

## **Working at the Gender center Dijana Tepsic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)**

Working at the Gender center – Center for Gender Equality of Republic of Srpska Government, gives me opportunity to present you current situation regarding gender roles, position of women and men in my country from my perspective, as part of the gender institutional mechanism, and on the other hand, from my point of view as a citizen of this country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a post conflict and transitional country which is one of the reasons why gender equality has still not reached a satisfactory level. After the civil war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into two entities (Republic of Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Gender institutional mechanisms are established on the state and entity level (2001), Law on Gender Equality is established in 2003. Gender institutional mechanisms (Governmental Gender centers) are working in cooperation with all the other government institutions, local and international NGO-s, media and international organizations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is still very patriarchal and traditional society with prejudice values and stereotypes about boys and girls, women and men. These are obstacles for introduction of gender concepts in all spheres of life. Obstacles that need to be overcome, theoretically and legally, women have the same rights as men. And there is no legal discrimination, for example, against women in regard to access to land or access to property. However, tradition generally favors men over women. Although regulations exist, in reality gender roles and discrimination are still present in everyday life. Consequently, women have less power and impact. And they are discriminated against in many areas of life only because they are women. Moreover, women do not have same opportunities as men, are still discriminated against in public and private life and are victims of domestic violence in 98% of cases. Many women can not enjoy their guaranteed rights economically, politically, socially and culturally. Traditional and stereotyped gender roles are making life more difficult for women and men in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Society expects from women to take care of children and elderly, while doing all the house work. This is true even if she is employed. According to traditional gender roles, men are expected just to work, but not to take part in taking care of children, elderly or doing house work.

I must say, however women in rural areas are most affected. And in most difficult situations, their problems are invisible to the society, even if their everyday contribution to their families, communities and to the whole society is huge. They physically work the same as men. They spend all day in the field, taking care of livestock, providing food for animals and family, and of course taking care of family members. Women do not have any property or land in their names. They can not request financial resources, because banks will ask them if they own any property as a guarantee for the bank loans. Consequently, women do not have opportunities to start up small business, or to invest in their education. That is why on October 15th 2009, Gender center – Center for Gender Equality of Republic of Srpska Government, launched campaign “EQUAL for women in Rural Area” exactly on International Day of rural women. The main goal of the campaign was to raise the awareness about the very important role of rural women, while pointing out their problems and positions.

Many activities and events were organized to make rural women more visible to the public. We also encouraged the media to present their hard work, their everyday life and their positions in society. We also pushed media to present great examples of women who managed to start small business or women who established their NGO's, so they could be role models to other women in rural area. Analysis and research about rural women and their problems were also part of the campaign that was for the first time presented to the public. Also, “action plan to improve position of women in rural area” will be adopted and implemented by the end of 2010.



Promotional poster for campaign „EQUAL for woman in rural area“

I would like to conclude this report on an optimistic note. In many areas, we can see the progress, especially over the last 20 years. For example, from my personal experience, looking at my grandmother, my mother and myself, of course, I can see the change especially considering different opportunities that each of us had in life, in fields of education, labor market as well as access to work and resources. So, I can say that progress is visible, but there is still lot of work to do. It's important to improve the position of women in all areas of life as well as include men as partners in this process. Namely accomplishing gender equality means social, economic and cultural improvement for country and better quality of life for entire society. We have to work together for equal, discrimination-free, healthy and a democratic society.