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# Feminization of Agriculture in Tajikistan

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Thirty Years since Dissolution of the Soviet Union –  
Social Effects of Transition in Central Asia

# Overview

- Gender in Central Asia what has changed over 30 years?
- Changing structures, institutions, gender roles
- Study area and methods
- Results: trends of feminization
- Conclusions & Recommendations



# Soviet

# VS

# Post-Soviet

Access to labour and equal citizenship

**BUT**

Essentialization of their duty as mothers

Division of public and domestic space

Reinforcement of familial values

- Patriarchal dominations in all spheres
- Vulnerable economic situation: conservative gender roles (cult of domesticity)
- Increasing participation of women in informal sectors of the labour market

# Structural transition and socio-economic trends

- Legacy of central, top down management & collective farming
- Partiality of privatization & land ownership
- Dislocations in the healthcare and educational system
- Disruptions in labour markets
- Migration



# Socioeconomic context: Challenges in the region

- rural poverty
  - inhabitants of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan spend 80 % of their household incomes on food
  - Tajikistan produces only 31 % of the nation's food domestically
- unemployment (particularly among women)
- poor housing conditions
- poor medical care
- deficient water management infrastructure
- lack of energy in winter

*(Lioubimtseva and Henebry 2009; World Bank 2012)*



# Gender disparities in Central Asia



Uzbekistan, Ferghana Valley

## Global Gender Gap Index in 2020 Ranking (153 countries)

Kazakhstan: 72

Kyrgyzstan: 93

Tajikistan: 137

Turkmenistan: ?

Uzbekistan: 58 (2009)

# Share of CA female workers in agriculture

KAZAKHSTAN	<b>46%</b>	National statistics 2018
KYRGYZSTAN	<b>45%</b>	National statistics 2018
TAJIKISTAN	<b>75%</b>	Survey results 2018
TURKMENISTAN	<b>53%</b>	FAO 2012)
UZBEKISTAN	<b>46%</b>	National statistics 2018





# CA women: roles, inequalities



- Responsible for household tasks & child, elders' care
- Securing food for the family
- Securing water for drinking/ household and for subsistence farm irrigation (fetching water, storing water)
- Additional seasonal jobs
- Preparing for winter (food processing)



# Research questions

How various actors, institutions or contexts influenced, interacted and produced changes?

How did the occupational choice of rural women change in Post-Soviet Tajikistan?

Has feminization of agriculture helped to lift gender inequalities or reinforced patriarchal values?

# Gender, occupational segregation & migration effects

- **Gender-occupational segregation** = different distribution of men & women across occupations & jobs
- Gender roles formed by interactions between individuals & their social, historical, political & economic environments (West & Zimmerman, 1987)
- Vulnerabilities can result in low/non-remuneration & persistent informality of jobs taken by women (Akramov & Shreedhar, 2012; Deere, 2005)

# Gender, occupational segregation & migration effects

- **Does migration strengthen or weaken traditional gender ideologies?** (Gartaula et al., 2010; Reeves 2011)
- “Erosion of traditional roles” (Taylor et al., 2006) & adverse influence of feminization on the male participation rate in agriculture - man's unfulfilled role as breadwinner (Kabeer, 2013)
- Improved bargaining position of women within the family, leading to improved welfare for children (FAO, 2011)





# OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION

	<b>Feminization of agriculture</b>	<b>A study of women's role in irrigated agriculture in the lower Vaksh River Basin, Tajikistan</b>
<b>Research period</b>	October-November 2011, 2012	October-December 2019
<b>Projects</b>	Integrated Water Resource Management IWMI/IAMO	Irrigation and Drainage Modernization in the Lower Vaksh River Basin is a grant-financed project of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)
<b>Research sites</b>	Sughd province	Khatlon province
<b>Methods</b>	Qualitative	Qualitative & quantitative
<b>Research objects</b>	WUAs, farm managers, permanent & seasonal workers	Households, WUAs, farm managers, seasonal workers
<b>Respondents</b>	N in-depth=60	N Survey=323, N In-depth= 54, N focus groups=10, N Expert interviews=6

# Overview of Gender Issues in Rural Tajikistan

- Poverty measures show that over 27.5% of the population in Tajikistan lives below the poverty line
- Tajikistan 2019: Fewer females (65%) than males (88%) indicated finishing at least secondary grades. Male respondents have better access to special or technical and university education.
- Women also consider that their income is formed by selling produce (13%), yet the men perceive this income contribution as much less (1%).
- Solid legal and policy framework for gender equality, implementation is weak
- Low salaries and the scarcity of jobs in rural Tajikistan drives over 800,000 people, mostly men, to migrate out of Tajikistan in search of employment
- Khatlon province experiences a higher rate of male migration (38.9%) than the national average (35.7%)

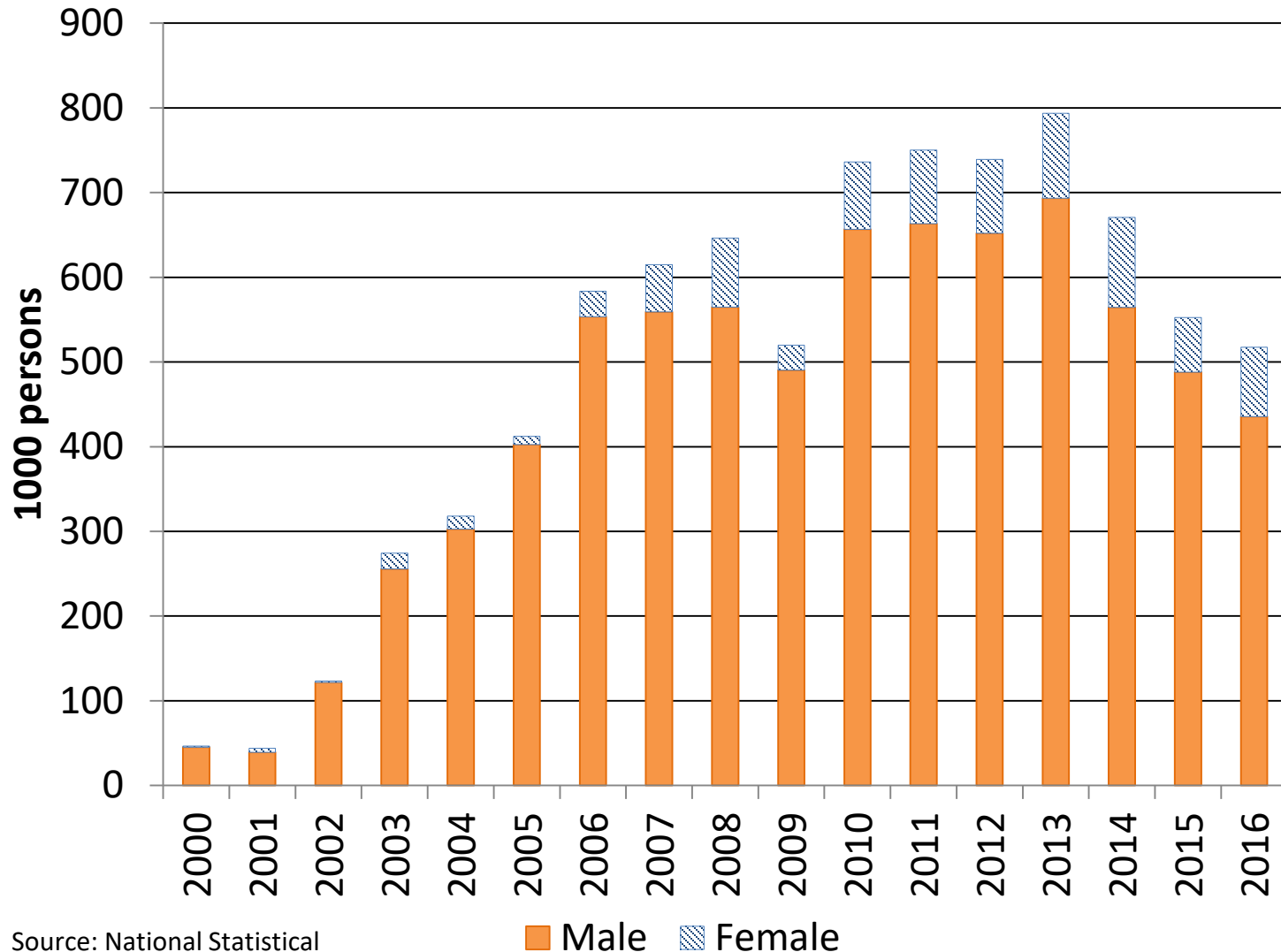
# Migration



Low salaries (\$40/month in 2019) and the scarcity of jobs in rural Tajikistan drive over 800,000 people, mostly men, to migrate out of the country in search of employment.



# Number of labour migrants originating from Tajikistan



Source: National Statistical agency of Republic of Tajikistan.

# Access to resources

- There is a large number of female-headed households due to male labor migration.
- Female-headed households have lower levels of access to land, irrigation and livestock.
- WUAs often excluding female water users (kitchen gardens)
- Unlike male-headed households, they have more difficulty in obtaining loans, equipment, access to services for the dissemination of experience and knowledge, as well as support from various relevant structures.



## Overview of Gender Issues in Southern Tajikistan

In 2018, officially about 68.5% of women were employed in the agricultural sector, compared to 41% of men

60% of inactive labor is due to domestic responsibilities (represented by women)

Women's involvement (owners, users or workers) in agriculture formally counts only when they are registered as legal entities or farm workers

Women are in minority among farmers who lead and own the agricultural value chains. Of 133,016 dehkan farms around 20 % were registered as female headed



# Feminization of agricultural labour



Photo: Neil Palmer

“an increase in women’s participation rates in the agricultural sector, either as self-employed or as agricultural wage workers





Many rural women who are “statistically” classified as “inactive” may in fact be working as farmers on their own account or as unpaid family or seasonal wage workers, but they are less likely to declare themselves as employed in the agricultural sector.

# Women in agriculture (Northern Tajikistan)

Types of groups	Sahimdor (Formal farm employee)	Hektarchi (Informal seasonal worker)	Mardikor (Daily worker)
<b>Female workers % of total</b>	Over 50%	Over 95%	Over 98%
<b>Age ranges</b>	40–80	25–65	16–60
<b>Types of work performed</b>	Land preparation, planting, tilling & weeding, trimming top foliage of cotton plant, cotton harvesting, gathering cotton stems		Weeding, harvesting vegetables, fruit trees, rice
	Performing agro-technical jobs on all other crops		
<b>Remuneration</b>	<b>Formal salary:</b> 30–80 USD/month cash ~ 70 USD/month in kind	<b>Informal wage:</b> 30-40 USD/month cash ~ 60 USD/ month in kind	<b>Informal payment:</b> 80-90 USD/month cash

Source: Author's fieldwork.

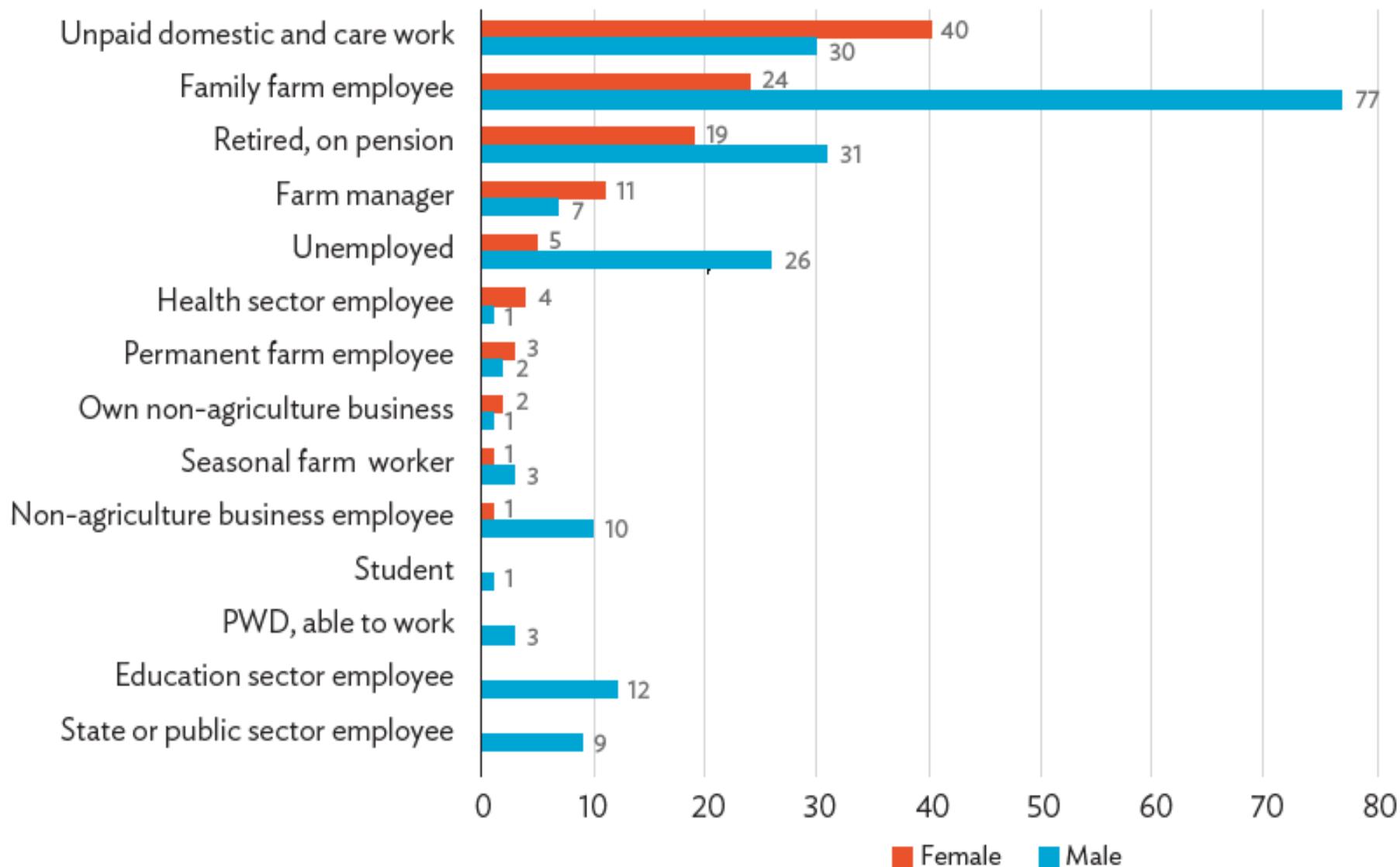
## Increasing insecurity across occupational groups

Sahimdor	Hektarchi	Mardikor
Formal employee with land certificate	Seasonal worker with a temporary access to a plot	Daily worker
→	Decreasing age	→
→	Decreasing wage	→
→	Decreasing income security	→
→	Increasing flexibility	→
→	Increasing feminization	→

Source: Author's fieldwork.



## Figure 4: Main Status or Activities of Respondents, Sex-Disaggregated



# Southern Tajikistan 2019

## Box 4: Reasons to Do Wage Work

“My husband left to work [in the Russian Federation] 2 years ago. He sends remittances of TJS300–TJS400 (about \$35) every 2–3 months. This is enough as we also plant carrots, potatoes, onions in our kitchen garden. We do not have access to a land (land rights). But I also have to work to support my children. Although, we live with our extended families, I have to earn money too. Monthly costs for food and clothing or school items for our family with two children is approximately TJS1,200 (about \$123). I [have been] working as *mardikor* [for] 5 to 7 years. During the season of onion harvesting, I can earn up to TJS500, however that’s only during a certain period. For works like hoeing, weeding one might earn only TJS5 to TJS6 per day.

We have to do *mardikor* works. In one household, you can find three to four families and they all have to be sustained. We have to work [to sustain them], life obliges. We have to work [for the] sake of our children.”

Source: Interview with a *mardikor* worker. November 2019. Jayhun, Kumsangir Irrigation and Drainage system.

# Southern Tajikistan 2019

**Table 6: Payments to Seasonal Workers for Major Agricultural Activities and Crops**

Crop Type	Tilling		Weeding		Trimming or Rooting Out		Harvesting	
	Frequency per Season	Daily Wage (TJS)	Frequency per Season	Daily Wage (TJS)	Frequency per Season	Daily Wage (TJS)	Frequency per Season	Daily Wage (TJS)
Cotton	2	50–100	2	40	1	60	3	45–80
Carrots	2	50–100	2	40–60		50–70	2	60–70
Onions	2	50–100	2	40–60		50–70	1	50–70
Fruits <sup>a</sup>								30

TJS = somoni.

<sup>a</sup> Persimmon, plums, and cherries.

Source: In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with *dehkan* farms and *mardikor* groups. October–November 2019.

# Membership and decision-making in WUAs



- On average, <5% to 22% female in as WUA members (based on farm ownership)
- Women remain fully or partially excluded from land use rights, water management, and agricultural services
- Women as decision makers are in the minority or absent among dehkan farm managers and therefore, are less visible among members of Water User Associations.
- Water institutions do not have gender-disaggregated statistics about their members and users



# Conclusions & Recommendations

- Erosion of traditional gender roles: economic, social triggers & structural changes
- Feminization followed a pattern of informal arrangements by choices of farmers & decisions of women
- Institutions are subject to constant manipulation by actors who do not follow all norms & rules blindly but, according to the specific circumstances, weigh them against each other

# Conclusions & Recommendations

Rising number of females in conventionally male-dominated positions:

- mardikors
- mirob workers
- irrigation fee collectors

However, male dominated positions are considered to be temporarily feminized.

Female face gender disparities and inequalities not experienced by males

Females as decision makers are in the minority or absent among farm managers

Expanded role of women needs recognition and support in practice as well as in legislation

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