

Şengül Akçar Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 10:50] [Session one: 1 September 2014]

[00:00] Şengül Akçar [SA], born Sivas, Turkey. Reflections on happy childhood in neighbourhood of different religions. Description of community life, childhood play. Return to village after 30 years, 2014.

[05:15] First job as bank clerk to raise funds for university.

[06:30] Family history, grandparents' move from Caucasia 1895. SA's mother tongue Circassian. Loss of sisters to disease. [Interruption]

Track 2 [duration: 1:24:19] [Session one: 1 September 2014]

[00:00] Secondary school and exposure to books. High School at time of 1968 France student movement and occupations, influence on SA.

[06:40] Religion in the community. Caucasian culture and parents' relationship. SA's relationship with mother and father.

[10:35] First job as bank clerk.

[12:00] Arrival in Istanbul for university. 1970s, the city's dormitories housing of visitors according to hometowns.

[14:01] Description of journey to Istanbul.

[15:15] Description of Zonguldak, Black Sea Coast dormitory.

[17:15] Study of civil engineering and study environment.

[19:01] Project in Izmit, Kocaeli, first industrial town in Turkey, 'turning point' in SA's life.

[24:55] Meeting future husband. Study of English in UK, and marriage on return. Discussion of marriage age in Circassian community and cultural expectations.

[30:45] September 1980 military coup d'état and beginning of Master's study in Public Administration, 'second turning point' in SA's life.

[32:25] Meeting with feminist groups, 1980s Istanbul and exploration of differing concerns of grassroots women and new feminism's 'your body'.

[35:14] Paper on limited childcare services in Istanbul. Description of textile workers taking children to work with them.

[37:32] Setting up Foundation for Support of Women's Work (FSWW), 'third turning point'. Began with focus on childcare and education, establishing Mother and Child Centres. Strategy of empowering women via childcare also strong rehabilitation tool in disasters – expansion with 1999 Marmara earthquake. Concurrent expansion to economic empowerment programme and leadership programme with Women's Learning Partnership (WLP).

[50:10] Involvement in preparation for United Nations (UN) conference, 1996 Habitat II: City Summit, Istanbul. Invitation to UNDP meeting in Vienna and meeting with Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (GROOTS) International – turning point for Foundation. Discussion on urbanization as being at the core of women's issues, democracy 'nourished from the bottom'. Implementation of programme on local decision-making and result of women's involvement and their presentation of holistic policy alternatives to aid.

[56:10] Community response and initial objection from fathers, later positive aspect when discovering counterpart in their wives. Transparency of centres and difficulty with changing mayors.

[1:00:46] Explanation of foundation staff, professional and volunteer roles.

[1:03:33] UN conferences attended. Description of UN Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994. Comments on UN conferences in general and lack of action on points, misappropriation of power, example of Turkey, feudal lords.

[1:10:28] Description of UN Fourth Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

[1:14:40] Conception of women's co-operative movement and establishment of first co-operatives, 2002. Progression to 160 co-operatives. Explanation of legal system and problem of co-operatives viewed as business.

[1:22:40] Reflection on strong connection with women as central to success of the foundation. Impact of ever-changing political arena on work.

Track 3 [duration: 5:36] [Session one: 1 September 2014]

[00:00] Referral system for literacy and reproductive health. Programme in south-eastern Turkey co-operative to identify women for referral and training.

[02:30] Micro-credit programme.

[03:25] Relationship with donors. [Interruption]

Track 4 [duration: 38:48] [Session one: 1 September 2014]

[00:00] Funding sources today and different relationships. Independent financial set up of foundation, shop selling products of co-operatives. Pilot grant scheme to raise funds for co-operatives.

[05:24] Use of WLP 'Leading to Choices' leadership training manual. Discussion about partnership and networking, opportunities for understanding regional dynamics.

[09:41] Impact of current political scene on work. Gap between what is said and what is done. Accumulation of dissatisfaction and call for outcry on the streets. Impact of profusion of construction projects, as main drive of country's economy, on the community. Mention of Roma people.

[15:50] Main issues affecting women in Turkey, picture outside Istanbul, 'women willingly giving away their rights', cost of living. Escalation of domestic violence and lack of law enforcement.

[23:40] Discussion on gap between elites and others, reflected in feminist movement from perspective of well-educated members, perspective of grassroots women not accounted for and missing link for real advancement.

[28:18] Lack of observation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

[29:11] Reflections on ups and downs of work and role as NGO, economic powers controlling national governments, need for global solidarity and awareness of commonality of issues.

[34:00] Reflection on most difficult setback as failure of policy-makers to use successful models developed by NGOs. SA's acknowledgment of proudest achievement in establishing co-operatives as a grassroots women's movement. Awaiting change in law with draft currently in Parliament.