

## **Gender Education: Theory and Practice**

### **Conference Report**

*The following is an open letter from two staff members of OSI's Women Program: Director of Programs Debra Schultz and Program Officer Marla Swanson. The letter was written after they attended "Gender Education: Theory and Practice," a conference in Bukhara, Uzbekistan organized by the Women's Program.*

November 13, 2003

Dear Colleagues,

We have just returned from a wonderful experience in beautiful Bukhara—the conference on "Gender Education: Theory and Practice"—organized brilliantly on November 4-5 by Eleonora Fayzullaeva. The Women's Program's deepest thanks go to Eleonora, Feruza and the conference planning committee: Elena Kochkina and Irina Tartakovskaya of the Gender Policy Institute-Russia, Olena Suslova of the Women's Information and Consultative Center-Ukraine, and Elmira Shishkaraeva of OSI-Kyrgyzstan. We are also thankful to ED Alisher Ilkhamov and the board of OSIAF-Uzbekistan, who supported the conference wholeheartedly and participated fully in the discussions and debates. With the support of the Asian Development Bank and OSCE, there was also a publication of papers from the conference.

Over 100 participants attended the two-day conference, which engaged gender studies scholars/practitioners and empowering education scholars/practitioners in examining next stages for the development of gender education at all levels in post-Soviet space—from Central Asia and the Caucasus, but also with representatives from Mongolia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. Leading gender studies scholars Irina Zherebkina of the Kharkov Center for Gender Studies and Olga Voronina of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies offered critical perspectives on the challenges of developing and institutionalizing gender studies programs. Elena Semikolenova of Ukraine introduced empowering education from a theoretical perspective while young participants of the program in Uzbekistan facilitated the opening and closing sessions. Each of the countries presented status reports, paving the way for both national and regional analyses of next steps in the development of gender education. In workshops, participants addressed issues particular to different constituencies and directions for empowering education and gender studies scholars focused on questions of institutionalization and research.

On November 6, participating women's program coordinators met to discuss next steps in presenting a more articulated regional program in post-Soviet gender studies. The Gender Policy Institute will be preparing a transcript and summary of the meeting, but among the priorities that emerged from the discussion were: regional summer schools, cross-border research collaborations, lists of experts, trainers, and classic literature, translation of texts in to local languages, internet and information resources, curriculum development on women in Muslim societies, regional networking and exchange, among others.

We cannot end this brief report without mentioning the spectacular hospitality and cultural riches of Bukhara and Samarkand that we experienced while we were in Uzbekistan. Once again, we thank Eleonora, our gracious host and organizer extraordinaire, for an immensely productive and unforgettable experience. We look forward to working together as we develop and "cross-fertilize" the Women's Program's work in gender studies, empowering education, mass media and gender policy, women's oral history, educational equity and policy, and other creative programs that will emerge as we seek to "engender" education in the region.

With warmest appreciation,

Debra Schultz, Director of Programs  
Marla Swanson, Program Officer