The importance of gender studies in the Kyrgyz Republic

What is gender? What do we mean by this term? It is the difference between men and women. These and other questions we often ask each other and it influences our actions when we decide what is best. The word gender comes from Latin *gener*. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the historical meaning of *gender* is "things we treat differently because of their inherent differences".

The concepts of gender, gender equality, gender policy, gender sociology are new to the Kyrgyz people. How do they differ from the concept of feminism, because we often confuse these two concepts and consider them as one. In essence, everyone has their own understanding of the term "gender": one may comprehend it as a division for *women* and *men*, some see it as an “aggressive” women, a “feminist” who asserts her rights and wants to be above men, and others perceive it as the equality of men and women imposed by the Western influence. However, there are some who do not even understand the word.

Gender is a social sex characteristic, i.e. the division into male and female, which determines the behavior of an individual in a society, his role and place in social life. Gender is everywhere, as the division into male and female influences one’s role and attitude in a society (relationship with parents, friends, colleagues, classmates, etc.). For example in most Eastern countries, women are learning, working, and earning less than men. One can cite an example in Saudi Arabia, where men are allowed to drive a car, and for women, even foreign, it is prohibited. In most Eastern countries, women do more housework than men. And we can say that the concept of gender may vary during the life - depending on the culture and mentality, and under the influence of time, age, race, ethnicity, education, religion and country. (about gender in vocabulary)

Unfortunately, the gender issue in Kyrgyzstan is moving at a very slow pace. Many ironically refer to gender equality. Despite that, after independence there were many studies conducted in this direction, but the results are insignificant. The problem is that the results are presented inaccurately; there is a lack of personnel, training and experience in this area. After independence, a key issue was the improvement of social life in rural areas. Since the closer of kindergartens and decline in child protection by the government, deterioration of health of population the responsibility for the care of children and family were shifted on women's shoulders. Women are assumed to combine work and care for the family. The main concern is that we have not gotten to the concept of gender equality, i.e., we still do not have that balance of what we have achieved in this area as European countries. We have not yet realized that we first need to change the parenting model. In our country, parenting, from birth, is carried out on the basis of gender division. Even when a child is not born, the public influences the choice of parents. For example, if a child born in a family is a boy, the traditional perception is that he is the property of the family, and if a girl is born, she is a guest in this family. Our society places great emphasis on gender differences. Initially, the society programs the child that if he is a boy, then he has more advantages than girls. Girls from birth know that she was born to a family life and must make a lot of sacrifices in order to be happy, thus, she is greatly dependent on her family and society on making any decision.

Moreover, the society has not yet reached an understanding that we must change the parenting model and upbringing by gender. We want to be a modern state, but live with a century-old view about the roles and functions of men and women. And at this point, we have a dual situation. On the one hand, we are going on a new path, but at the same time we continue to impose stereotypes to children that boys should be strong and they are the main breadwinners, while girls should prepare themselves for marriage, learn how to take care of household. Therefore, in our society, the issue of gender equality is unbalanced. As long as
there are stereotypes and a parenting model, gender inequality will grow. As for the EU, the countries that have no clear division of gender and a parenting model are completely different.

However, gender inequality does not only apply to women, but to men also. Indeed, the Eastern parenting model imparts that a man is the chief figure in the family and in society, and yet it is a huge psychological and physical stress. And all this leads to a decrease in the male life expectancy and to alcoholism, in some cases even suicides, because the man is bestowed with such pressure and responsibility from his family and society. For example, in Eastern countries, particularly in Central Asia, boys are from childhood instilled the idea that by the time he is 25 he should get married, buy a house and a car and provide for his relatives. It's a big burden and responsibility. I would really like to conduct a case study on this topic and to hear the opinions of our men and women. How do they understand the word gender and how does this relate to gender equality. I think that women and men are equally eager to learn, work, engage in politics, business and be successful, but our society insists that men have more opportunities than women. So why can the possibilities not be equal for all in spite of the biological differences or mentality, nationality etc.

In Central Asia to this day there are serious gender issues. As discussed earlier, some of them are associated with the traditional culture, while another part is related to the instability of social and economic situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The latter being the restructuring of agriculture and industry, accompanied by a significant drop in production and job cuts and a very competitive labor market. All of these indicators are still rising in rural areas. Over the last decade, the situation in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, has improved. Furthermore, labor migration is another problem. The problem of unemployment caused massive labor migration, mostly of the male population to work in other countries. Statistics show that there is a large percentage of the outflow from the country, and for a long time. And here we see a gender problem caused by the lack of male parenting. Labour migration has a negative impact on parenting and increases women's work in the household, which is unpaid. Additionally, she has to search for paid jobs in order to sustain her children. And do not forget that with independence and deteriorating social and economic circumstances, a completely new dimension, a new challenge is emerging - human trafficking. This applies primarily to women. According to French human rights organizations in 2003, about 4 thousand women from Kyrgyzstan were sold to Arabic countries, Turkey, South Korea and China, where they were forced into prostitution. South of Kyrgyzstan (Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken region) became the entrepot of the slave trade where women were brought from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and are being sent to foreign countries. This is further evidence that gender policy in the country is not designed to perfection. Inadequate and irregular systems of education, lack of knowledge of rights are leading to such a deplorable situation in the country. Because a woman has to learn to make money in the market-based economy, feed the family and master new areas of business, a lack of knowledge and limited access to resources do not allow them to develop the right way. So the gender issue in the Kyrgyz Republic has been widely studied over the past decade. As mentioned above, gender inequality has become one of the characteristics which adhere to the development of the country's development.

Among the first to study this problem was UNDP. The main objective of the UNDP in the world is the practical implementation of gender equality. In the framework of UNDP’s global cooperation program, "gender issue" is no longer treated as a separate sphere of activity, but is a responsibility, which must be incorporated into all activities of UNDP. As a result of these measures, in 2003, UNDP Kyrgyzstan has adopted a multifaceted approach to promoting gender equality in all areas of the country's development. In solving this problem, the government, civil society and local communities are actively involved, including participants who had not engaged in tackling gender inequality before and for whom it was
not their main scope of work. Using two complementary approaches to the implementation of gender equality, namely: strengthening the role of gender equality and empowerment of women, UNDP, in close cooperation with all UN agencies such as UNIFEM, UNICEF and UNFPA has played a large role in creating the conditions for the realization of gender equality in Kyrgyzstan. They provide ongoing financial and technical assistance to public authorities through the institutional mechanisms for the implementation of gender equality, including the National Commission for Women, Family and Gender Development under the President and Special Envoy of the President, defending the interests of gender development in the parliament, as well as public organizations. In addition, the UN system has played an important role in the emergence of national strategies and policies. The most recent example is the UN Assistance in integrating a gender perspective into the Country Development Strategy 2007-2010 - a collaboration of a large circle of government officials in Kyrgyzstan.

UNDP Kyrgyzstan is trying to find a solution to gender equality issues by recommending policies that create conditions for domestic partners and for internal UNDP staff, and provide protection. Since this is a question that requires an integrated approach, the gender issue is present in all UNDP activities in the country and is an integral part of the work of the Programs on poverty reduction, democratic governance, HIV / AIDS, environment, peace and development. In the portfolio of the UNDP, there are many examples of efforts to achieve gender equality in the country: the development of national action plans on gender development, the focus on gender in the activities of ministries and departments, study of such burning issues as the feminization of poverty and gender analysis of the policy of the government staff. In addition, there are a wide range of activities to create opportunities for gender equality through the media with the participation of government officials and community organizations.

In my thesis, I would like to explore the issue of the development and impact of gender issues in rural areas. The relevance of my topic is in that gender as a social phenomenon and a problem had not been sufficiently studied in the transitional regimes, such as in Kyrgyzstan and other countries of the former Soviet Union. But the heightened interest in it came when strong women were able to break the stereotypes and was able to occupy the highest places in the life of their society. As an example, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic – Roza Otunbayeva, who could in the most difficult and tragic moments, make the right decisions and lead the country to stability.