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Political Participation and Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan: Civil Society, Women, and a Democratic Future

by

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"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In places close to home--so close and so small that cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet, they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he/she lives in; the school or college he/she attends; the factory, farm, or office where he/she works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the large world."

Eleanor Roosevelt, "The Great Question, NY: United Nations 1958"

Human Rights, Citizens, and Civil Society

The study of human rights and its protection, promotion, and enhancement, is a living subject; gaining depth and strength by daily application. An understanding of what human dignity means is advanced, optimistically, everyday in the towns, villages, and cities of our world. Since the inception of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the international community has been steadily interpreting and advancing these principles in inter/intra state and national legislation, local legal systems, multi-national corporations, and individual lives. As concepts of human dignity are challenged, amended, and expanded, the global human rights vision matures. Most critical to the philosophy of human rights is Eleanor Roosevelt's assertion that it is in the expression, the accessibility, and the use of human rights in daily lives that matter most and that provides dimension to the Universal Declaration.

Women have historically been marginalized in concepts of human rights definitions and applications. This 'gender' blind spot in human rights law and movements was, and remains to a fair degree, blatant. It took a sophomoric slogan, 'women's rights are human rights,' repeated incessantly, as recently as the 1993 United Nations Human

Rights Conference, to even begin to gain international recognition that women's lives, largely, have not benefited from initial or expanding concepts of 'universal' human rights.

Why did this situation, where half of humanity was without international human rights consideration or protection, occur? How could such an obvious exclusion, particularly among the parties, activists, and academics committed to and impassioned by the promotion of human dignity ignore slightly more than half of the world's population? Eleanor Roosevelt speaks of 'concerned citizen action' as the catalyst towards global-local human rights recognition. "Citizen action." Citizen. It is in the definition of this small, but powerful word, that women's marginalization has been sanctified. The infamous public/private divide of men as citizens, public decision-makers, and women as private property, outside of state affairs, hidden in the home, has been part of the Western concept of citizen since Socrates sent his wife, Xanthippe, home.

Since women have historically not been considered citizens of the state, until very recently, women have been immune from the privileges, duties, and protection of national and international law intended for citizens and consequently outside the realm of human rights concepts and laws. Thus, it is only through an inclusion of women in political decision-making process, through women as public citizens of the state, that women's human rights will attain application and enhancement; subsequently having meaning at the international, national and local level for women.¹⁾

While much of the literature of this debate has focused on women's elected political representation this paper argues that in Kyrgyzstan it is as 'citizens' of a nascent civil society that women are making progress towards women's human rights. Moreover, it is through the building of the informal sector of a democratic society that women will recognize their own gains in human rights. Thus, while key elected and appointed percentages of women have declined, this is, not necessarily, cause for alarm because the elected and appointed positions in Kyrgyzstan do not represent real political power.¹⁾ Therefore, women are realizing greater force and effectiveness as active citizens in the third-sector, the civil society of Kyrgyzstan, by contributing to the overall improvement of life for all citizens. Furthermore, while there is justified cause for alarm in many areas of women's lives that have, and continued to, back-slide at a rapid rate, i.e. economic, security, health, education, these are a result of dramatic sectoral collapse affecting the entire population. Arguably, women are influenced to a more severe degree²⁾, but these are general failures rather than planned reduction in women's human rights.

At the outset, it is critical to understand gender and political process in Kyrgyzstan from a Former Soviet Union (FSU), non-Western perspective.³⁾ This recognition and subsequent dismantling, to the extent possible, of Western blinders involves outlining five main points.

First, formal representation of women was obligatory under the Soviet Union carrying less than the already non-existent meaning of 'political representation.' Furthermore, the Soviet public/political space provided little privilege in the realm of freedom and human rights. The private space of the home, domain of women, in the FSU was cherished as one of the few spaces of freedom and actual decision-making. As Beth Holmgren notes, "Soviet women, more than Soviet men, were able to 'remain human' precisely on account of their domestic attachments."⁴⁾

Second, the current crisis environment in which women of Kyrgyzstan are situated is extreme. Central Asia has been labeled, appropriately, a 'tragic experience' of Soviet rule.⁵⁾ The collapse of the Soviet Union left, Kyrgyzstan, like other post-Soviet republics, mired deep in general moral, political, and economical confusion. Add to this the fact that Kyrgyzstan was one of the poorest republics of the FSU and a grim picture begins to emerge. Moreover, there is a severe crisis of identity, economy, and politics, all integrally and steadfastly complementing each other.⁶⁾

Third, one must account for both the Soviet and Russian residue, considering the Soviet Union's imposition of a very distinct Russian identity upon all non-Russian citizens. In addition to examining the post-Soviet woman, one must also consider the historical, pre-Soviet, Kyrgyz nomadic identity and the current influences of a renewed 'traditionalism' and 'Muslim' identity. Women, along with Kyrgyz society, are struggling to define what it means to be Kyrgyz and/or Kyrgyz citizen.⁷⁾

Fourth, Kyrgyz society currently operates with great contradiction and stress due to the ongoing transition. Vast paradoxes span every area of human development and existence. Events and symbols are often not what they appear, creating a distinct 'Alice in Wonderland' phenomena and a vocabulary for describing Kyrgyzstan rich with words like; murky, ambiguous, paradoxical, bizarre, fuzzy, shaky, etc.⁸⁾ For instance, while women's participation in civil society is at a high level so is domestic violence. Bride kidnapping is on the increase yet so are the numbers of women graduating from post-secondary education.⁹⁾ Thus, it is not uncommon to encounter an intelligent, perhaps even Western educated, woman who will support a renewal of 'traditions' including bride-kidnapping and the *Kalym*, bride-price. This may not be seen as contradictory, bearing in mind that a renewal of traditions can be understood as a 'political or national expression' since these practices were outlawed under Soviet

rule.^{[10\)](#)} Knowing these paradoxes it is easier to understand an Asian Development Bank statement such as, "while women are among those groups most seriously affected by the overall decline in social indicators, they have also become a major driving force in the political and economic reform."^{[11\)](#)}

Fifth, it is imperative to move beyond what has essentially been a Western feminist epistemology when examining gender and specially women in the FSU and Kyrgyzstan. While many women in Kyrgyzstan would not label themselves feminists, or claim that they are working for women's human rights, this does not mean that these female leaders are not contributing significantly to the advancement of women's human dignity. Rather, it is a different understanding of definitions and priorities due to historical connotations of the 'women's question' in the FSU and current-day priorities in women's lives.^{[12\)](#)}

Thus, this paper expands concepts of women's political participation to the wider realm of non-elected, non-official representation in the newly formed non-governmental organizations, arguing that the third-sector forms both the foundation of civil society in Kyrgyzstan and, therefore, the basis for prospects of an authentic democratic future and an advancement of women's human rights. Moreover, it is precisely though concern and dedication to improving the lives of their families, their children, their neighbors, and their country that women will recognize augmentation of their own human rights. The two, women and society, cannot be divorced. If Kyrgyzstan fails to transition, out of political and economic anarchy, into some form of consolidated democratic system that respects and supports the full range of human rights and values then women in Kyrgyzstan stand little chance of recognizing human rights.

Democratic Transition and Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan?

Before examining women's lives and their involvement in decision-making, it is critical to review the fabric of current society, thereby avoiding the 'gender vacuum' that can plague gender/feminist research when women are separated from the lives they lead. Additionally, a working definition of democracy and civil society must be introduced. For the purposes of this paper the definition will follow the United States Department of State identification of Kyrgyzstan, "although the 1993 Constitution defines the form of government as a democratic republic with substantial civil rights for its citizens, the President, Askar Akayev, dominates the government."^{[13\)](#)} Whatever else is, or is not, occurring in Kyrgyzstan there is clear evidence that an active civil

society, lead by women, exists and is functioning outside, around, and in spite of the "democratic" government.^{[14\)](#)}

Democracy has become a word so full and so empty of meaning in today's instant development lexicon that recently minted 'democrats' can conjure images of freedom, liberty, and equality without having to apply norms of democratic behavior to themselves. 'Today's democrats are yesterday's Communists, who have cleverly exploited the change in government to cloak themselves in the mantle of democracy and enrich themselves in the process,' says Dooronbek Sadyrbayev, formerly a leading Kyrgyz filmmaker, current Member of Parliament.^{[15\)](#)} As Jeremy Bransten confirms in "Kyrgyzstan: A Democracy for the Rich", it is easy to spot the 'democrats' in Kyrgyzstan. They travel aboard, sport well-tailored suits... drive, or are driven, in government Volgas or BMWs... sip imported beer... and dance the night away."^{[16\)](#)}

Although numerous scholars from Aristotle to Dahl have produced volumes on what democracy is and what democracy means the concept remains ambiguous and debatable. While there may be universal recognition that democracy must include; free and fair elections, rule of law, freedom of speech and media, equality and liberty for all citizens, and acceptable practice of human rights standards, among other indicators, how these democratic ingredients are applied is subjective and varied.^{[17\)](#)} Vaclav Havel argues, "democracy in its present Western form arouses skepticism and mistrust in many parts of the world." Havel says he is "not entirely satisfied with this recipe for saving the world... because it is hopelessly half-baked. In fact it is really only half a recipe."^{[18\)](#)}

Unfortunately, democracy debates are outside the scope of this paper. However, a definition appropriate to the context, realizing that it is, as any definition of democracy, both subjective and incomplete, is applied. Ralph Waldo Emerson's notion of democracy best captures the spirit of the women leaders in Kyrgyzstan. Emerson believed that democracy is essentially the strong conviction that in ordinary people there exists extraordinary possibilities. Democracy, in other words, as a system of government, that Thomas Jefferson believed, can tap into the remarkable, renewable human spirit, capable of extraordinary good.^{[19\)](#)} A more functional, less normative, definition of modern, political democracy is stated as "system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives."^{[20\)](#)}

Citizens acting in the public realm, civil society, is a critical ingredient to democratic society, transition, and consolidation. Democratic success requires active citizens and thus democracy, at best, includes a directly proportional relationship that

both nurtures and depends upon civic culture.²¹⁾ Steven Fish called civil society the 'dependent variable' of democracy.²²⁾ While civil society is essential it is no more easy to define than democracy. Steven Fish provides an excellent discussion of the civil society process in relation to Russian democratic advancement; favoring John Keane's definition of civil society. Paraphrased, Keane essentially defines civil society as an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged in a complexity of non-state activities, including economic, cultural, family, voluntary associations, education, media etc. and by doing so transform and preserve their own identity through exercising formal and non-formal pressures/controls on state institutions.²³⁾

Civil society is the non-sexy side of democratic consolidation. Building a civil society is the 'roll-your-sleeves-up, get-down-and-dirty' kind of work that it takes to consolidate a democracy. Elbow grease, with which most of the 'democrats' in Kyrgyzstan are not preoccupied, is a necessary component of civil society. However, the women, by and large, have taken advantage of the newly open public space and started building a vibrant civil society. Djanaeva Nurgul, Director of the Forum of Women's NGO, claims that among the NGOs, "particularly the women's NGOs, a practical realization of the social responsibility is taking place."²⁴⁾ It is this concern for their children, families, and country that has catalyzed women to create and lead the nascent, yet rapidly expanding, NGO movement in Kyrgyzstan. With over five-hundred registered NGOs in 1996, of which a generous estimate would define half as 'working' NGOs, some fifty NGOs have a women focused mission.²⁵⁾ Moreover, many of the strongest NGOs, focusing on non-gender specific areas, are directed by women and contribute significantly to improving women's lives.

If, as Touraine asserts, "we cannot divorce democratic culture from political consciousness, which is not simply a sense of citizenship but a demand for responsibility,"²⁶⁾ then it is the women of Kyrgyzstan who are taking on the burden of both creating and assuming public responsibility for the democratic transition while the 'new democrats' are busy 'sipping beer and dancing the night away.' Therefore, it is in the realm of civil-society building that the political power of Kyrgyzstan's transitional democracy lies and it is the women, to their credit, who have seized the opportunity to contribute substantially and participate actively in this non-formal power structure, that may determine the future of democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

Women's Lives and Politics in Kyrgyzstan

Currently, women's daily lives in Kyrgyzstan often seem far removed from the UN Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Universal Declaration, the human rights guaranteed in the Kyrgyz constitution, and President Akayev's 'special women's program, the Ayalzat National Program. Actual realization of human rights in women's daily lives still remains in the stratosphere, placed somewhere beyond the official declaration of President Akaeva's 1996 Year of the Woman and Education and the multitude of international laws that Kyrgyz has signed. Similar to patterns found all over the FSU women's official representation has, in the words of Mary Buckley, 'come crashing down' in Kyrgyzstan.²⁷⁾ Since independence women have lost positions, mainly in public and governmental bodies, with critical reductions in local management from thirty percent to three-five percent.²⁸⁾ Lower than the average ten percent of global representation of elected representation at the national level, Kyrgyzstan's parliament includes only four percent of women, down from thirty percent in 1985. At the upper levels of government women consisted of thirty-five percent of the justice system in 1985. By 1995 this figure had dropped to eight percent.

In the White House, the most important source of government power in Kyrgyzstan, women represent two percent of all department heads with thirty-eight percent of all staff women. At the local oblast level, in 1996, of sixty heads of state district administrations only one Akim, director, was a woman. Mid-level government management shows slightly better figures, with Bishkek oblast at forty-seven percent followed by Chui oblast at thirty-eight percent female representation.²⁹⁾ At the outset these figures might seem cause for alarm; however, if political participation is defined more broadly than elected or appointed office than there is cause for optimism. Moreover, remembering the tradition of politics in the FSU and understanding the current state of politics today in Kyrgyzstan then it may indeed be a very positive sign that women are opting for more substantial roles in the creation of a democratic society.

While women's overall political represented/appointed numbers have decline, paradoxically, Kyrgyzstan supports a female Vice Prime Minister, Mira Jangaracheva; a female Chair of the Supreme Court, Cholpon Baekova, Minister of Justice, Larisa Gutnichenko, Minister of Labor and Social Protection, Asylgul Abdurehmenova, and until recently a female Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rosa Otunbayeva, currently Ambassador to the United Kingdom, which one might argue is a more powerful position.³⁰⁾ The former Minister of Education was represented by Chinara Jakypova, currently director of the local Soros Foundation, again an arguably greater position of

influence.³¹⁾ Women consisted of a majority of lawyers, journalists and 67.7% of all health care workers.³²⁾ Yet recall that in Soviet terms these sectors were relatively unimportant. The legal system was nothing more than a sentencing apparatus and legal reform has yet to occur. Media was a state propaganda tool, media reform also remains in a nascent stage. The medical system, although universal, was and remains a field given little respect and pay with the most basic practices and supplies, such as dental floss, non-existent.

Where then does the real power lie in the political process in Kyrgyzstan and how do women factor into these areas? First and foremost, political power is in the hands of President Askar Akayev and thus the presidential executive body, the White House. The power of both houses of the parliament is virtually non-existence. The ministries are controlled both fiscally and practically by the White House and the akyms, oblast directors, are appointed by the President. The media has been silenced by presidential libel suits. As mentioned, the judicial is yet unreformed and judges are appointed by the President.

Effectively, the White House is the government of Kyrgyzstan and this means that President Akayev, his relatives and former classmates, control the political processes.³³⁾ The gender aspect of the White House is significant in that the personal power of First Lady Madame Akayev is rumored to be substantial. Some claim she holds power akin to the Nancy Reagan model. In fairness, Madam Akayev's position of power does have some relevance on the impact of women's human rights. She directs the infamous Meerim Foundation that supports children and women's advancement in Kyrgyzstan. Although this NGO is often seen as an instrument for elite projects the Foundation has been instrumental, to some degree, in working towards the elevation of feminine poverty to some degree.

Where, then, is the important process of democratic reform occurring? As previously mentioned, it is in the civil society realm where women leaders are wielding power and achieving significant results. Some of the most critical work is being done by women in non-gender specific organizations arguably creating strong threads of civil society and democratic reform in Kyrgyzstan. The Forum of Women's NGOs and Diamond should also be mentioned as women specific NGOs that are providing much needed support and guidance to rural women and victims of domestic violence. In order to understand why I argue that progress in civil society holds the potential for democratic consolidation in Kyrgyzstan, and hence an increase in women's human rights, the activities and achievements of seven strongest organizations are described, in brief detail, below. These were not selected because they are directed by women, rather it

is part of the argument that the strongest, most successful organizations have been created and are being led by women.

Interbilim: Interbilim is a NGO information clearinghouse and training/resource center. It has been extremely successful in coordinating the frantic pace at which NGOs are sprouting and has provided depth and effectiveness to the activities of new NGOs. Asiya Sasykbaeva is the director of Interbilim. With Interbilim she has created a pulse and nerve center for the NGO movement in Kyrgyzstan. Without Interbilim the civil society movement would be substantially less coordinated and mature.

Institute for Regional Studies (IRS), formerly The Kyrgyz Peace Research Center: Anara Tabyshalieva, director of IRS, was recently a fellow at The U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C.. The organization that Tabyshalieva created is the main, if not only, effort to provide the entire population with civic and human rights education. IRS leads a successful teacher-training program helping to educate secondary and post-secondary schools in human rights, democracy, and civil society. Additionally, IRS conducts professional and substantial research related to peace, reducing and avoiding ethnic conflict, human rights, civil society, and gender issues.

Kyrgyz-American Human Rights Bureau: Natalia Ablova created and directs the Bureau. As a former journalist, Ablova focuses many of the Bureau's activities on freedom of speech and press. The Bureau is a key source of information for leading international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Additionally, the Bureau runs a secondary school human rights education projects, staffed by university students, that actively involves secondary school children in human rights and civic community projects. Finally, the Bureau is the leading human rights activist organization often organizing and participating in protests around such diverse issues as children's rights to nuclear testing at Lob Nor.

The American University of Kyrgyzstan: (AUK), recently inaugurated by U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton and sponsored by The Soros Foundation to become a regional Central Asian university, is the brainchild of Camilla Sharshekeeva, formerly an English teacher at Kyrgyz State National University (KSNU). Despite pressure and lack of support from KSNU and the White House, AUK has developed as the institute to undertake and accomplish educational reform. With an objective to provide 'democratic life skills' AUK embarked on numerous activities outside the classroom, including: sex education, democracy round-tables, student government, debate clubs, student news

papers, and leadership training, etc. In addition, the curriculum offered at AUK is the first to support updated material, anything after the 1970s, and teach in a "Western" style, i.e. seminars, small group discussions, and critical analysis.³⁴⁾

The Talent Support Fund: The Support Fund, directed by Dinara Chochunbayeva, is one of two leading organization to undertake support, both material and otherwise, of the most vulnerable section of Kyrgyz population; children and women. The Support Fund has been extremely successful in fund-raising, immunization, advocacy, etc., stepping in where the government has been unable, or unwilling, to allocate vital social service sector funds for the needs of children and their mothers.

Ukuk: Ukuk is the leading NGO promoting rule of law and legal reform founded and directed by Mirgul Smanalieva. Ukuk has been able to contribute significantly to public advocacy, advancement of a legal society, and NGO development. Ukuk organized and maintained leadership of, an on-going effort to push the Parliament to adopt NGO legislation, that would officially recognize NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, provide regulations, and stipulate examinations, i.e. tax codes.

Res Publica: Res Publica is the only opposition newspaper to continue to test President Akayev's commitment to free speech and media. Despite a demonstrated lack of understanding and/or commitment to journalistic ethics, Res Public is filling a vital role in freedom of the press, as notably the only media to openly question and criticize President Akayev and his government. Two editors, Zamira Sydykova and Tamara Slashcheva, were given suspended prison sentences of eighteen months and one year, respectively, and were banned from publishing until January 11, 1997, for Presidential libel after publishing an article critical of the President's luxurious lifestyle. Without Sydykova and Slascheva it is fair to say that a) the open space of media freedom would be significantly less and b) the issue of violation of media freedom would not have come to the foreground.³⁵⁾

Democratic Potential, Women and Full Human Development

Considering the forgone explanations of official political power, democratic reform, and civil society in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan's democratic future will only be obtained via civic society building, exercise of daily political life, and the continuous push of citizen activism in the form of media, legal, education, and human rights organizations. As it is

women who are leading these reforms, gender is particularly relevant in Kyrgyzstan's democratic process. Moreover, returning to the central theme, women's human rights are being advanced via women's political participation; although not in terms, theories, and definitions that may be readily recognizably to Western-style feminism.

There is a need to challenge the particularly Western feminist notion that gender is both the unifying and primary category of identity, subsuming all other categories of race, class, ethnicity, socioeconomic, and nationality.³⁶⁾ For a country experiencing such chaos, like Kyrgyzstan, it is an empty concept to say, 'I am a woman first.' In the face of such drastic identity shift what matters first and foremost for the majority of women and men is their identity as a citizen of their fledgling country and their newly discovered, re-created ethnic identities; Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, Kazakh, and Russian.

Is a feminist still a feminist if she does not place gender as her primary identity? Maybe, more so, as a comprehensive gender identity may be more effective in the long-term. Are the women of Kyrgyzstan working towards an enhanced definition of women's human rights? Yes, and in Kyrgyzstan realizing these rights via other means may be the only way to achieve women's human rights. The woman is already separated from the family and society in Kyrgyzstan without the need to create additional 'gender' divisions. Moreover, the extent of fragmentation in Central Asia is so great, the stress on identity roles and the general mental and moral confusion of new identities, is such that any civil movement can not afford new fractions. Society may not be able to tolerate the current fractions, let alone adding yet another separation. Many women are already separated from husbands, through an increase in divorce, separation, and alcoholism.³⁷⁾ The family is breaking down at a rapid pace and the last thing most women want is to increase these fragmentations and pressures by calling themselves feminists.

Moreover, the best way to improve the women's condition in Kyrgyzstan is through an improvement in the foundations of society. An increase in general living standards, including, basic housing, access to health care, food stuff, employment, freedom from violence, educational reform, etc. The poverty in Kyrgyzstan is extreme. The feminization of poverty is also evident, contributing to the global trend. The only way to improve women's condition is by improving her family condition; the lives and health of her children and husband. The woman cannot be divorced from family and society in Central Asia and to the extent that this happens, Kyrgyzstan will witness a greater reduction in women's status, lives, and wealth. Thus, these women leaders are truly engaged in 'gender' work as they advance women's human rights and work towards improving the lives of both genders.

Does this secondary emphasis on women's conditions mean that women's rights, interests, and agendas are once again falling second-rate to the larger interest of the state and society? Perhaps. Is it possible that once women make gains for their society they will be once again disenfranchised of their power as has occurred in history? Potentially, but this outcome is not a foregone conclusion. If women are able to make and maintain substantial gains in the democratic transition they can then translate these achievements into valuable political currency when running for elected official and/or holding appointed office has any color of democratic meaning and significance. The Kyrgyz women leaders may follow the women of Mongolia who saw their civic action turn into political power when the democratic forces won the Parliament, rendering the Khural a true democratic body, during the June 1996 elections.

Therefore, to the extent that women's political participation is defined as civil action, community building, civil society, then yes, an increase in women's political participation in Kyrgyzstan is the only way to enhance women's conditions and ensure that even the very basic human rights are met. Moreover, it is through women's political action in daily life that Kyrgyzstan will be able to transition into some form of consolidated democracy. Thus we see women once again carrying a double, perhaps triple burden. Through their efforts to improve society, women may realize an improvement in their own lives and increased access to and application of human rights, not only for women, but for all members of Kyrgyzstan.

To conclude, women's political participation is directly related to the achievement of women's human rights; however, it is an indirect link via the improvement of human rights and conditions for the whole population and it is represented in non-official, non-elected positions of power that are the true mechanisms of consolidating democratic gains. While these roles may translate later into elected position of power, this will only be useful for women when the elected and appointed positions of power embody authentic democratic decision making power. Until that time women are in the right place, making meaningful contributions to their society, in the realm of civil society and the freedom of political space in the third sector; which, ultimately, I optimistically argue, will enhance and promote women's human rights in a sustainable manner, linked with the progress of human rights and democratic society as a whole. Thereby, by giving human rights a meaning 'close to home' the women leaders of Kyrgyzstan are contributing, not only to an enhancement of women's human rights and democratic progress in Kyrgyzstan but to the progress of human dignity 'in the large world.'