

Women Can Do It (WCDI) program in Albania

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Socio-economic-cultural conditions and gender inequalities

Like other women in countries in transition, Albanian women have been confronted with opportunities and challenges that come with democracy. During this period of transition, it has been so evident that talented women faced the same challenges as men learning to make democracy work, challenges that needed to be addressed by men and women together in societies (like ours) with weak infrastructure, undeveloped institutions and the lure or opportunities outside politics. This period of transition also made evident the lack of female economic autonomy, the lack of policies that facilitate and create opportunities for women's participation at the labor market and help to share family responsibilities, that taken together constitute the major hurdles to women's involvement in politics.

It has also been evident that men were not seriously involved in promoting women's participation in decision-making. Cultural norms and laws often prevented women from getting decision-making positions. Men often resisted the quota system for women participation, even though the society has recently recognized the importance of women in political participation and decision-making. Neither have issues linked to gender equality become an important element of political parties and government policies and strategies. As a result female representation in governance 2006 was: 7.14% as ministers, 27 % as deputy ministers, 18.8 % as cabinet directors in the ministries, 13.33 % as general secretaries in the ministries, and 24 % as department directors in the ministries. Whereas, women's representation in the parliament of 2005 is 7.14 % compared to 6.42 % in 2001. Figures make evident only 10-15 % of female party membership in the main Albanian political parties in 2006 compared to 40 % in 1997. Only 3 % of representatives of both political subjects in the voting central commissions of 2007 were females.

As it can be seen, gender process has driven by a number of different forces in Albania. As the dynamics triggering changes and reforms in the country were multi faceted, they involved both government and civil society in the process. Each of them had a role to play. Women played their own. They understood that they had to take their future in their hands, and had to try to change mainstream politics. Through WCDI program they rejected their role as victims and requested partnership, a stakeholder's role in rebuilding peace and establishing democracy.

From the beginning of 2000 up to this day, under WCDI program (starting in 2000 till beginning of 2003 as GTF WCDI program and since 2003 up to this day continuing as NPA WCDI program), Albanian women's groups based their activities on an assessment of national women's needs and priorities as well as a nationwide cooperation of civil society actors: women's NGOs, political, media and trade union women's groups, representatives of governmental and parliamentary gender equality bodies, representatives of local government, female academics. Through this program

they were able to empower elected women through capacity building; stimulate a positive social attitude towards women's leadership among the public; promote positive media coverage of gender issues and women leadership; and encourage parliamentarian parties formulate steps in their gender equality programs. By training over 3,500 participants, the women's groups were also able to develop a considerable number of trained activists and trainers who were prepared to work as catalysts of the nationwide gender equality movement. Together with other gender equality actors they started working together, analyzing state of gender equality, learning together and, joining actions with a clever division of tasks for improving the situation.

The main results gained and lessons learned: Through WCDI program, potential women have been assisted to develop a vision and plan of action through a participatory process. Also, the awareness was aroused of the need to not only keep women's issues visible but also keep their agenda on the agenda of political movement. Due to this vision and plans, two laws have been introduced in the parliament to combat political discrimination of women (gender equality law finally approved in June 2004 & the draft for quota bill) and the national strategy for gender equality was drafted and approved. Experiences in Albania clearly showed that the struggle for the establishment of quota regulations in legislation was extremely hard, and the changes of statutory, so difficult to get, were never respected to the full.

Analyses of current state of gender equality were carried out, which made evident the increase of women's representation in the parliament, local government councils and second decision-making positions. In several cases, women took male dominated and ill spoken positions. However, women's involvement in the activities of the top-level governmental and political party bodies still remains insignificant. Unfortunately, institutions and political parties have done too little to support them, so they could be effective and fully play their role.

Efforts to improve policies from gender prospective have been made and small steps forward in gender equality policy were achieved. Nonetheless, political parties continue to have no specific policies on gender equality, which contradicts with their statements for a better presentation of women in decision-making. Regardless of difficulties, the activities brought the issue of the status of women in a systematic way to the nation wide attention and the efforts for gender equality in politics gained new momentum.

Women's image in the media was improved and there has been an increase of media's contribution to gender parity in governance. However, there still remain serious problems, as media is still unprepared to interpret gender issues in terms of human rights.

Challenges and plans for the future: To enhance democracy there is a need to avoid dividing democratic forces and make all groups in a society feel they are represented. As gender process is driven by a number of different forces in Albania, including in particular the urge for a change, which however is more pronounced than ever, gender equality in civic education and active gender balanced policies remain

among the main challenges for the future. Developing more training programs and actions related to gender analysis and measurement, gender policies and programs, gender budgeting, management and leadership skills, program's monitoring and promotional materials that will assist women change and improve mentalities and their actual status are no doubt the nearest main plans for the future.

Albanian women have learned their lessons and are aware that unity in diversity is another challenge for them. They know by now that moving beyond the tiny spaces in which women have been operating in order to break away a history of suppression is not a game but a new challenge to face. They are also aware that the next step should be articulating a well-developed policy agenda that indicates what women want, why do they want it and what do they propose to achieve these needs.

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