



World Vision Bosnia-Herzegovina

Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the occasion of the consideration of the second periodic report of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Committee's 51st session.

September 2013

Introduction

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves close to 100 million people in nearly 100 countries around the world, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

World Vision in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Following the outbreak of war in the Balkans in the spring of 1991, World Vision commenced a program for war-affected communities, working out of an office based in Split, eastern Croatia. As conflict and suffering in Bosnia and Herzegovina intensified, World Vision moved its operational base to the north-central Bosnian city of Zenica and in 1995 commenced a winterization project to reduce the physical suffering of displaced and war-affected individuals. Numerous relief and rehabilitation projects followed, including health, micro-enterprise, agriculture and trauma healing. By 1996, World Vision Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) was assisting more than one million people, many through a reconstruction program for war-damaged dwellings. Following an end to the war, World Vision-BiH activities became more sharply focused on helping people recover and move on. Today, World Vision's projects have gone beyond meeting the demands of crisis situations to changing the quality of life in entire communities. Currently, WV has 30 on-going projects countrywide with a budget at around US\$5 million.

Overview of Key Issues and Project Background

This short paper builds and elaborates on the three key issues which World Vision has outlined in its previous submission to the Pre-Sessional Working Group of the Committee in March 2013. The following issues had emerged during the first phase of World Vision BiH's project "Empowering Young Women to Monitor Government's Commitment in Gender Equality"¹ through local level advocacy initiatives in 6 municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

¹ The EU-funded project "Empowering Young Women to Monitor Government's Commitment in Gender Equality" is supported by World Vision Ireland and jointly implemented by World Vision Bosnia-Herzegovina, DAH Theatre Serbia, Women's Safe House Montenegro and Infoteka Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project supports civil society

1. discrimination of women in the labour market;
2. almost zero political participation of women at the grassroots level; and
3. few or non-existent opportunities for youth in rural areas to enjoy their cultural rights.

The local level advocacy methodology applied in this process was Citizens Voice and Action (CVA). Citizen Voice and Action is an approach that aims to increase dialogue between ordinary citizens and organisations that provide services to the public. It also aims to improve accountability from the administrative and political sections of government (both national and local) in order to improve the delivery of public services. The approach aims to empower communities to influence the quality, efficiency and accountability of public services.

Citizen Voice and Action works through the mobilization of citizens, equipping them with tools to monitor government services, and facilitating a process to improve those services. CVA includes three implementation phases (Enabling Citizen Engagement; Engagement via Community Gathering; and Improving Services and Influencing Policies). Community Gathering, as evidence of citizen's engagement, is a series of linked participatory processes that focus on assessing the quality of public services (like health care, education etc.) and identifying ways to improve their delivery. Community members who use the service, service providers (such as clinic, employment bureaus, police etc.) and local government officials are all invited to participate. The process is collaborative — not confrontational. Simply put, nobody wants an underperforming school or clinic in their community, and local authorities are often eager to work with citizens to improve these essential facilities. Operating in the social space between citizens and decision makers, service providers sometimes feel frustrated with poor implementation of the regulations and policies by the government as well as low engagement by citizens.

Under the CVA project, four youth teams in the municipalities of Visoko, Doboj Istok, Lukavac and Sapna have been working on the issues relevant for this paper. Detailed explanation is given below under each item, together with some references to the relevant research recently done by WV's partnering organisations. In each municipality approximately 20-30 young people were engaged directly, while wider audiences were reached through social networks, as the most frequent way of communication among young people.

1. Discrimination of women in labour market (Article 6 and 7 of the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

In spite of the existence of a favourable legal framework, many factors, including stereotyping on male and female occupations, continues to create a discriminatory environment in the BiH labour market, in general towards:

organizations in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina involved in promoting gender-sensitive laws, policies and action plans. It focuses on engaging youth and young adults (18-30 years old) to monitor and advocate for gender equality in law and policy implementation.

- young women of reproductive age who employers will presume to become absent from work to care for children (if they are employed and in maternity leave, reimbursements vary from one administrative unit to another, thus discriminating women based on their residence status);
- women over 40 who were actually absent from work due to child care.

In a particularly difficult position are single mothers (divorced women who do not receive child support from ex-husbands are not legally considered as single mothers), women who have suffered domestic violence, or who belong to a marginalized and socially excluded group (Roma, women with disabilities).² This situation contributes to further feminization of poverty in the country.

According to the State Statistical Agency, women's participation in labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina was 33.2% in 2011, while the employment rate was only 23% for women vs. 41.3% for men.

The research conducted by WV's partner "Zene zenama" in 2012³ showed that gender inequality mirrors in:

- unequal opportunities in the process of looking for/ getting employment.

All laws in BiH (RS, Federation, Brcko District) forbid gender discrimination while looking for jobs, getting employment and at the work place. However, the research showed that more than half (55.8 %) of interviewed women of different ages have seen vacancy notices which state a gender preference, while the percentage of those who actually faced gender discrimination is slightly less but still high (44.2 %). Discrimination by age in vacancies was stated by more than 70% of interviewees in this research, the problem being more serious considering that this kind of discrimination is not mentioned (forbidden) in any of the existing respective laws. The same stands for the marital status – the laws do not recognise marital status as potential cause of discrimination. More than 40% of survey participants stated that they were asked about their marital status and number of children during the job interview.

This is seen as a potentially discriminatory practice by the 68.7% of interviewed women who perceive that people who are not married have more chances to find employment, while another 10% think that married couples without children are more likely to get a job. In the job interviews more than half of the participating women were asked about their intentions to have children.

According to the existing laws employed women enjoy additional protection during pregnancy, delivery and period of maternity, with mandatory paid maternity leave. All labour laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina prohibit firing women during pregnancy or maternity leave, however, 8.6 % of interviewed

² Policy analysis by "Udružene zene" Bajaluka, 2012

³ *Rodne (ne)jedakosti na trzistu rada u BiH – Zenska strana price /Gender (In)equalities in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovin – Women's side of story/* by Sanela Basic and Milanla Mikovic, Zene zenama, Sarajevo, 2012.

women were actually fired because of being pregnant, and an additional 5.6% during their maternity leave.

Another study, done by VESTA Association⁴ gives an insight into gender insensitivity of the state budgets at all levels (entities, cantons, district), which causes a deepening of gender discrimination, and which is the most obvious in the most sensitive period of their lives. Unequal distribution of funds discriminates pregnant women and mothers who are entitled to benefits during pregnancy and maternity leave. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is no unique regulation of this right – it is the responsibility of entities, cantons and Brcko District, and the actual support depends on the financial strength of each level of governance. The consequence of these disparities is that significant number of women do not enjoy this right – due to gender insensitivity of the budgets, the money goes to other, “higher” priorities.⁵

During the Citizen Voice and Action process in Visoko municipality (24 persons participated, men and women equally), young women scored the availability of information about job opportunities for women with 1.75 on a scale from 1 – 5 (1 means “not satisfactory” and 5 means “excellent”), while service providers (employees of Employment Agency) scored the same service with 4. At the interface meeting it is agreed that this gap will be bridged by inclusion of local youth associations in the process of information sharing. Gender stereotyping is not registered in the official process of advertising but employers often verbally share their preferences with the agency.

Government response

There are several strategic documents which enable improvements in this area, which were drafted during the report writing and finalized in the meantime:

- Gender Action Plans in both entities in BiH (Republic of Srpska and Federation of BiH)
- Employment strategies in both entities
- Social inclusion strategies

While all these documents do pay attention to women and aim at an increase in their employment, there are not enough concrete programmes to support women’s employment and self-employment. Monitoring of implementation of the Laws on gender equality and prohibition of all sorts of discrimination is poor and inefficient.

Proposed Questions:

⁴ *Analiticka podloga za izradu strateskih smjernica za unapredjenje položaja porodilja u BiH uz korištenje procesa rodno odgovornog budžetiranja*, Udruženje VESTA, Tuzla 2011.

⁵ Complete study available at:

<http://www.vesta.ba/files/Analiticka%20podloga%20za%20izradu%20strateskih%20smjernica%20za%20prava%20porodilja%20u%20BiH.pdf>

What are the plans for the reinforcement of the Gender Equality Law, in terms of routine data disaggregation in all state institutions? When will the monitoring mechanisms of discrimination be established/ improved?

2. No political participation of women at the grassroots level (Articles 3 and 4 of the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

While the overall level of political participation of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina is far from acceptable, their participation at the grassroots level does not exceed 3%. Local community councils are made up almost exclusively of male representatives. "I can't remember a woman has ever been a member of local council", says one of the young men from the local advocacy team in Dobož Istok, BiH.

Some actions have indeed been taken in this field, e.g. the appointment of Gender Commissions at the municipal level as well as implementation of various projects on localizing gender in municipalities. However, no actions were taken at the very grassroots level, especially in rural areas. In addition, very few of the established Gender Commissions have actually achieved results in promoting the political participation of women.

Citizen Voice and Action in Dobož Istok municipality showed that women participated neither in development nor in implementation of the local development strategy in their municipality and local community. There were very few women candidates at the local elections (2 were elected as councillors at the Municipal Council), and prior to 2013, no woman had ever stood as a candidate at the lowest level of local community council. Women themselves scored their political participation in Dobož Istok with 1 (not satisfactory) and have started a discussion about root causes of this situation.

Proposed Question:

What are the plans to improve the work of the Gender Commissions at the municipal level? Are there any initiatives to increase women's participation in local councils?

3. Cultural Rights of young people (Article 15 of the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

Young people in rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina rarely participate in the cultural life of their communities. Culture is treated as luxury rather than a need and it is rarely budgeted in grassroots action plans. Young people who live in villages feel neglected and excluded from the cultural life even though the local authorities are legally obliged to create opportunities for cultural life of local communities.

During Citizen Voice and Action, respect of cultural rights of young people was scored with the lowest marks in rural communities of Poljice in Lukavac municipality, as well as in Sapna and Dobož Istok municipalities. All youth teams who led the CVA process identified the objectives in local strategies as being vague, unspecific, and never achieved in practice, so that young people have no opportunities to

actually enjoy their rights. All youth teams scored youth participation and pro-activeness also as “not satisfactory” (1) and engaged with local authorities and service providers in discussions on possibilities of change.

Proposed Question:

Will any official mechanisms be established to hold local government accountable for fulfilling the cultural rights of its citizens, especially of youth in rural areas?

A full project report of the Citizen Voice and Action project (for more details see footnote 1), containing conclusions and further steps of all teams, will be available by the end of calendar year 2013.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact any of the below listed staff members.

Contact:

World Vision Bosnia-Herzegovina

Venita Popovic, Project Manager

Office Phone: +387 32 243 414

Office Fax: + 387 32 246 278

Email: venita_popovic@wvi.org

Office address: Skolska 10, Metalurg, 7th floor, 72000 Zenica

World Vision International

Marisa Vojta, Programme Officer, Child Rights and Wellbeing

Office Phone: +41 22 798 41 83

Office Fax: +41 22 798 65 47

Email: marisa_vojta@wvi.org

Office address: Chemin de Balxert 7-9, CH-1219 Châtelaine (Geneva)