desarrollo (GAD) y la combino con la teoría neoinstitucional. Además del análisis de las relaciones entre Mujer y Desarrollo, y la confirmación de la posición subordinada de Mujeres en Desarrollo y Género y Desarrollo, admito la relevancia de la contribución masculina en este proceso. Considero el papel de los hombres en desarrollo desde su papel como obstáculos al cambio de la mujer a una asociación estratégica de género.

*Palabras clave:*

1.- Feminismo. 2.- Género y Desarrollo. 3. Teoría neoinstitucional. 4.- Mercado de trabajo. 5.- Privatización. 6.- Serbia. 7.- Desempleo. 8.- Desigualdad. 9.- Transición.

## **Transition, privatization and gender in Serbia. impact on labour market**

### **SUMMARY:**

In this paper, I explore the impact of privatisation and structural adjustment on gender inequalities in Serbia. Primarily, I research relative economic welfare of women in Serbia during the transition process and reform of labour market. All the data from other post-socialist countries, as well as my analysis of the situation in Serbia, show a paradox of democracy. Transition sharpens economic inequalities between women and men, as well as among women, especially regarding job opportunities.

In the transformation process in Serbia full employment will not be guaranteed any more. It could be expected that transition in Serbia would lead to the increase of unemployment resulting from decreasing of labour demand on the one hand and increasing of its supply on the other hand. Under the circumstances of generally high unemployment rates, structural changes in employment could also be expected. These changes will probably lead to greater availability of temporary, seasonal and low-paid jobs. Women are likely to be pushed out even from such employment opportunities by unemployed men. Some positive effects of all these changes may be expected, but they will not benefit everybody. Besides, all these changes have their time lags. In a short time period, the unemployment will remain high and the salaries of workers low. Highly educated and skilled women may still get new job

opportunities in the newly expanding sectors. However, we can hope only for a few female winners among many female losers amidst expected economic changes.

In this paper, I use theoretical perspective Gender and Development (GAD) and combine it with neo-institutional theory. Beside analysis of relationship between Women and Development, and confirmation of subordinated position of Women in Development, in Gender and Development I recognize the significance of male contribution in this process. I consider men's role in development from their role as obstacles to female development and gender oppression to their strategic gender partnership.

*Key words:*

1.- Feminism. 2.- Gender and Development. 3. Neo-institucional theory. 4.- Labour market. 5.- Privatization. 6.- Serbia. 7.- Unemployment. 8.- Inequality. 9.- Transition.

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## TRANSITION, PRIVATIZATION AND GENDER IN SERBIA. IMPACT ON LABOUR MARKET

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### Refusal of transition in Serbia during 1990 and absence of labour market

Unlike the most countries in transition, Serbia is just starting the process of radical change in economy and society. During the 1990s the basic characteristic of development experience in Serbia was state's refusal of transition<sup>1</sup> and state led non-development of economy and society (Djuric Kuzmanovic, 1997). During the 1990s, the Serbian government refused the reforms which could lead to the market economy and to the parliamentary democracy and created the context of state directed non-development with its hardly negative, even destroying economic consequences, i.e. economic chaos (Lazic, 2000: 10) and political conditions of war and nationalism (inside) and isolation (outside). This context which produced and supported absence of normal conditions of *realizing one's potentials* for everybody, also

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Her interest has been in the issues of Development Economics (Social/Alternative/Human Development); Transitional Economies; Gender and Economy; Gender and Development; Poverty; Nationalism and Economy. She was the member of the Editorial Committee of the periodical Economist, Belgrade and director of the Centre for Documentation, Publishing and Research on Youth (CIDID), Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Professional Memberships in SID (Society for International Development) and IAFE (International Association of Feminist Economist).

<sup>1</sup> I use the meaning of the word 'transition' widely accepted when Eastern and Central Europe is concerned: as a process of transforming the existing economic and social system into a market economy based on private ownership and parliamentary democracy. Therefore, transition includes liberalisation of bureaucratic management of economy, wide reprivatisation and economic restructuring. Even within such a traditional and limited approach, during the 1990s, Serbia drops out.

created complex and partly specific consequences for women. It was a context of state supported gender oppression<sup>2</sup>, as *lack of specific culture of non-violence* and absence of normal social structures and destroying of society as a consequence of all above.

Absence of economic transition in Serbia can be regarded on the basis of:

- Unchanged structure of economic activity;
- Low portion of private sector in total economy and employment;
- Very slight decrease of employment in relation to significant decrease of GNP<sup>3</sup>.

For more than five decades the labour and capital market in Serbia have distortedly functioned. Throughout all that period the socialist state didn't abandon the ideal of full employment and principle of distribution according to work, although it was widely confirmed in reality that they were not realized. On the other hand, in reality extremely low wages and high long-term unemployment prevailed. The socialist economic policy led to inadequate allocation of available resources with consequences in surplus of labor, capacity and demand for certain goods as well. For example, the prices of production factors presented completely different relationship of production factors in relation to their availability. Namely, labour, as a relatively abundant production factor, was made more expensive by high taxes, while the capital, as a very rare production factor was made cheaper by negative interest rate (Djuric Kuzmanovic, 1986).

During the era of socialism women did make many gains such as large increases in participation in the paid labour market and access to education. The participation of women at the labour market in socialist economies, as well as in Serbian economy, was significantly higher than the one achieved in the West capitalist countries. Such high

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<sup>2</sup> The subordinated position of women is a consequence of the articulation of two registers of hegemony: patriarchy and an economic system of domination (Morell, A., I., 1999). This subordinated position of women occurred despite the fact that the ex socialist state publicly proclaimed the development of a human equal society as one of its main goals. According to the ex socialist state, humanization should have been achieved through the participation of workers in the process of social reproduction and the simultaneous withering away of the state, first from the economy, and then from other spheres of social life. Both principles were especially present in the state socialist project of the emancipation of women. Thus, women should have operated as equal participants in the development of the socialist economy and society as a whole as well as protectors and nurturers of the young and future generations. However, as recent feminist literature on women's emancipation in socialism demonstrates, women were not equal partners, either in the public or private realm. Patriarchal gender regimes dominated women's lives at home, and their position in the economy or in politics was far from ideal.

<sup>3</sup> During the last decade, decrease of GNP was 45.6 per cent, while employment decreased only for 14.6 per cent (Krstic, G, Stojanovic, B., 2001: 48).



participation of women at socialist labour market was a product of socialist development ideology, which promoted gender equality, and of development aim of full employment. Nowadays it is well known that interpretation of gender equality in socialism was largely simplified. Researches of relative women position in public sphere, i.e. at labour market, in socialism confirmed gender inequality and women oppression during socialism as well (Funk, N., and Mueller, M., 1993., Aslanbeigui, N., Pressman S., Summerfield G., 1994, Holzner, M.B., and Krahl, A. 1997). Thus, strong mutual dependency between women position in public sphere, i.e. at labour market and sex division of labour in private domain, was noticed. It confirmed that patriarchal ideology in socialism remained largely unquestionable.

Gender inequalities in public sphere in socialism primarily referred to:

- Bigger concentration of female labour force in lower-paid economic sectors (Djuric Kuzmanovic, T., 1995, 2001);
- Slower hierarchical promotion of women (Markov, S., Stankovic, F., 1991), and
- Gender pay discrepancy (Krstic G., Stojanovic B., 2001).

### **Directed non-development in Serbia during 1990 and main characteristic the labour market**

During the 1990s, economic system in Serbia was quasi-market and structurally deformed. That economic system, i.e., the state led non-development, ensured neither economic growth, nor economic efficiency (Djuric Kuzmanovic, 1997). Instead, it maintained crime, corruption and rent seeking (Vukotic, V., et al., 2000, Antonic, D. et al., 2001 ). These conditions influenced labour market as well. Moreover, it led to:

- Absence of formal and strengthening of informal labour market;
- Low utilization and mobility of labour;
- Mass open and latent unemployment<sup>4</sup> and high level of long-time unemployment;
- High participation of youth and women in total unemployment;
- Low wages and high wage disparity of the employed with the same or similar qualifications;
- Mass poverty and
- Brain drain<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Latent unemployment refers to the people who have job in formal economy, but they do not have what to do. Latent unemployment in state and social sector of economy in Serbia is estimated at 30 per cent of employed, i.e. over 700 thousand people ( Posarac, A., 1998). At the same time, latent unemployment went over the proportion of open, i.e. officially registered unemployment.

During the last decade, adjusting of employment to the decreasing level of economic activity was not done by firing surplus of the employed. Instead, that adjusting was done by:

- Sharp decrease of real wages,
- Increasing number of the employed on paid or unpaid leaves,
- Increased number of retired people, as well as
- Increasing participation of the employed on informal labour market.

The basic characteristic of labour market in Serbia is its division on formal and informal labour market. In this way, decrease of living standard was mitigated and social tension was avoided. However, social peace was ensured by large decrease of work productivity in formal sector, great increase of latent unemployment and by expansion of informal labour market. For example, during the 1990s, between 2.1 million and 2.2 million people was employed in formal Serbian economy (SGS, 2000). In the same period the number of employed in formal private sector increased from 160 to 501 thousand people. Finally, there is estimation that about one million of people are employed in informal economy, mostly in trade, handicraft and agriculture (*Reintegracija sive ekonomije i razvoj privatnog sektora*, 2001). Even 60.5 per cent of employed in informal economy already have regular job in formal economy, while 20 per cent of them are really unemployed. One of the reasons why employed in formal sector accept to work illegally is because they have health care due to their work in formal sector (ibid.).

At the same time, different forms of flexible employment like: reduced working time, part-time job, temporary job, work at home, self-employment and similar non-standard forms of employment were present in Serbian economy with only 1-2 per cent of total employment (Marsenic, D., 1999: 288). Although, in 2000, reduced working time and part-time job increased their portion in total employment to 5 and 1 per cent respectively, they still have marginal significance in total employment. Employment with reduced working time is mostly unwilling employment, because it is mainly consequence of illness or disability.

Empirical analysis of wages<sup>6</sup> in Serbia from 1996 to 2000 (Krstic, G., Stojanovic, B. 2001: 24-28) showed that labour market in Serbia do not have the same

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<sup>5</sup> Different estimations about the number of people who left the country during the last decade vary from 100 thousand to 450 thousand (Djuric Kuzmanovic, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Monthly wage is commonly regarded as a function of the following variables: sex, age, marital status, education, working experience, occupation, economic branch, firm's property status and working hours. Qualifications are multi-linear with education level and therefore they are excluded.

In the case of monthly wages in Serbia, larger number of the above mentioned variables is statistically significant. However, their relatively low determination ratio indicates the significance of non-economic and institutional factors in the formation of wages. For

characteristics as labour market in transition countries during the first years of reforms. Namely, in the transition countries process of transition led to large decrease of real wages and to the increase of their dispersion. Furthermore, this process led to increase of the wages of high level educated employed in relation to the profile at lower level of education. On the contrary, in the period from 1996-2000, in the case of Serbia, the slight decrease of real monthly wages was noticed. In fact, the lowest wages realized slight increase, while all others really decreased. Also, calculated indicators of inequality in distribution of all wages: standard deviation and Gini coefficient confirmed decrease in total dispersion of all wages (ibid: 24).

Basic features of formal labour market in Serbia are large wage disparities among workers with the same or similar qualifications in different economic branches. The wages of the employed in Serbia, more depend on the economic branches where workers are employed than on their working effect. Thus, in 1996, agriculture and trade realized lower wages in relation to the industry. In 2000, catering, tourism, education, culture, as well as health and social care were added to these two branches. Also, compared to the wages in public and social sector of property, the wages in private sector were higher for 30.9 per cent in 1996, and for nearly 50 per cent in 2000 (Krstic, G. and Stojanovic, B., 2001). Finally, empirical analysis of the wages in Serbian economy showed that comparing to 1996, gender wage differences increased in 2000. While in 1996, employed women earned 15 per cent less than men, this gender wage gap increased for 2.6 percent in 2000 (Krstic, G. and Reilly, 2000).<sup>7</sup> Gender gap is broader at the informal than at the formal market. Women in Serbia in 2000, realized different wages per hour at formal and informal labour market. At formal labour market these wages were lower for 28.1 per cent in relation to men's; at informal labour market these wages were lower for 39.5 per cent (Krstic, G. Stojanovic, B., 2001:34). Part of these differences is due to worse education structure of women at informal in relation to formal sector. Of course, basic and the biggest wage difference is the result of the total effect of the economic branches.

During the 1990s unemployment rate<sup>8</sup> in Serbia was from 19.7 per cent in 1990 to 26.8 in 1998. Compared to other countries in transition, it was one of the highest rates (UNICEF, 1997). Unemployment in Serbia is long-time phenomena, because

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example, the total effect of economic branches on wages in Serbia is highly statistically significant.

<sup>7</sup> This gap can partly be explained by the variables such as: education, working experience, etc. However, the other part of the gap is ascribed to different valuation of these variables.

<sup>8</sup> Unemployment ratio is relation between the number of unemployed who are actively seeking for their job and active population (employed plus unemployed). Active farmers are not included.



about 80 per cent of unemployed wait for their job more than a year. Participation of women in number of total unemployment is continuously being higher than men's. For instance, in 2000, participation of women in total unemployment was 54.1 per cent, while men's participation was 45.1 per cent (Anketa o radnoj snazi, 2000). Also, the educational structure of unemployed women is higher than men's.

### **Challenges of transformation at the labour market in Serbia and expected gender consequences**

The experience of ex socialist economies of East and Central Europe, which were in transition since 1989, warns us on painfulness of this social transformation. During this process, significant changes in women status on labour market are expected. Previous researches about transition in these countries (Funk and Mueller, 1993) already confirmed that women experienced the most significant losses in the fields such as: employment, social welfare and participation in politics. In this paper, I especially pay my attention to the challenges of transformation at the labour market in Serbia and expected consequences on relative position of women.

Reform of the labour market should be harmonized with the dynamism of global economic reform, especially with privatization and market liberalization. In fact, the reform of the labour market in the case of Serbia means its establishing. First of all, it includes abolishment of the monopoly on the working place and integration of existing informal market into formal market. It is expected that the new institutional conditions, created by the Law on Privatization (Sluzbeni glasnik, 2001) and the Law on Work (Sluzbeni glasnik, 2001) should encourage increase of the average productivity of work through decrease of working hours or/and number of workers and structural changes as well. Expected structural changes will demand higher mobility and flexibility of workers, competitiveness and selection among the employed, their personal responsibility and initiative. In longer period of time, the changes in the volume and education structure, as well as in regional allocation of employment are predicted.

It is also expected that during the transition reforms the officially proclaimed socialist gender equality will lose its significance. It is not so easy to give precise answer about the changes in relative economic welfare of women, i.e. gender inequalities during the transition process. Yet, some of the previous experience of Poland and other Central European countries warns us on the persistence of the gender pay differential and gender discrimination in a transition economy (Bedi, S. A., 2001, Pailhe, A., 2000). It could be expected that transition in Serbia would lead to the increase of unemployment resulting from decreasing labour demand on the one hand and increasing of its supply on the other hand. In addition, the demand

for labour force by small private firms will increase, but without any serious impact on the level of unemployment. All in all, some positive effects of all these changes may be expected, but they will not benefit everybody. Besides, all these changes have their time lags. In a short time period, the unemployment will remain high and the salaries of workers low.

There are several factors influencing the female labour supply in general: the income level, the unemployment level, the male contribution to household work, the number of children, the State's family and childcare policies, the availability of household appliances, the social norms and values related to female work and labour market participation (Dijkstra, A.G., 1997). All of these factors are relevant for countries in transition as well as for Serbia. Some of them are not expected to change significantly, at least in the initial stages of transition. For example, the number of children is not expected to change dramatically any time soon. Some other factors, like, male contribution in household work, as well as the gender ratio of unpaid work, are also likely to remain unchanged.

However, some other factors that influence female labour supply are expected to change. The biggest change in this respect has already occurred at the level of ideology throughout the former socialist countries. The experiences of transition economies warn us that the socialist development ideology, which promoted gender equality in the public sphere, is near its end. In post-socialist countries socialist gender ideology is currently regarded as a part of the repressive socialist system. These ideological changes have influenced new legislation and deprived women from the incentives granted by the socialist state. Therefore, most newly elected democratic governments have supported the right of women to stay at home. Thus, the patriarchal gender ideology has even been encouraged by transition.

The above named factors will influence decrease of women participation at labour market. On the other hand, women will do their best to stay at the labour market, primarily because they want to ensure their and their families' economic position. Hence, during these changes, decrease of women labour force is not expected.

What can be expected in terms of demand for female labour in Serbia? In order to estimate future trends in terms of the demand for female labour in Serbia we should follow two lines of analysis:

The first line of analysing is by gender and sector. I point out a perspective of women in specific sectors of the economy where women are under-represented or over-represented among employed or unemployed, and their possibilities for employment in other sectors. Thus, the employment perspectives of women in heavy industry are very bad. Production in this sector is capital-intensive and non-competitive for export to developed countries. When restructuring hits, the first to lose their jobs in heavy industry will be administrative workers, mostly women. At the same time, women are over-represented in light industry, especially in the production of consumer goods. The prospects for new employment in these labour-intensive sectors depend on new investments and possibilities for developing new

markets, including exports. In the commercial sector (trade, tourism, banking, communications, etc.), where most growth is to be expected, women are well represented among employees. The prospects for new employment in these labour-intensive sectors depend on new investments and possibilities. Thus, they could be potential beneficiaries of expansion. Still, under the circumstances of high unemployment, women are first to lose jobs, particularly higher level and better-paid ones, more in industry than in other sectors. It is also observed that women are more and more situated within low-paid sectors. This certainly contributes not only to unemployment of women but also to the feminisation of poverty.

Second line of analysis is gender and individual. It deals with individual situations, meaning the chance that a woman, compared to a man or another woman, actually keeps or loses her job. Generally, in Serbia, unemployed women have higher education than men. Due to high family responsibilities, women are considered as more expensive and less reliable, a less mobile and less flexible work force, than men. Since in the countries with transitional economies the fastest growing sector is private, it is safe to argue that the gender income gap will grow large quickly contributing to deterioration of the overall economic status of women and possibly influencing their participation in the labour market.

### **From gender oppression to strategic gender partnership**

Would working with men have a positive effect on the status of women? Would knowing more about how women and men are subordinated significantly contribute to gender equality? For a long time, women have been ignored in the theory, as well as in reality. Thus, the traditional development theory, such as neo-classical which was the basis for development ideology<sup>9</sup> of the globalization process, neglected women and gender as a theoretical category and research variable<sup>10</sup>. However, more than three decades ago, Development economy noticed the significance of gender for realistic analysis of development processes. Thus, concept like Gender and Development (GAD)<sup>11</sup> introduce gender, as meso-level variable in the analysis of

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<sup>9</sup> Development ideology includes: development theory or a group of development theories, or a group of elements from different theories. Simultaneously, it includes a group of strategic economic-political rules used in a society - for example, Marxism is one of development theories and development ideologies at the same time (Hettne, B., 1990).

<sup>10</sup> One of the main questions in the development theory is about formulating the new research agenda. Irrespectively of theoretical perspective, variables of different analytical levels: micro (local level), mezzo (gender and class) and macro (state and international economic relations) should be adequately connected. In other words, analytical frames of new researches have to analyze relationship between different participants of various power and their structure on different analytical level.

<sup>11</sup> Namely, in Development economy, as a complex theoretical and teaching discipline there are some subdisciplines: Women in Development (WID), Women and

development processes. Gender encourages holistic approach to social processes, visibility of women status in development theory and practices. Furthermore, introduction of gender as analytical tool, helps women to:

- Accept themselves as important participants in society;
- Accept male contribution, and
- Not to emphasise exclusively female solidarity (Rathgeb, E.,M., 1990).

Today, it is very clear, not only to the alternative, but also to the mainstream that those development politics, which do not take gender into account, have very limited scope and very high costs of gender inequalities. The societies with high gender discrimination pay high price in poverty, economic growth and quality of life. Thus, gender inequalities are highest in poor countries and in the poorest strata in the society.

What is the situation like in Serbia? According to the data from some recent researches about women in Serbia (Milosavljevic, 2000), the situation is very bad. Women in Serbia work 15 hours per week longer than women in the West Europe.

Hence, female life expectancy at birth in Serbia is seven years shorter than that in West Europe. Women in Serbia mainly, take care of children and family and the most dominant feeling which they have is that they are neglected. The most time women spend at work and home duties. Mainly, they eat the food of low quality. If they are suffering from some chronic disease, they almost never take medical care. Due to all these things, women almost think that their most dominant problems are: violence, sex trafficking, poor medical care and quality of life. The last thing, which they have on their mind, is introduction of minimal quota for women in political bodies and encouraging women to management.

Thus, how could I emphasise the need for understanding position of men? Really, theoretical focus of researching women is more and more changed: from enumerating the cases of female oppression by males and finding the ways to their outcomes (WID - Women in Development approach), to the analyse of social relationship between males and females (GAD - Gender and Development approach). This theoretical need to understand position of men and women, at the same time, was not followed by the same efforts in politics. Except a few

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Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD). While WID was formed in early 1970s and was connected with theory of modernisation, WAD appeared in the second half of the 1970s. It was based on the dependency theories and evolved from critique of the modernisation theory and WID approach. Gender and Development approach (GAD) was developed during the 1980s as an alternative approach for the both previous concepts and it was influenced by the thinking of socialist feminists (Visvanathan, N.,1997:17-32).

exceptions, males are very rarely mentioned in the gender political documents. Also, when that is the case, men are generally seen as obstacles to women's development. It is widely accepted that men have to surrender their positions of dominance for women to become empowered.

Why should we change focus towards men? Focus on women is insufficient and inadequate. If we want to research gender as social relation we must understand men's position and perception. GAD perspective includes men and thus contributes to changing of ideas about man's role and mainstream concept of masculinity as well. In this concept individual activities and beliefs of both man and woman are placed in the wider frame of social, economic and political changes. The most important reasons why researchers' focus have to be changed to women and men, and gender differences between them are the following (Cleaver, F., 2000):

Firstly, gender refers to social relationship between men and women, which are the subject of their negotiation in private and public sphere. Instead of biological reductionism, gender includes analysis of social context in which gender roles and relations are formed. Moreover, gender is affirmative towards the ideal of equality and social justice by supposing that gender sensitive politics of decreasing gender inequalities contribute both to more efficiency and more humane development. Men and women, both could be limited by social and economic structures and they both have right to live free from poverty and repression. Thus, the process of their empowerment could enable them to liberate from restrictions, which comes through their stereotype gender roles. Finally, gender affirms strategic gender partnerships through idea that change towards gender equality is possible and reliable: if we could realise it in the family, local communities and organisations, it means that we need men as partners and allies.

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