

Sharing as a Beneficial Principle: The International Forum of Women at the VII Astana Economic Forum, May 2014

by Ursula Gelis

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“...the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else.” John Maynard Keynes¹



International Forum of Women, VII AEF, May 2014. Photo: Ursula Gelis

In May 2014, the VII Astana Economic Forum (AEF) brought together politicians, economists, Nobel laureates, academics, and representatives from international organizations and NGOs to discuss ideas and solutions to cope with global economic and social challenges.

The annual event, held in the nation's capital since 2008, is an indicator of Kazakhstan's increasing role as a mediator between East and West, due not only to its geographic position, straddling both Europe and Asia, but also to its impressive past along the trading routes of the former Silk Road. As a result, today the multi-ethnic state is able to incorporate models from different parts of the world. In 1991 Kazakhstan became independent from the former Soviet Union and managed to establish itself as a valuable global economic partner.

The G-Global initiative (<http://g-globalexpert.com/>) was initiated by Kazakhstan, inviting experts to look for solutions to global crisis.

“The G-Global project represents a new international collaboration format. This global group will expand, enhance and supplement the role of global governance groups in developing world economic policies. The principles of G-Global – evolution and reforms; justice,

¹ J. M. Keynes. *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964, p. 383.

equality and consensus among countries; global tolerance and trust in interstate relations; global transparency and absence of double standards; constructive multi-polarity – can guarantee the constructive development of civilization in the XXI-st century and a serve as fundamental principles of a new world order.”²

The Association of Businesswomen in Kazakhstan has had a major impact on the AEF since 2012, particularly on the topic of women’s empowerment.



www.astanatimes.com/2014/05/role-women-new-economy-discussed-astana-economic-forum/

‘Homo oeconomicus’ and others

According to British economist John M. Keynes (1883-1946) the world is ruled mainly by economists and political philosophers.

The term ‘homo oeconomicus’ was labeled 1914 by the German philosopher and pedagogue Eduard Spranger (1882-1963) in his work ‘Lebensformen’ (life forms). Spranger categorized people as such: the social, the esthetical, the theoretical, religious, the personality dominated by power ambitions, and the economical man, ‘homo oeconomicus’.- Discussions whether ‘homo oeconomicus’ is a rational and non-social person, inclined to reach his or her personal goals with minimal means yet looking for achieving maximal output, vary from ideas that a economical inclined actor will automatically be a social player, because social behavior will be more beneficial (Adam Smith).³

² <http://g-globalexpert.com/articles/business/new-economic-approaches-coherent-post-%E2%80%93-2015-agenda>.

³ <http://www.rechnungswesen-verstehen.de/bwl-vwl/bwl/homo-oeconomicus.php>.

Supporting women in businesses is supporting development

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev emphasized the role of women in the development of society, the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises and the importance of women's entrepreneurship for successful economic development.

On May 22, the high profile International Women's Forum "G-Global: the role of women in new economies" was held at the Palace of Independence in Astana. 'Leadership of women in political and economic life' was discussed in the first session.

Leadership implies followership. Philosopher Max Weber (1864-1920) defines three basic types of leadership: the charismatic, traditional and rational-legal.⁴ "The charismatic leader is the revolutionary, the prophet, the national hero, etc. Such leadership styles surface during times of great social change to challenge the status quo and to provide an inspiring vision for the future."⁵

The time is ripe that "women's participation in economics becomes normal", said Arancha Gonzales, executive director of the international Trade Center in Spain. (<http://www.astanatimes.com/2014/06/smes-key-kazakhstans-economic-future/>).

The forum gave a way for charismatic women to talk about their experiences in the business world and to share their concerns about mechanisms still in place to prevent equal participation.

Lyazzat Ibragimova, chairwomen and executive board member of "Damu Entrepreneurship Development Fund" (<http://www.damu.kz/en>), and member of the National Commission for Women Affairs, Kazakhstan, described proactive Kazakh women who are opening their own businesses. She shared her concerns about structural hindrances with hundreds of women who attended the session (some men were attending too).

She describes the phenomenon of 'women sitting in the back of the conference room'; the fact that women are less out-spoken than men and too timid and insecure. Often women are not capable enough to promote themselves and are

⁴ Max Weber. Soziologische Kategorienlehre. 1 Teil. 3. Kapitel: die Typen der Herrschaft. In: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Frankfurt a. M. 2010.

⁵ G. Evans/J. Newnham. Dictionary of International Relations. London 1998, p. 299.

less successful at networking. Therefore men can easily remain in the leading positions. Women have to learn to promote each other and to appoint other women. Sharing of information and experiences is a necessity.



<http://www.damu.kz/en>

Reaching the OSCE standards to increase women in the staff is crucial.

“The OSCE aims to provide equal opportunities for women and men, as well as to integrate gender equality into policies and practices, both within participating States and the Organization itself. With local partners, the OSCE initiates and runs projects across the OSCE region to empower women, and build local capacities and expertise on gender issues. It co-operates with authorities in reviewing legislation and assists in building national mechanisms to ensure equality between women and men”.
<http://www.osce.org/what/gender>.

Suppression techniques

Following the recommendations of the forum, women’s personalities and attitudes apparently need to be readjusted to reflect the new business paradigm. Is this the answer? Is change possible without understanding and integrating this new ‘reality?’ According to Berit Ås (1928-) suppression techniques, women are strategically placed into certain uncomfortable positions. The Norwegian social psychologist dominance practices are exercised as follows:

- Making invisible: to silence persons by marginalizing them. Examples:
 - a) Another speaker takes something you have said as if it was an idea of their own, or starts speaking despite it being your turn.
 - b) As it is your turn to speak, the other attendees start to talk to each other, browse through their papers, etc.

- To ridicule a person: to portray the arguments of, or their opponents themselves, in a ridiculing fashion. Examples:
 - a) Another speaker laughs at your accent and compares you to a character in a humorous TV show (although you had something important to say).
 - b) When making an accusation of wrongdoing against someone, you are being told that you look cute when you're angry.

- To withhold information: To exclude a person from the decision making process, or knowingly not forwarding information so as to make the person less able to make an informed choice. Examples:
 - a) Your colleagues have a meeting that concerns you, without inviting you.
 - b) Decisions are made not in a conference where everyone is present, but at a dinner party later in the evening, where only some attendants have been invited.



Berit Ås, Nesna, May 2011. Photo: Ursula Gelis

- Double bind: To punish or otherwise belittle the actions of a person, regardless of how they act. Example:

- a) When you do your work tasks thoroughly, you receive complaints for being too slow. When you do them efficiently, you're critiqued for being sloppy.
- Put to shame: To embarrass a person or to insinuate that they are themselves to blame for their position. Example:
- a) You inform your manager that you are being slandered but are told it is your fault since you dress provocatively.⁶

Analyzing human behavior in a competitive world seems to be a precondition for constructive change. Are we willing to share or are we only after short term personal benefits?

Eurasian Economic Union

The development of women-owned enterprises will be supported with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union which was officially established in Astana on May 29th.

This view was shared by Chair of the Union of women-entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan, Meruyert Kazbekova. "Today 70% of economically-active women focus on small business, so our main task in the Eurasian Community is to develop SME (small and medium sized businesses). By creating the new integration union for the businesswomen of Kazakhstan, new opportunities will be opened for searching new partners and additional markets."



ASTANA – The leaders of Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus met in the Kazakh capital, Astana, on May 29, 2014 to sign the treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a common market of 170 million people and a combined gross domestic product valued at \$2.7 trillion.⁷

⁶ Ås, Berit. "Hersketeknikker". *Kjerringråd* (Oslo) (1978:3): 17–21. ISSN 0800-0565. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_suppression_techniques.

Where are we?

Gender parity in schooling worldwide is closest to being achieved at the primary level; however, only 2 out of 130 countries have achieved that target at all levels of education.

Globally, 40 out of 100 wage-earning jobs in the non-agricultural sector are held by women. But women still enter the labor market on an unequal basis to men, even after accounting for educational background and skills.

As of October 2013, women were 21.8 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses and 19.4 per cent of Senate or upper houses, up from 12 per cent and 10.1 per cent in January 1997, respectively. At the pace witnessed during the last 15 years, it will take nearly 40 years to reach the parity zone in parliaments.

According to the Secretary-General's pre-CSW report "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls", while the three indicators under Goal 3 reflect important dimensions of gender inequality, the narrow focus of Goal 3 fails to address such critical issues as violence against women, inequalities in the division of unpaid care work, women's limited access to assets, violations of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, and their unequal participation in private and public decision-making beyond national parliaments.

For countries where data are available, women spend on average roughly twice as much or more time than men on unpaid domestic and care work. The report stresses that unless all dimensions of gender inequality are addressed, the overall Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be achieved.

See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/mdg-momentum#sthash.D3h8QIIu.dpuf>.

Exclusion of the poor

In a plenary session at the Economic Forum, Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus shared his concerns about an attitude which promotes a kind of mechanistic

⁷ <http://www.astanatimes.com/2014/05/kazakhstan-belarus-russia-sign-historic-treaty-creating-eurasian-economic-union/>.

behavior, focusing only on economic issues. “We became robots”, because we disregard the variety of human experience.

Yunus stressed the need for integrating women in entrepreneurial activism, which has a positive effect on the economy of a country. He discussed the power of microcredit and social business in tackling social problems in the context of the existing capitalist system that excludes the poorest.

President Nazarbayev urged the countries to be united to work to overcome the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

“This problem is not just limited to developing countries but also developed countries, like Germany and the UK.”⁸

The repertoire of discrimination

The second session of the women’s forum addressed the role of Asian and Afghan women in the development of a new globalized economy.

Talking about *new* economies should not be understood as a geographical issue alone, but also in respect to *new* ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

As the Malmö Nordic Forum which took place in June 2014 pointed out:

“All over the world, women’s rights are marginalized, ridiculed and threatened. In Europe, the economic crisis has hit hard with rising unemployment and an increase in poverty as a result. In the wake of the crisis, voices calling for women to remain engaged in unpaid domestic and care work are given more and more space. [...]

In the Nordic region – where we are often seen as leaders in the field of gender equality – violence and threats to violence, lower wages, fewer career opportunities and less influence in decision-making are included in the repertoire of discrimination.” (Nordisk Forum. Malmö, June 2014: New Actions on Women’s Rights, p. 5).

Moving ahead

⁸ <http://blog.astanaforum.org/en/yunus-says-women-entrepreneurs-to-drive-economy>

The vision statement of the NGO Forum of Women, in Beijing 1995 still needs to be implemented: “To bring together women and men to challenge, create, and transform global structures and processes at all levels through the empowerment and celebration of women. We are committed to equality, peace, justice, inclusiveness, and full participation of all.”

The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report of 2013 ranked Kazakhstan 32nd out of 136 countries in terms of gender equality. Recently, legislative and social initiatives have been put into place to increase women’s representation in decision-making processes.

The country is in the midst of a 10-year plan to encourage women to hold a minimum of 30 percent of all decision-making positions in government by 2016.

Websites:

http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/2013_progress_english.pdf.

<http://www.osce.org/secretariat/119635>.

<http://nf2014.org/en/>.

<http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2013>.

Oslo, June 2014