

The attitude towards women entrepreneurs in religious communities is ambiguous and often controversial: from full approval to obvious reproof. However, women's participation in the business domain is an economic impetus for the national development and prosperity. Whereas religious pluralism that is developing in the Kyrgyzstan society is a trend that contributes to the strengthening of the state.

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**Aizhanym Zhunushalieva** is a founder, director and employee of a coffee house. Her coffee house differs from a dozen of similar houses in Bishkek. The girl has combined a coffee house with a bookstore. According to her, her purpose was to help students and pupils - to make a place for them where they can read books and make lessons.

**The girls wearing headscarves and exercising their religion, customs and norms can achieve success.**

Aizhanym has recently graduated from a university; she is fluent in a few foreign languages and is planning to continue her studies abroad. Before she opened her business, she had had some concerns about attitude towards her as a girl wearing a hijab. However, in practice, it turned out that Muslim people and followers of other religions do not think it is improper.



Aizhanym Zhunushalieva. Photo: CABAR.asia

“By my example I wanted to demonstrate that girls wearing hijabs and practising their religion, norms and customs may succeed, if they fear the society and side glances,” Aizhanym said.

It would be difficult if not the support of her relatives. Aizhanym's father thinks it's wrong to isolate girls for religious purposes. Therefore, he even spurred his daughter into her business.

“We should make way to them and show the right and useful path to people,” said the girl's

father, **Zhyrgylbek Zhunushaliev**.

The coffee house is located across the street from the mosque. A shop where Aizhanym's mother works is located in the vicinity. She sells clothing for the Muslims and various accessories. **Aida Isembaeva** has been in small and medium business since she was twenty. She started practising religion not a long time ago, but she has managed to become a true Muslim and remain a businessperson. She noted that if a woman works, she gets more knowledge and gains more self-confidence.

"According to our religion, we all have to learn new things, work, create some better things in line with our times, the times we live in," Isembaeva said.

According to her, a good entrepreneur is decisive and good moral principles. The religion they practice is not important because it's important to comply with the state laws and to be honest to customers.



*Aida Isembaeva. Photo: CABAR.asia*

### **Fancy floristics with a note of women's care**

The representative of the Baha'i community of Kyrgyzstan, **Lidia Zeinalova**, has her small flower business. She grows indoor plants and pays must attention to aesthetics. Creative combination of the plant, pot and other elements give birth to fancy and interesting patterns.



Photo: CABAR.asia

She is not just a florist, but also runs a popular video blog, where she shares the secrets of her craft and tricks of the landscape design. Her hobby since youth – flowers – has become her lifework.

Lidia Zeinalova said that she never in her life has seen any obstacles to her entrepreneurship for religious or gender reasons. She is not prone to divide entrepreneurs into religious people and atheists, into men and women. What's most important is that work should be beneficial to the society.

“In my mind, even if some part of society believes that a woman should sit at home, the wheel of time turns so much that a woman will anyway want to be needed by society. And she will always be interesting for her family once she is when she is in high demand,” Zeinalova said.

All women in her family are hard working. Lidia's daughter, **Tamila**, creates original gifts, namely handmade soap, in her art workshop.

“Probably, I am creating, in a global sense. I create felt projects, pictures. I hope my pictures have some artistic value. Now I am making soap,” said Tamila Zeinalova.

### **None religion praises dependence just because you don't want to do anything**

According to her, it's a great responsibility to be the follower of the Baha'i and be an entrepreneur. The girl believes that one of the principles of the Baha'ism is the need to have high moral principles. It means that one should run business honestly and efficiently.

"My work is like a wish to make the world better, but I also want to improve by welfare. It is not forbidden, but rather praised. None religion praises dependence or begging just because you don't want to do anything," she said.

### **Medicine free from stigma**

A Christian **Tatiana Ni** is the chief doctor and founder of a private dental clinic. According to her, 10 years ago her coreligionists from Germany suddenly offered investments for business. Today, this clinic is one of the most popular in Bishkek.

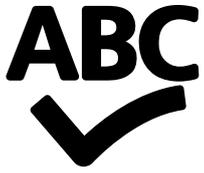
"Once you try, do your best, invest your efforts and talent, and want to do good to people, it pays off to you. This is how it happened in my life," she said.

According to her, every client regardless of religion will get professional service in her clinic. And some difference between clients' and her own views and beliefs is not a problem.



*Tatiana Ni. Photo: CABAR.asia*

"There have been cases when religious leaders ask me to cover my head. It's not a problem, so I do that. But I don't have to do that as a religious woman. I can say for sure: yes, I trust in God," Tatiana Ni said.



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