Notes from the Field: Women’s Crisis Center of the NGO Najoti Kudakon

By Swetlana Torno

About six months ago, the construction of a Women’s Crisis Center in the city of Kulob was completed, the first in the Khatlon region and the whole Republic of Tajikistan. The opening of a safe house for women and girls, victims of domestic violence, was one of the lengthy aspired aims of the local NGO “Najoti Kudakon” (Safe the Children) (picture 1).

Since 1993, Najoti Kudakon was working to improve the livelihood of the women and girls in Khatlon region, mitigating gender inequality, and fighting against stigma associated to domestic violence (picture 2). The organization runs a Resource Center which offers sewing and computer classes for women and girls and propagates information on women’s rights in order to strengthen their participation in public sphere, increase their employment chances, and consolidate their position in community (picture 3). Furthermore, the NGO provides medical, legal and psychological support for victims of domestic violence, and those facing familial difficulties, such as early marriage, discrimination or divorce.

The number of early marriages rose considerably after the Independence, today the communities are furthermore facing the problems of increasing divorce cases. The workers of Najoti Kudakon complain that families take marriage lightly today without thinking about the consequence of possible divorce for early married girls. Sometimes the girls are taken from school at the age of 16 or married shortly after finishing high school. Without a higher education and life experience, they and their children face enormous financial problems and social stigma in case of a divorce. To separate became an easy undertaking for men today: In a recent case of the NGO a husband and labor migrant gave his wife a trifold talokh (divorce) via SMS. A widely held belief among the local populations goes that as a consequence of the
civil war and male labor migration, a higher percentage of unmarried women are competing on the marriage market today. However, a lot of families forget, so Mahbuba from Najoti Kudakon, that a marriage in early, unprepared age can ruin the whole life of a young woman.

Picture 2: Najoti Kudakon participates in an information session on domestic violence with the Head of the Department of Women’s Affairs of Muminobod district and representatives from women’s community, 28th Jan. 2014

Picture 3: Participants of the current sewing class come together for the visit of the Soros Foundation, 27th Jan. 2014