



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# NATIONAL GENDER PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

## Republic of Tajikistan



**COUNTRY  
GENDER  
ASSESSMENT  
SERIES**

**EUROPE AND  
CENTRAL ASIA**



# **NATIONAL GENDER PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS**

**COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT SERIES**

**Republic of Tajikistan**

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<sup>1</sup> This CGA report was prepared prior to 24 January 2025.



# Abbreviations

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank	<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>CARI</b>	Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security	<b>IWMI</b>	International Water Management Institute
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	<b>MHH</b>	male-headed household
<b>CFSAM</b>	Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission	<b>NDCs</b>	nationally determined contributions
<b>CGA</b>	Country Gender Assessment	<b>NDRRS</b>	National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>CPF</b>	Country Programming Framework	<b>NDS</b>	National Development Strategy
<b>CWFA</b>	Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan	<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>DHS</b>	Demographic and Health Survey	<b>PUA</b>	pasture users' association
<b>DRS</b>	Districts of Republican Subordination	<b>RAS</b>	rural advisory services
<b>DWFA</b>	Department of Women and Family Affairs	<b>RIKT</b>	regional information advisory centres
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	<b>TAU</b>	Tajik Agrarian University
<b>FAST</b>	Farmer Advisory Services in Tajikistan	<b>TSA</b>	targeted social assistance
<b>FHH</b>	female-headed household	<b>TJS</b>	somoni
<b>GBAO</b>	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>GBV</b>	gender-based violence	<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product	<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>GIZ</b>	German Agency for International Cooperation	<b>WAGE/CIPE</b>	Women and Girls Empowered/Center for International Private Enterprise
<b>ICT</b>	information and communications technology	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
		<b>WUA</b>	water users' association



# Currency equivalents

## Currency units

somoni (TJS)

United States dollar (USD)

As of 24 April 2025

TJS 1.00 – USD 0.09

USD 1.00 – TJS 10.61



# Executive summary

The key objective of this Country Gender Assessment (CGA) is to present an updated and comprehensive analysis of gender equality in the agricultural sector and rural development in Tajikistan, identify gender inequalities and their causes and impacts, and provide recommendations for gender-responsive policies and practices. The assessment mainly shows that although women in Tajikistan are the primary labour force in agriculture and contribute significantly to food security, their work is undervalued, under-recognized, and largely unpaid. Yet, because of the increasingly important role that they play on farms, especially given the migration of men from rural areas, investment in women's empowerment will have benefits for food security, for agricultural productivity and for rural development as a whole.

Most of the population of Tajikistan lives in rural areas (71.2 percent; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023a), and more than half of the labour force is employed in agriculture (60.9 percent; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2021). However, due to the limitations of agriculture as a sole means of sustaining livelihoods, there has been significant migration from rural areas, with the majority of migrants being men. As a result, many rural regions of Tajikistan now have a de facto population made up predominantly of women, children and older people. This demographic shift has contributed to the "feminization" of agricultural labour, with women increasingly taking on roles traditionally held by men in farming and other rural occupations. The absence of men has created new dynamics in rural households, where women are not only responsible for managing the household but also for ensuring the continuity of agricultural production. This shift has placed additional pressure on women, as they navigate both the challenges of farming and the responsibilities of family care in a context where economic opportunities remain limited. Despite their contributions, rural women are disproportionately affected by poverty, exclusion and various forms of discrimination. They bear the burden of housework and caregiving, including unpaid work on family plots, such as tending to domestic animals,

planting, watering and harvesting crops. Women face discrimination in terms of access to land, seeds, credit, equipment and knowledge.

The structural constraints that women face in rural development and agriculture are both general, related to the problems of the sector, as well as gender-based, related to specific forms of discrimination. The problems experienced by rural women cannot be separated from those of rural development and agriculture, and vice versa.

The general constraints affecting the advancement of agriculture and rural development, which also have a gender dimension, include:

- » *Neglect of the agricultural sector* in general, with challenges that hinder its growth and sustainability related to production, storage and markets, compounded by difficulties in responding to shocks such as food price surges and climate risks.
- » *Limited access to decent jobs*, both on farms and non-farms, pushing large sections of the working-age population to look for alternative livelihoods and coping mechanisms: labour migration for men and, precarious and insecure on- or off-farm informal and seasonal employment (including day labour as *mardikors*) for women.
- » *Ongoing difficulties in obtaining water* for irrigation in agriculture, with manual irrigation methods being common and drip irrigation underutilized. The lack of a defined system of water management and inefficient interactions between farms, water users' associations (WUAs), and the local Agency for Land Reclamation and Irrigation (ARLI) limit access to water resources. Insufficient access to clean water and sanitation facilities also increases the risk of diseases, particularly for women and children.
- » *Poor social infrastructure* including lack of transport, energy, electricity, water and sanitation facilities present serious challenges to rural livelihoods and

lifestyles. Lack of decent access to health care facilities results in high home birth rates and ongoing maternal mortality problems. The absence of preschool facilities in rural areas also affects child development and women's ability to work outside the home.

- » *Frequent energy shortages* force households to rely on purchased or locally-sourced fuel. Poor-quality housing and the use of unclean solid fuel for cooking contribute to indoor air pollution and respiratory illnesses, especially among women who spend most of their time in kitchens.
- » *Unequal access to modern technologies* between urban and rural areas and between men and women limits opportunities for digitalization and productivity. While many rural women have access to smartphones connected to the internet which they use for talking to their relatives in the Russian Federation, lack of digital literacy prevents them from making full use of online trade and training opportunities.

While these challenges affect both men and women, there are also specific gender-based constraints that impact on rural women the most, including:

- » *More responsibilities for women* as a result of male migration, but no power over resources. Remittances improve livelihoods and food security, but the de facto female-headed household concept hasn't empowered women. Men often send money to male relatives or mothers who become decision-makers, while younger women experience increased workloads and limited access to resources. Women shoulder responsibilities without decision-making power or control over resources.
- » *Gender discrimination* in agriculture, where less than a quarter of dehqan farm owners are female. Their lands are small, lending themselves to small-scale agricultural production and exclusion from agrifood value chains. Women face gender barriers and limited access to resources, education, agricultural knowledge, equipment and innovative technologies. Limited access to quality seeds, fertilizers and pesticides significantly hinders the development of smallholder farms. These challenges result in lower productivity in female-headed farms, particularly in the cultivation of high-value crops. The absence of specialized advice and guidance prevents small-scale farmers, particularly female farmers, from participating in contemporary agrifood supply chains.

- » Women employed in agriculture *mainly engage in manual labour as informal, seasonal or unpaid family workers*. In addition, women are solely responsible for child care and household tasks, which means they have little or no time to participate in income-generating activities outside the home and limited opportunities for education and leisure time.
- » Most rural women are "*asset poor*", and either have no ownership rights or jointly hold property. This compromises their ability to utilize property for economic purposes, such as selling, renting, or offering it as collateral for loans, putting them at risk of poverty and extreme poverty in situations such as divorce or abandonment. Access to financial services and credit is crucial but remains limited for women due to high interest rates, absence of collateral and lack of financial and management literacy. Women often work as contributing family members on farms without receiving payment or recognition for their labour. Consequently, they receive only a minimum social pension, as they are not officially considered formal workers who contribute to pension funds. They are rarely recognized as land or business owners. Gender discrimination in terms of remuneration is also prevalent, with women experiencing a widening wage gap compared to men.
- » Women are *under-represented in governance and decision-making structures*, with limited leadership opportunities. Their low participation in WUAs restricts their access to water and involvement in maintaining irrigation canals.
- » *Direct and indirect violence* against women is prevalent in rural areas due to factors such as community pressure, lack of access to finances, and economic dependency of women. Despite specialized legislation and national policies, violence remains widespread and enshrouded in a culture of silence. Access to justice is a particular concern for rural women, who often have low legal literacy and are unaware of or unable to assert their rights related to domestic violence, marital property rights, land disputes and labour rights.
- » *Patriarchal social norms* persist in rural areas and determine stereotypical roles that hamper the advancement of young women. Families who have money restrict rights for women more than poorer families where women have to work to support the household.

The government has recognized these challenges and identified them in various national strategies and policies related to the advancement of women, but also to agriculture reform, food security, rural development and climate change adaptation. However, there are obstacles to achieving the goals of gender equality, including weak institutional mechanisms, understaffing or high turnover of staff in ministries, lack of training and limited understanding of gender issues in sectors beyond traditional domains such as education and health care, and a disconnect between policy intentions and their implementation.

Yet, women in rural areas are potential agents of change and their role is key for the agricultural sector in general. If opportunities are provided and barriers lifted, their rights would be upheld, agriculture would be more efficient and rural development more equitable and sustainable. In the long term, women, their families, households, society and the national economy would benefit. This requires gender-responsive agricultural and food security policies and practices, and gender mainstreaming across all sectors, so that the current status of rural women is no longer seen only as a women's problem. This CGA report concludes with practical recommendations for such policies and practices, for both FAO and national counterparts.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Why is gender relevant to sustainable agriculture and rural development in Tajikistan?

There are a number of reasons why the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment are important for sustainable agriculture and rural development in Tajikistan.

» *First, women play a significant role in agriculture and rural development in Tajikistan, and their contributions are essential to achieving food security and sustainable agriculture. Yet, their roles and contributions are not recognized enough. Addressing gender inequalities in agriculture and rural development can lead to more sustainable and inclusive development outcomes.*

Agriculture is the "backbone of Tajikistan's economy", representing 22 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 19 percent of exports: the sector employs over 60 percent of the total population (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2021, p. 118). Moreover, although women represented 59 percent of the agricultural labour force in 2021 (World Bank, 2024), they owned only 23.5 percent of dehqan farms in the same year, and this figure had reduced to 22.4 percent in 2022 (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023b).

Whether they are heads of dehqan farms or are working on their family plots and kitchen gardens, whether they are de jure female heads of households or de facto ones left behind by the men in labour migration, women in rural Tajikistan are heavily engaged in agricultural labour: cultivation, harvesting and looking after the livestock. They tend to be responsible for food production, processing, and preparation, and as such, they play a critical role in ensuring household food security. With the migration of men in search of labour abroad, agriculture has become even more "feminized".

As this CGA demonstrates, despite women's contributions, their labour in agriculture is seldom recognized and supported due to several factors:

(i) The legal framework does not always translate into a de facto situation to fully protect women's ownership rights.

(ii) Due to prevailing social norms, women have little access to resources (equipment, credit, extension services) that would make their farms more productive.

(iii) Their mobility is restricted as a result of both infrastructure and social norms.

(iv) They often work unpaid or underpaid on family farms and engage in a care economy that is not sufficiently recognized and remunerated in the formal economy.

(v) Women lack digital, legal and economic literacy to be able to take advantage of their rights, assets and responsibilities.

Supporting women in agriculture in Tajikistan is an opportunity to overcome these barriers. Empowering rural women by giving them access to resources, such as land and credit, not only increases their incomes and contributions to the economic development of their communities, but can also increase agricultural productivity, reduce poverty in rural communities, and improve food security and nutrition.

» *Second, women have unique perspectives and knowledge which are often overlooked in agricultural development. They can be agents of change when proper investment is geared towards their empowerment.*

Rural women often have a wealth of knowledge about natural resources such as land, water and forests. Not only are they responsible for the management of natural resources because of their roles as farmers

and caretakers of animals, but they are also the main providers of food, water and energy within their households (FAO, 2016). They have unique insights into the needs and priorities of their households and communities. All of this knowledge and perspective, however, is overlooked when it comes to decision-making.

In all national development strategies of Tajikistan, such as the Agrarian Reform Programme of the Republic of Tajikistan (ARP) for 2012–2020, the Development Programme of Agri-Food System and Sustainable Agriculture for the period up to 2030, the Mid-term Development Programme for 2021–2025, and the National Development Strategy for the period up to 2030 (NDS-2030), there is widespread recognition that without gender equality and consideration of women's needs, the potential for development of rural communities and achieving food security is undermined. While measures are stipulated for building the capacity of women and creating an enabling environment, there is a need to involve them more directly in the design of policies, strategies and programmes. As such, they can be agents of change in their rural communities. For this, it is important to know their vulnerabilities but also their capabilities and aspirations. It is crucial to ensure that women's perspectives and knowledge are integrated into decision-making processes related to agriculture and rural development.

Furthermore, while women's perspectives are often disregarded, they also lag behind when it comes to accessing simple, life-changing and innovative technologies. Rural women in Tajikistan lack the opportunity, economic resources and capacity to invest in appropriate agricultural technologies, as well as access to the knowledge required for advanced agricultural practices. Yet, when given access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and innovative agricultural practices, and provided with adequate training and education to use them, they have the potential to mobilize. For example, in Tajikistan, rural women who have relatives in the Russian Federation and have been given mobile phones and sim cards to communicate with them, are demonstrating their interest and insight when it comes to accessing the internet for social media sites. If they are empowered with more digital knowledge and given equipment and access to the internet, they can play an important role in the growth of e-trade in rural areas and online information exchanges on agricultural practices.

» *Third, harmful discriminative norms and stereotypes, as well as gender-based violence, which are*

*prevalent in rural areas, increase the burden for women while hampering their contribution to agriculture and rural development. Yet, gender equality is a human right that women deserve.*

Harmful practices, such as stereotypes and gender-based violence, can directly and indirectly negatively affect women's health, education and livelihoods, and create barriers to their participation in sustainable agriculture and rural development activities. They can lead to reduced agricultural productivity and perpetuate poverty in rural communities while increasing the burden for women.

In Tajikistan, women face significant gender-based constraints that limit their potential as economic actors – particularly in agriculture – and hinder their ability to fully benefit from their labour. Despite their vital contributions, rural women often lack a voice in critical decision-making processes and have limited control over the income generated through their work. For example, even when land is officially certified in a woman's name, she is frequently excluded from decisions related to farm expenditures, productivity, and the use of income from the land. This lack of agency often extends to the household level, where many women are unable to influence decisions that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.

The root cause of this discrimination lies in social norms, attitudes and beliefs, which shape how women and men are expected to behave, the opportunities that are offered to them and the aspirations they can pursue.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2023, published by the World Economic Forum, Tajikistan ranks 111th out of 146 countries in terms of gender equality – reflecting limited progress over the past decade. The index reveals significant gender disparities across multiple sectors. While Tajikistan performs relatively well in areas such as educational attainment and health and survival, its score for political empowerment – measured by indicators such as the proportion of women in parliament and ministerial roles – remains lower than the target set by the United Nations of 30 percent. Similarly, the country continues to face serious challenges in expanding economic opportunities for women, with persistent inequalities in access to employment, equal pay and career advancement (WEF, 2023).

However, the Global Gender Gap Index does not fully account for the rural-urban divide, which is particularly pronounced in Tajikistan. Gender inequality in rural areas is likely to be even more severe, as women face compounded barriers including limited access to quality

education, health care and economic resources. In addition, rural women shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid labour and are often excluded from decision-making processes at both community and household levels.

When these rural-specific challenges are taken into account, the overall picture of gender inequality in Tajikistan becomes even more concerning, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions that address the unique needs of rural women.

As noted by UNDP (2015a, no pagination), “no society can develop – economically, politically, or socially – when half of its population is marginalized”. Addressing gender inequalities and alleviating barriers to women’s full participation in agriculture and rural development can have multiple benefits. It is good for women’s human rights, as they gain recognition of their contributions and reap the benefits in a just way. It is beneficial for sustainable rural development and food security for households. And finally, it can assist Tajikistan in achieving a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5 and SDG 6.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2. Scope and purpose of the report

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is a specialized agency with the mandate to work on agriculture, food security and nutrition. FAO plays a key role in coordinating efforts, generating knowledge and promoting innovative solutions to address the gender-based discriminations that still hold back rural women and girls. The Organization is fully committed to closing gender gaps in agriculture, empowering rural women, and achieving greater effectiveness in the provision of technical assistance to Member Nations in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

According to the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030, the Organization’s work is guided by four objectives:

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Women and men have equal voice and decision-making power in rural institutions and organizations to shape relevant legal frameworks, policies and programmes.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Women and men have equal rights, access to and control over natural and productive

resources, to contribute to and benefit from sustainable agriculture and rural development.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Women and men have equal rights and access to services, markets and decent work and equal control over the resulting income and benefits.

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Women’s work burden is reduced by enhancing their access to technologies, practices and infrastructure and by promoting an equitable distribution of responsibilities, including at household level (FAO, 2020a, p. 5).

To address these objectives, FAO aims to gather and analyse sex-disaggregated data on the status of rural women, and disseminate information that is necessary for gender-responsive agriculture policies. FAO considers a Country Gender Assessment in agriculture and rural development as a minimum standard and a primary tool for gender analysis of country-level programming and requires it to be conducted in each country and updated every five years (FAO, 2017a). In Tajikistan, FAO produced its first CGA in 2016 (see FAO, 2016).

Wherever possible, this revised assessment provides updated statistics from government sources as well as those produced by international organizations. It also adds analysis in new areas, such as climate change, and provides a set of recommendations that were missing in the 2016 report. Furthermore, this CGA draws on qualitative data collected through interviews with policymakers in Dushanbe, as well as with women across three regions of Tajikistan – Khatlon, the Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS), and Sughd – using direct interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations. Additional information is provided below in the methodology and in Appendices 1 and 2.

This revised CGA for Tajikistan was made possible due to support received from the project “Leaving no one behind: greater involvement and empowerment of rural women in Turkey and Central Asia” (GCP/SEC/018/TUR), funded by the Government of Türkiye under the FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme. The project’s objectives were to improve the economic status of rural women through skills development for engaging in income-generating activities, and to create an enabling environment for rural women’s economic empowerment through the provision of policy advice to state institutions involved in developing and implementing agricultural and rural development policies and programmes. The project’s activities were carried out in Türkiye, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The CGA’s findings and recommendations are

<sup>2</sup> The SDGs include ending poverty (Goal 1), achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture (Goal 2), achieving gender equality and empowering women (Goal 5) and providing universal access to clean water and sanitation (Goal 6).

aimed principally at FAO staff to assist with the effective mainstreaming of gender into the Country Programming Framework (CPF) in support of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. In addition, the CGA may be beneficial for other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and research staff, as well as diverse professionals in the fields of agriculture and rural development.

### 1.3. FAO in Tajikistan

Cooperation between FAO and Tajikistan has been carried out since 1995, when the country joined the Organization. Assistance from FAO was first provided as “short-term emergency interventions in response to a locust outbreak as well as support for the country’s transition to stability after a period of civil war. More recently, cooperation has focused on rehabilitation and development interventions to build a sustainable and competitive agriculture sector, including improved food security and nutrition, and resilience to climate change” (FAO, 2019a, p. 1).

FAO’s assistance in Tajikistan is shaped by the draft 2022–2024 FAO Country Programming Framework, which focuses on the following three priority areas:

- » Enhancing national food and nutritional security and safety, including a focus on the governance of food security, nutrition and food safety issues and the provision of technical and managerial support to value chain actors.
- » Supporting sustainable management of natural resources and improved resilience to climate change, including efforts to strengthen the policy-enabling environment and promote innovative and multisectoral approaches and gender-sensitive practices and technologies.

- » Boosting sustainable agricultural productivity and competitiveness across the livestock, crop, and fisheries and aquaculture subsectors (FAO, n.d., no pagination).

The CPF benefits from increased support for the United Nations Secretary-General’s call to “build back better” from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as FAO’s new approach to agricultural development through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative which is meant to strengthen national ownership and capacities. The draft CPF states that during its implementation, the cross-cutting issues of gender equality, climate change, decreasing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and governance from FAO’s Strategic Framework 2022–2031 will be mainstreamed across the projects and regular work under the priority areas. It recognizes that gender inequalities in the country are severe, especially in rural areas, and women’s access to decision-making, water users’ associations, credit, information, knowledge, agricultural inputs and land is limited.

Recognizing the importance of including gender in empowering smallholders and dehkan farms to improve rural livelihoods and poverty reduction, FAO’s assistance in Tajikistan focuses on two main areas : (i) *strengthening institutional and technical capacities* of relevant government institutions, as well as service providers and beneficiaries’ communities, through the provision of inputs and gender-sensitive capacity building; and (ii) *enhancing favourable policies and regulations* towards the sustainable improvement of the livelihoods of women and men, the business environment, and agricultural productivity.

# 2. Methodology

The methodology and outline of this report follow the format recommended by FAO's internal guidance on preparing a Country Gender Assessment (FAO, 2017a). The preparation process for the CGA included the collection and analysis of quantitative data and qualitative information based on **a desk review** of sources and statistical compilations (FAO, 2016), analysis of **survey findings** produced by different international organizations working in Tajikistan, and **interviews** with experts at key Tajik government and non-government institutions in order to gain their inputs for various parts of the CGA. Brief fieldwork was also carried out in three regions (DRS, Khatlon and Sughd) to observe the everyday lives of women farmers and to solicit their views through individual and focus group discussions. The full list of participants is available in Appendix 1.

The basis of the report was the 2016 CGA, many parts of which were used in this report (FAO, 2016). Statistics have been updated and new information included, alongside the addition of new chapters, a set of recommendations, and the results of the fieldwork.

## 2.1. Desk review

Three types of source documentation were analysed: (i) statistics and strategies of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan; (ii) surveys and studies by international organizations, non-government organizations and experts; and (iii) documents produced by different government institutions. The literature review focused on materials pertaining to agriculture and rural development, and also general research concerning gender inequalities in Tajikistan and materials that have been updated since the first CGA in 2016. Sources included:

- » Data on the characteristics of the rural population, maternal health and women's empowerment, disaggregated by sex and rural/urban location (Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey; FAO, 2017a).
- » Data from the Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (referred to

subsequently as the Agency on Statistics) available from different regular or periodical statistical surveys (Population Census data, Agricultural Census data, and other relevant data collected by the Agency on Statistics) from a range of institutions and published in its regular reports (statistics on wages and education, etc.). In particular, the "Women and Men of the Republic of Tajikistan" publication (2014, 2018 and 2020 editions) was relevant to this CGA.

- » Publications of different surveys carried out and qualitative studies and data collected by international development organizations and NGOs through surveys. Household surveys conducted by different international organizations, namely the Asian Development Bank (ADB), FAO, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>3</sup> and the World Bank, proved to be the most useful data sources for developing a picture of rural life in Tajikistan. While these surveys provided unique insights, they often used small samples or were based on short-term projects. Consequently, their findings are not necessarily useful for understanding the national picture. Furthermore, because of variations in methodology, sample size, locations and years when the surveys took place, much of the data is not directly comparable and is presented in this CGA for the purposes of developing general conclusions (FAO, 2017a).
- » Government policy documents and official reporting under international conventions, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Platform for Action (from the Fourth World Conference on Women; FAO, 2017a).

## 2.2. Interviews

- » Interviews with key informants from the government, and non-government and private sectors, as well as international organizations, helped to reveal the

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<sup>3</sup> This CGA report was prepared prior to 24 January 2025 and uses studies and data produced by USAID before this date.

successes and challenges of the situation of rural women within different sectors, the results achieved in the implementation of sectoral programmes, the challenges encountered, and priorities and plans for the future. These interviews were held with:

- » Representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (CWFA), the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies, the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population, the Committee on Environmental Protection, and the Tajik Agrarian University.
- » Selected key officials at the local level responsible for rural development policies and gender policies and programmes in Khatlon (Vakhsh district) and Sughd (Ayni district) where FAO has significant programming presence.
- » Representatives of international organizations in Dushanbe, Tajikistan who shared their analysis. These organizations included: FAO, ADB, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), USAID, USAID Agribusiness Competitiveness Activity in Tajikistan (USAID/ACAT)<sup>4</sup>, and the Women and Girls Empowered/Center for International Private Enterprise (WAGE/CIPE).
- » Interviews with civil society organizations, including experts and extension representatives such as Sarob Cooperative, which provides consultation and training to women and men farmers.

### 2.3. Field visits

Field visits were made to 12 villages in 3 regions (DRS, Khatlon and Sughd). Some of the villages had been the site of an FAO project. Others were chosen through intermediaries who knew a rural woman activist who could organize a focus group discussion with other women from their neighbourhood and village. Furthermore, the researchers also randomly selected farms and interviewed women working on the farmland or in their houses.

At the end of the focus groups, the consultant and the National Project Facilitator accompanied one or

two women to their homes and collected in-depth information about their personal situations, with video, photography and recordings (consent was given for all forms of data collection). The focus group discussions and the individual interviews were open-ended and guided by a set of thematic questions found in Appendix 2. This qualitative data helped to contextualize the statistics and facts found in the above-mentioned reports.

Interviews and focus groups discussions with rural women were conducted in the following localities:

- » Districts of Republican Subordination – women from villages in the districts of Hisor and Shahrinav;
- » Khatlon region – women from villages in the districts of Dusti, Jomi and Vakhsh; and
- » Sughd region – women from villages in the districts of Ayni, Bobojon Gafurov, Jabbor Rasulov and Shahrston.

### 2.4. Data limitations

Official data, compiled by the Agency on Statistics were used whenever possible. However, as already noted in the 2016 report, there are several gaps in terms of the data related to agricultural production and rural livelihoods that make it difficult to present a clear picture of gender inequalities (see also FAO, 2016, pp. 3–4).

- » Producing gender statistics relevant to agriculture and rural livelihoods in Tajikistan is complicated by the fact that existing datasets are generally limited to data disaggregated by sex, by sex of the household head or by urban and rural location, but all three factors are seldom cross-tabulated.
- » The Agency on Statistics does not produce a unified compilation of gender statistics every year (the most recent “Women and Men of Tajikistan” datasets are from 2020). Although some of the data are disaggregated by urban and rural areas, indicators related to agriculture are mostly disaggregated by region.
- » The agricultural census, conducted in 2013, collected information about the sex of both managers of enterprises that produce agricultural products and heads of households, but to date, the data have not yet been analysed or published.<sup>5</sup> A new agricultural census has also not taken place since 2013.

<sup>4</sup> All contributions to the fieldwork for this CGA by representatives from USAID and USAID/ACAT were obtained prior to 24 January 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Information about the agricultural census is available from the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan website in the Tajik, Russian and English languages at <http://www.stat.tj/>.

- » Surveys generally include data disaggregated by sex (or in some cases, sex of the head of household only) and also by rural and urban location. While data about male- and female-headed households can be considered proxy information to describe the circumstances of rural men and women, they are not as definitive as data collected about women or men as individuals (women and men farmers, business owners, etc.).
- » Value chain analysis is particularly needed to improve the understanding of where women and men are most active in various forms of agricultural production, including crop production and animal husbandry, and also the extent to which they benefit from the processing, marketing and sale of such products.
- » Furthermore, of the statistics that are published by the Agency on Statistics, very few are disaggregated by both sex and settlement type. Accessible cross-referenced data are available for indicators related to demographics (for example, household composition and life expectancy) but are not available for key indicators concerning health, education or access to social protection.
- » Finally, it is important to note that the official statistical definition of a rural region in Tajikistan is typically disaggregated by area of residence, often categorized as “urban” and “other” areas. In this context, the term “other” is used to refer to rural areas, including the “countryside”. This classification, however, can be somewhat ambiguous and may not fully capture the diversity and complexities of rural life. The “other” category encompasses a wide range of regions, from remote villages to peri-urban areas, which can differ significantly in terms of access to resources, infrastructure and services. As a result, the rural population may be underrepresented or generalized in official statistics, making it more challenging to address the specific needs and challenges faced by rural communities, particularly in terms of gender equality and socioeconomic development.



# 3. Exploring the overall context of rural livelihoods

## 3.1. Administrative and territorial divisions

Tajikistan is a landlocked, lower middle-income country located in Central Asia. It has borders with Uzbekistan (on the west and north sides), Kyrgyzstan (in the north and east), China (in the east) and Afghanistan (in the south). It is a mountainous country with a land area of 142 400 square kilometres and a population of 10.288 million people (as of 1 January 2024; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2024). Almost three-quarters of the population (71.2 percent) live in rural areas (more than 7 million people). It is divided into four main regions or oblasts: Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) to the east, Khatlon in the south, Sughd in the north and the Districts of Republican Subordination in the centre (see Figure 1). The capital, Dushanbe, is often treated as a nominal fifth oblast for administration purposes.

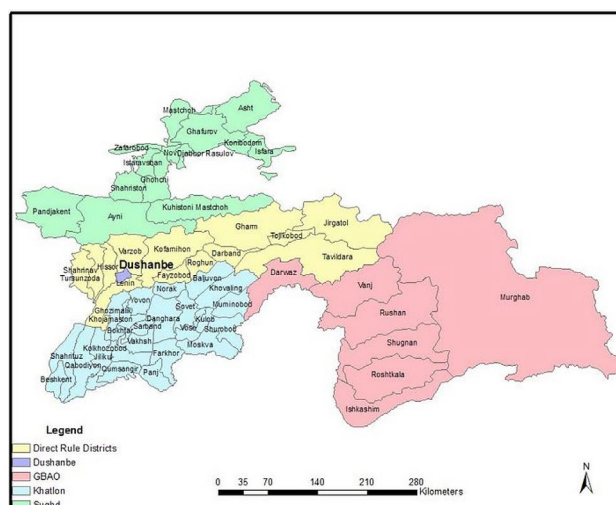
As of 2023, the four regions of Tajikistan were subdivided into 47 districts (called “*nohiya*” in Tajik, “*rayon*” in Russian), not including four districts belonging to the capital city Dushanbe. There are 18 cities and towns including Dushanbe and 66 urban-type settlements (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023c). The districts are further subdivided into rural municipalities called *jamoats*, which are the third-level administrative divisions, similar to communes or municipalities. As of 1 January 2023, there were 367 rural *jamoats*, and these were further subdivided into villages (“*deha*” or “*qyshloq*”; *ibid.*).

More than 93 percent of the territory of Tajikistan is occupied by mountains, and half of the territory is at altitudes higher than 3 000 m above sea level, with the highest point being the Ismoil Somoni Peak (7 495 m) in the Akademiya Nauk Range (Pamirs). Due to variable

climatic conditions and mountainous geography, most of the country’s territory is unsuitable for commercial agriculture, though households have access to small plots for subsistence agriculture.

The agricultural sector employs about 43 percent of the economically active population, with women representing 59 percent of the agricultural labour force (World Bank, 2021a, 2021b). In fact, a large share of the rural population is highly dependent on agriculture, as a form of employment and also for subsistence. Because only about 10 percent of the country’s territory is suitable for cultivation, agricultural land, especially irrigated land, is a critical resource. The main agricultural

**Figure 1. Map of Tajikistan showing the administrative boundaries of the three regions and DRS**



**Source:** Ugonna, U.P. 2005. Mapping deprivation in Tajikistan. Developing an index of deprivation at the small-area level in a data-sparse region. London, Birkbeck College. MSc dissertation. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239785685\\_Mapping\\_Deprivation\\_in\\_Tajikistan](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239785685_Mapping_Deprivation_in_Tajikistan) Refer to the disclaimer on page [ii] for the names and boundaries used in this map.

areas of the country are the Khatlon region in the southwest, the Sughd region in the north and the Hissor and Rasht zones in the southern and eastern parts of the DRS. Most towns and jamoats are concentrated in irrigated valleys linked with agricultural systems.

### Box 1. Classification of urban and rural areas

There is no internationally agreed-upon definition of urban and rural areas due to the fact that national characteristics vary significantly. The classification of Tajikistan's territory as "urban" or "rural" is based on the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on the Procedures for Resolving Issues of the Administrative-Territorial Structure of the Republic of Tajikistan. Article 6 of this law defines villages as "settlements that have reached a certain level of infrastructure development, with a population of at least 50 people, more than half of whom are engaged in agricultural activities. In exceptional cases, remote and hard-to-reach settlements with a population of fewer than 50 people may also be classified as villages". Furthermore, locations in Tajikistan are designated as "cities" and "urban-type settlements" using the following criteria: "Number of inhabitants and predominance of agricultural, or number of non-agricultural workers and their families" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2005, p. 2).

When conducting the population census, the Agency on Statistics uses the following classifications: large cities (a population of 100 000 people or more); big cities (a population of 40 000 to 100 000 people); medium-sized cities and towns (from 10 000 to 40 000 people) and small cities and towns (settlements; less than 10 000 people). Cities, towns and "urban-type settlements" are classified as "urban areas", and all other settlements are considered "rural areas" (FAO, 2016, p. 9).

**Sources:** (i) Tajikistan. *Constitutional Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on the Procedures for Resolving Issues of the Administrative-Territorial Structure of the Republic of Tajikistan* (as amended by the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2 January 2018). No. 1492. Also available at: [https://ncz.tj/system/files/Legislation/1001\\_ru\\_0.pdf](https://ncz.tj/system/files/Legislation/1001_ru_0.pdf); (ii) United Nations Statistics Division. 2005. *Definition of "urban": Demographic Yearbook, 2005*. [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/densurb/Defintion\\_of%20Urban.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/densurb/Defintion_of%20Urban.pdf); (iii) FAO. 2016. *National gender profile of agricultural and rural livelihoods – Tajikistan*. Country Gender Assessment Series. Ankara. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/ac04d416-f189-4171-bf18-1dfb847024f6/content>

## 3.2. Demographic profile: population dynamics

The population of the country was 10.288 million as of 1 January 2024, with an annual growth rate of 2.2 percent (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2024). Women represent 49.3 percent of the total population, and within this, 49.4 percent of urban and 49.2 percent of rural populations (ibid.). In 2022, life expectancy at birth was 76 years: 74 years for men and 77 years for women (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023c).

The country consists mostly of rural populations: 72 percent of the total population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2022a), with an annual growth rate of 1.7 and differing rates by region (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022; see also Table 1). The largest proportion of the rural population lives in Khatlon region. Despite trends of migration to the capital city, the population is expected to remain largely concentrated in rural areas. Tajikistan is the only country in the Europe and Central Asia region that is expected to have more than half of its population (57 percent) residing in rural areas by 2050 (Van't Wout, Celikyilmaz and Arguello, 2021).

Differences in the rural-to-urban population ratio are also influenced by higher birth rates and lower death rates in rural areas. In 2019, the birth rate in rural areas was 25.9 per 1 000 people, compared to 24.0 per 1 000 in urban areas. At the same time, the death rate was significantly lower in rural areas – 3.3 per 1 000 people – primarily due to the higher prevalence of lifestyle-related diseases among urban residents. As a result, natural population growth was higher in rural areas – 22.8 per 1 000 people – than in urban areas, which was 19.5 per 1 000 (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a).

**In rural areas, the number of women is increasing faster than in urban areas.** While there has been a slight decrease in the ratio of women in the urban population, in recent years the proportion of women among the rural population has remained steady at around 49 percent (FAO, 2016). Although the total fertility rate in Tajikistan is 3.2 births per woman (World Bank, 2021c), there is a significant difference between urban and rural women: 4.0 births per woman in rural areas (in 2017, up from 3.9 in 2012), compared with 3.0 births in urban areas in 2017 (down from 3.3 in 2012; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018).

**Table 1. Female population, by region and settlement type**

Region	Total population	Rural women	Urban women
Dushanbe	1 221 100	–	594 500
GBAO	232 000	94 100	19 500
Khatlon	3 611 200	1 456 800	321 100
Sughd	2 870 000	1 077 000	342 700
DRS	2 144 100	895 700	159 600
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 078 400</b>	<b>3 523 600</b>	<b>1 437 400</b>

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2023a. *Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of January 1, 2023*. Dushanbe, pp. 42–54.

Additionally, as will be discussed below, because of the high rate of male labour migration, many rural locations have de facto populations that are predominantly women, children and older people. Since rural-urban migration is male-dominated in Tajikistan, migration changes the population structure of rural areas, leading to higher proportions of older people, very young people and women in the agricultural workforce (FAO, 2016).

**Tajikistan has a young population.** More than half (55 percent) of the population is under the age of 25 years, and 38 percent are younger than 15 years (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). The significant share of young people in the population structure may serve as a window of opportunity for economic growth, for example, “there is a large working population of 60% ... between the ages of 15 to 64, and a small old-age dependency population of about 3.2%” (Kan and Aytimur, 2018, p. 2). However, a larger population also suggests greater pressure on the national economy in terms of food security, adequate infrastructure, job creation and the environment.

Precise data about the number of female-headed households (FHHs) in Tajikistan are lacking. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of 2017 estimated that 21 percent of households sampled were female-headed and that FHHs were more common in urban areas – 28.3 percent of households in urban areas were headed by women compared with 18.3 percent in rural areas (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and

ICF 2018).<sup>6</sup> The Agency on Statistics (2020) estimates that 18.7 percent of all households were headed by women in 2018. It is unclear, however, whether these numbers distinguish between legally divorced, never-married or widowed women. Estimated numbers may also not take into consideration de facto and de jure female-headed households which are very important in the context of Tajikistan. Using FAO’s categorization, de facto FHHs are those in which an adult male partner is working away from the household but remains involved through remittances and other economic and social ties, while de jure FHHs are those which have no male partner, such as women who are widowed, divorced or never married (FAO, 2011).

According to the 2017 DHS, and as summarized in Table 2, households are larger on average in rural areas than in urban areas. They are more likely to be headed by a woman – single or never married – in urban areas rather than rural ones, although de jure female-headed households (women “left behind” by migrant husbands) in rural areas are on the increase with the migration of men – but are not counted in the statistics of this particular study. The median age at first marriage was only slightly higher in urban than in rural areas. There is little difference in the median age at first birth between urban and rural women (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018).

The traditional Tajik rural household is a multigenerational family living together, with women typically moving into their spouse’s household after

<sup>6</sup> The DHS had a sample of 6 675 households (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018).

**Table 2. Snapshot of women, by settlement type, 2017**

	Rural	Urban
Household average number	6.5 persons	4.8 persons
Households headed by a woman	16.1%	31%
Median age at first marriage	20.1 years	20.5 years
Median age at first birth	21.8 years	22 years
Number of children per woman	4	3

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF. 2018. *Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017*. Dushanbe, Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and Rockville, Maryland, USA, ICF, p. 12, p. 21, p. 52, p. 63, p. 73.

marriage. Multigenerational families usually consist of an adult couple, their unmarried children and married sons with their spouses and children. This family structure is efficient for households that rely on agriculture, but it also reflects limited economic resources and the lack of affordable housing in the country (FAO, 2016).

In extended families, the traditional household head is usually a male family member who makes key decisions – especially financial ones – for the family unit. Next, the mother-in-law plays a key role in allocating responsibilities and deciding on divisions of labour. Young married women and unmarried daughters are the ones with the least amount of power and say in multigenerational extended families. In rural areas, this often means that their work on family farms goes unpaid or lower paid than men's, based on the presumption that they are only supplementing the larger family budget.

### 3.3. Migration

This review of Tajikistan's gender and agriculture profile must take into account the significant impact of large-scale labour migration that has become a key factor shaping the nation's economic and social landscape in recent decades. From the 1990s onwards, labour migration has become one of the most common coping strategies for survival by households, and many Tajik citizens, particularly men, migrate abroad in search of better job prospects, which has profound implications for both the rural and urban populations left behind. Low salaries, low productivity of the agricultural sector and the scarcity of jobs in rural areas are the main drivers of both rural-urban migration and emigration.

According to official statistics, in 2019, the year prior

to the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, the number of workers who left the country seeking a job reached 553 868 people (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a, p. 71), although experts estimate the numbers to be significantly higher. According to other sources, 1.6 million Tajik nationals entered the Russian Federation between January to September 2021 alone, stating work as their official purpose (Ibragimova, 2021).

Migration from Tajikistan is male-dominated, and more than 85 percent of labour migrants come from rural areas. Although in 2019 female migration increased by double that of male migration (a 24 percent increase, compared to a 12 percent increase in the number of male labour migrants), women's participation in labour migration has remained between 12 percent and 16 percent over the past 5 years. In addition, for both genders, the majority were unemployed before migrating (ADB, 2020a). The majority of migrants travel to the Russian Federation, and, to a lesser extent to Kazakhstan and other countries (ibid.), where they often work informally on construction sites, in the service sector and in agriculture, among others.

The share of women migrating independently as labour migrants, rather than as family dependants, is also growing. Some leave the country specifically to find migrant husbands who have stopped communicating with the family, while others may take the place of their husbands (for example if they are on the non-entry list for the Russian Federation as a result of deportation). While migrant men mostly work in trade and construction, migrant women tend to work in "eateries (mainly as waitresses and cleaners), semi-formal produce and clothing bazaars (as stall owners and vendors), and formal retail and grocery stores (as sales clerks and cleaners)" (Gorina, Agadjanian and Zotova, 2017, p. 8). Younger women

also work in services such as beauty and nail salons. With the ageing of the host countries' workforces, migrant women are likely to also work as doctors, nurses and caregivers (UNDP, 2015b). In other words, rural women who may not have opportunities in Tajikistan are learning new skills abroad. This can have implications upon return to their place of origin, where they may not want to work in agriculture.

Remittances from labour migration have been one of the main forms of contribution to household income in the country for at least the last two decades. In 2019, remittances from migrant workers amounted to around USD 2.5 billion, equivalent to 33 percent of the national GDP (Eurasianet, 2020). Tajikistan experienced a sharp but temporary reduction in remittance inflows in 2020 as a result of border closures and quarantine restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19 infections, with remittances dropping to 21 percent of GDP (FAO, 2022a).

A year later, however, remittances started to grow again, exceeding the 2019 level by nearly 20 percent in USD terms. During the January to June 2021 period, remittances of labour migrants amounted to 11 percent more than in the same period of 2020 (FAO, 2022b). The outbreak of the war in Ukraine and international sanctions against the Russian Federation were expected to cause a further fall of remittances. However, the data suggest that "remittances from the Russian Federation remained mostly steady" (Hugot and Mogilevskii, 2023, p. 36), information informally corroborated by households interviewed for this assessment who were receiving remittances. The World Bank estimates that in 2022, USD 5.35 billion were received in remittances, which amounted to 50.9 percent of GDP (World Bank, 2022b).

In a 2022 FAO survey, the "majority of households who received remittances reported that the money was used to cover food needs" (FAO, 2022b, p. 53), followed by basic household needs such as education and housing. Furthermore, "only 1 percent of the households reported that the money was used to invest in business" (ibid.). There were few differences in expenditure

between urban and rural households, except in relation to education, on which urban households spent a larger proportion (FAO, 2022b).

Migration has had a mixed impact on rural communities and farming households. While remittances serve as an important source of income to support household livelihoods and food security, the absence of men appears to have had little effect on improving women's empowerment, including on the use of household budgets. Men tend to send money to male relatives who have stayed behind, or to their mothers who then become the de facto decision-makers in the households. Mothers-in-law are the ones who invest in the household while they give part of the budget to younger women members of the household who are responsible for spending on the needs of their children (clothing, educational needs, food, etc.). Decisions about investments on the farm are most often made by male relatives or mothers-in-law, except in households without men.<sup>7</sup>

When men leave on labour migration, women suffer from increased workloads and limited access to resources. "Left behind" wives of migrant workers are among the most socially and economically vulnerable women in Tajikistan (FAO, 2016). They often do not have sufficient knowledge and experience to run the dehkan farms, while their "abandonment is exacerbated by the negative social norms and traditional attitudes to women's status and rights within the family and society" (UN Women, 2024a, no pagination). Subsequently, to avoid the decline in the profitability of dehkan farms, these are put up to lease. In some cases, they can be taken back by the government, according to Article No. 37 of the Land Code of Tajikistan which stipulates the termination of land use rights if the land plot has not been used for agricultural needs in two consecutive years. To avoid this outcome, "left behind" wives are encouraged by international organizations, including FAO and IOM, among others, to participate in training on topics such as financial literacy and innovative income-generating activities.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Observations from the fieldwork conducted for this CGA.

<sup>8</sup> Interview for this assessment conducted with Muzaffar Shodiev, Senior Programme Assistant, and Elizabeth Linklater, Programme Support Officer, International Organization for Migration, Dushanbe, 22 November 2022.



# 4. Socioeconomic status of rural women

## 4.1. Overcoming rural poverty

Over the past decade, Tajikistan has made steady progress in reducing poverty and growing its economy. Between 2000 and 2021, the poverty rate, measured by the national poverty line, fell from 83 percent of the population to an estimated 26.5 percent, while the economy grew at an average rate of 7 percent per year (World Bank, 2023). Growth in employment, incomes and remittances have been the most important drivers of poverty reduction in recent years. One type of income that is significant for many households in rural parts of Tajikistan are remittance payments from migrants working abroad. In 2019, these accounted for nearly 30 percent of GDP (World Bank, 2024).

Yet, despite significant improvements towards poverty reduction, Tajikistan is still the poorest country in Central Asia. According to official statistics and shown in Table 3, 26.3 percent of the population was living below the national poverty line in 2019, while the extreme poverty rate was 10.7 percent in 2019, down from 18.2 percent in 2013 (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). The National Development Strategy 2030 has established targets of halving poverty and increasing domestic incomes by up to 3.5 times (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2016).

In Tajikistan, as in many countries around the world, rural residents and communities in remote,

mountainous and underdeveloped areas are at greater disadvantage, due to geographical isolation, lack of viable jobs, infrastructure gaps, inferior public services and heavy reliance on transportation. To these, the low profitability of the agricultural sector in Tajikistan is an added factor. As of 2019, the poverty level for rural households was 30.1 percent, while it was 18.4 percent for urban households (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2021a).

According to the Agency on Statistics, in 2022 the main sources of income in rural households were labour income (34 percent) and income from agriculture (17.6 percent). Data on remittances is missing and some have suggested that remittances might have been included in labour income. Forty-four percent of rural household income is spent on food (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023d). As explained earlier, given that incomes from the agricultural sector do not cover all expenses, a large number of households rely on remittances. These are mainly directed towards consumer spending instead of investments in production on the farms. These trends imply a continued high dependency of households on remittances but also a low level of financial literacy necessary for investing in the future, rather than spending in the present.

Female-headed rural households – especially de jure FHHs with no male partner, such as women who are widowed, divorced or never married – experience

**Table 3. Levels of poverty and extreme poverty, 2019**

	Total (%)	Rural population (%)	Urban population (%)
Level of absolute poverty	26.3	30.1	18.4
Level of extreme poverty	10.7	12.3	7.6

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2020a. *Women and Men of the Republic of Tajikistan*. Dushanbe, p. 1, p. 19. [https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen\\_tajikistan\\_statistical\\_publication\\_eng.pdf](https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen_tajikistan_statistical_publication_eng.pdf)

higher rates of poverty than de facto FHHs (whose male partners work abroad), urban FHHs and male-headed households (MHHs) in both urban and rural areas (FAO, 2022a). Female-headed households tend to be smaller than MHHs, but specifically they have fewer working-age adults that could contribute to the household budget or could take on a share of the child care responsibilities. These factors, as well women's more limited access to higher paid employment opportunities, explain why FHHs are at higher risk of impoverishment (FAO, 2016).

Rural women in general have limited access to productive resources and opportunities, for example, extension and rural advisory services, but also transportation, equipment, innovative technologies, irrigation, finance and networks (ADB, 2016; see also FAO, 2011). According to the 2017 DHS, only 1 percent of women have a bank account that they use compared with 3.0 percent of urban women (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Only 54 percent own a mobile phone, and of these, only 9 percent use it for financial transactions (*ibid.*).

Women also experience income poverty due to the significant gender wage gap in Tajikistan. In 2019, women's average wages (across all sectors of the economy) were equivalent to only 64 percent of men's wages (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020b), while in agriculture these consisted of 80.8 percent of men's (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). The wage gap in the non-agricultural sector can be partially explained by gender-based discrimination and stereotypes, such as the fact that women predominate in low paid sectors of the economy (for example, education and health care) and are also more likely than men to work part-time and to leave the job market for periods of time due to child care responsibilities (Sattar *et al.*, 2013). The fact that the gender wage gap is lower in agricultural labour may have to do with outmigration of men, the greater number of women in agricultural labour and low wages in general. It is most likely not the result of more gender-friendly policies in *dehkan* farms that recognize the worth of female employment.

Understanding patterns of ownership of key assets offers another means to understand relative poverty rates between women and men. While there are no formal or legal barriers to women's property ownership, culturally and traditionally property is registered in the names of male relatives and also

inheritance follows a patrilineal pattern. As a result, most women are "asset poor", meaning that they less likely to exercise their ownership rights and/or hold property jointly. Without full ownership, women's ability to use property (for example, to sell, rent out or offer property as collateral to secure loans) is compromised, and this puts them at risk of poverty and extreme poverty in cases of divorce, abandonment or in other situations when they are not supported by a male property owner (FAO, 2016).

Given the prevailing social norms and hierarchies within families, young women in rural areas – whether married or unmarried – are disproportionately affected by poverty, exclusion and multiple forms of discrimination. As observed during the field interviews conducted in preparation for this assessment, it is young women who bear the heaviest burden when it comes to household duties and caregiving. In addition to managing these responsibilities, they also engage in unpaid labour on family-owned agricultural plots, which includes tending to domestic animals and performing tasks such as planting, watering, and harvesting fruits and vegetables.

Although young rural women may have more access to mobile phones – often used to communicate with husbands working abroad – they face significant barriers to fully utilizing new technologies for economic activities. Their limited financial and digital literacy, combined with poor transportation options and inadequate infrastructure, severely restrict their ability to engage in online economic ventures, agribusinesses, or other opportunities that could improve their livelihoods. Moreover, the work that rural women perform on family farms – despite being integral to household and agricultural production – goes unrecognized as formal labour and remains unpaid, simply viewed as part of their domestic responsibilities.

This lack of recognition and remuneration not only deepens the economic divide but also reinforces the broader social and cultural marginalization of young women in rural communities, further hindering their potential for social mobility and economic independence.

All of these trends have a direct and profound impact on the productivity of *dehkan* farms and the overall agricultural development in rural areas. Despite the crucial role women play in agriculture, particularly in tasks such as planting, harvesting, tending to livestock, and managing household food security, they continue to face systemic barriers that limit their economic opportunities and leave them disproportionately affected by poverty.

## 4.2. Social protection

### 4.2.1. Pensions

Older women in rural areas also face significant challenges. While they may earn more respect within the household and are privy to decision-making on matters related to budget expenditure, investment and consumption, among other things, older women are also at a higher risk of extreme poverty, especially if they do not have children that can take care of them. Female life expectancy is longer than male life expectancy in Tajikistan, but because women retire at an earlier age than men, they also live longer with smaller pensions, a situation that puts them at greater risk of economic insecurity (FAO, 2016).<sup>9</sup> As of 1 January 2020, the number of pensioners was 7.6 percent of the total population, and among them, 62.3 percent were women (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a).

The Law about Insurance and National Pensions guarantees that all persons (regardless of gender) are entitled to receive a pension if they are insured by the compulsory pension insurance system. However, there are no specific gender-sensitive social protection measures that recognize gender-specific life course vulnerabilities (for example, related to maternity or care work). Rural households that own agricultural land plots larger than 0.5 hectares are also typically not eligible for targeted social assistance schemes or unemployment benefits without consideration of land plot productivity or the family's ability to use it effectively (FAO, 2022c). Rural women often work as "contributing family workers with limited or no access to social insurance. For those with access, they are more likely to be in low-paid jobs and with fewer years of contributions, due to breaks for child care, leading to a lower pension size. Rural women lag behind their urban peers in accessing maternity rights due to widespread informality, and in addition, a lack of digital literacy hinders rural women in using digitized procedures" (FAO, 2022c, p. xiv).

In the case of older rural women, those who worked in the *kolkhoz* or *sovkhov* system during the Soviet era continue to receive a small pension, which is registered in their *trudavaia knizhka* (service record). According to the Law "On provision of pensions of citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan", only some women above 50 years of age are entitled to this, if they have worked in specific fields of agricultural occupation and have accrued at least 15 to 20 years of service. Under the

same law, specific groups of women are entitled to pensions on preferential terms. These groups include: tractor drivers; milking machine operatives in dairy production; workers in cultivation and harvesting of cotton and tobacco in *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoves*; and doctors and other medical personnel who have been employed in their specialist area for at least 30 years in urban areas and at least 25 years in rural areas.

Women who have engaged in informal agricultural work are entitled to a social pension when they reach the age of 58 years. Following the presidential decree issued on 6 February 2023, the basic pension was set at TJS 250 per month (equivalent to USD 22.12; ADLIA, 2025). Interviews conducted for this assessment showed, however, that the cost of transportation to the nearest town is often higher than the amount of pension that can be withdrawn from the bank there.

### 4.2.2. Social assistance

In 2011, the government, through the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP), introduced a new mechanism for delivering targeted social assistance (TSA)<sup>10</sup> to vulnerable households known as "The State Programme of Providing Targeted Social Assistance".. The programme is supported by the World Bank and provides unconditional cash payments of about USD 40 to USD 60 per family per year. As of 1 January 2021, there were 223 900 recipients of TSA benefits under the World Bank-supported Tajikistan Emergency COVID-19 (TEC-19) Program, which was 2.2 times more than in 2020. Of those, 53.7 percent of the households were headed by women and 46.3 percent were headed by men.

In September 2022, the number of households receiving TSA was 220 000, which was approximately 15 percent of all households in the country (World Bank, 2022c). In October 2022, the government adopted a new proxy means test (PMT) formula to better identify population welfare (in force from 1 January 2023) and approved a Government Resolution on establishing a different approach to determining the TSA amount which is higher in size and is based on a per-child under 16 years approach. This came into force on 1 July 2023 (ibid.).

## 4.3. Health

Average life expectancy in Tajikistan varies by both sex and place of residence. Women in rural areas have the

<sup>9</sup> Men are eligible for old-age pensions at the age of 63 with at least 25 years of covered employment, and women are eligible at the age of 58 with at least 20 years of covered work, with further reductions in the required years of employment for mothers of five or more children or children with disabilities.

<sup>10</sup> Targeted social assistance replaces two outdated mechanisms: compensation to low-income citizens for the use of electricity and natural gas, and the payment of benefits to children from low-income families enrolled in general education schools.

**Table 4. Female and male life expectancy at birth, by settlement type, 2019**

Rural population		Urban population	
Female	Male	Female	Male
77.7	74.6	74.4	70.4

Source: Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2020a. *Women and Men in the Republic of Tajikistan*. Dushanbe, p. 60. [https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen\\_tajikistan\\_statistical\\_publication\\_eng.pdf](https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen_tajikistan_statistical_publication_eng.pdf)

highest life expectancy, while the gender gap is more pronounced among the urban population. On average, men in Tajikistan live nearly 4 years less than women (see Table 4).

The main causes of death for men and women are similar and include diseases of the circulatory or respiratory systems, cancers and heart disease. More men than women die of cardiovascular diseases, infectious and parasitic diseases, and respiratory diseases. Men are also far more likely to die from accidents, poisoning or trauma (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a).

Investments in improving maternal health and birth outcomes have resulted in a decrease in the maternal mortality overall rate (World Bank, 2020). According to the 2017 DHS, the risk of dying in early childhood is much greater for children in rural areas (37 deaths per 1 000 live births) than for those in urban areas (20 deaths per 1 000 live births; Agency on Statistics under the President of The Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Rural women in Tajikistan are often vulnerable to maternal and infant deaths due to low-quality health care, lack of access to transportation to health care facilities, the pressure to continue engaging in physical work during pregnancy, lack of knowledge about irregular pregnancy symptoms, and an overall hesitancy to consult medical professionals

that is aggravated by the power dynamics within rural households (World Bank, 2021d).

While rural women may not necessarily lead unhealthier lives than their urban counterparts, they tend to seek medical advice less frequently than urban women. As a result, they may not address health issues in a timely manner, which can affect their overall well-being. According to the 2017 DHS, only 15 percent of rural women aged 15 to 49 years had their blood sugar and blood pressure measured by a doctor or health care provider compared with 24.4 percent of urban women (Agency on Statistics under the President of The Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Urban women are also more likely than rural women to take iron or folate tablets during pregnancy (ibid.). Two out of five women (41 percent) in Tajikistan suffer from anaemia. Of these, more rural women (41.8 percent) suffer from anaemia than urban women (39.2 percent; ibid.).

According to the 2017 DHS, while the proportion of women aged 15 to 49 years who received any antenatal care from skilled health workers increased from 79 percent in 2012 to 92 percent in 2017, women in rural areas were more likely than women in urban locations to have received no antenatal care during pregnancy (ibid.). While the percentage of home delivery had fallen by one half to 12 percent in 2017 (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a), rural women give birth at home considerably more often (13.1 percent of rural women had given birth at home, compared with only 5.8 percent of urban women; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Home births are risky because women are less likely to receive postnatal care, and less likely to register the birth, with long-term legal and economic implications. In rural

**Table 5. Problems in access to health care**

	Rural women	Urban women
<b>Percentage of women who reported at least one problem in having access to health care</b>	45.3%	32.7%
– including getting money for treatment	38.0%	27.5%
– including distance to health facility	25.2%	9.6%
– including not wanting to go alone	22.2%	11.7%

Source: Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF. 2018. *Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017*. Dushanbe, Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and Rockville, Maryland, USA, ICF, p. 137.

**Table 6. Percentage of girls in school, 2019**

	Rural schools	Urban schools
% of girls in 5th to 9th grades (middle school)	49% of students	46% of students
% of girls in 10th to 11th grades (high school)	47% of students	45% of students

**Source:** World Bank. 2021d. *Tajikistan. Country Gender Assessment*. Washington, DC, pp. 4–5. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/874641637562869105/pdf/Tajikistan-Country-Gender-Assessment.pdf>

areas, 4.7 percent of children under the age of 5 years have no birth certificate, compared with 3.6 percent of urban children (ibid.).

To increase the rural population's access to medical services, the government has adopted the primary health care (PHC) approach, bringing health care closer to communities. Health Houses (HH) and Rural Health Centers (RHC) are being established throughout the country, however, there is a shortage of medical personnel, and the number and quality of services in rural areas leave significant space for development and improvement.

Table 5 shows the main challenges reported by rural and urban women themselves in accessing health care facilities.

There are no data that would indicate differences in sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates, or HIV in particular, by location, but rural areas have several characteristics that present risk factors for transmission. Rural areas experience high levels of male outmigration, and wives of labour migrants are considered particularly at risk for STI transmission. Sexual and reproductive health services, especially those oriented to young people, are very limited in rural areas, while conservative attitudes and taboos make it difficult for young people to seek necessary advice (FAO, 2016). As expected, the use of modern contraception is higher in urban areas than in rural areas – 32 percent versus 26 percent (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). The abortion rate is similar in urban and rural areas, with 0.4 and 0.5 abortions per woman, respectively (ibid.).

In 2021, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection adopted the National Health Protection Strategy through 2030, with one of its key objectives being to ensure equitable access to health services. This strategy served as the foundation for the development and subsequent adoption of the State Programme for the Development of Public Healthcare Facilities for 2022–2025. Under this programme, numerous hospitals and clinics – both urban and rural – have been constructed,

renovated and modernized. A particular emphasis is placed on protecting reproductive health, with targeted measures such as the distribution of contraceptives and public awareness campaigns promoting their use.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.4. Education

Tajikistan's Constitution guarantees equal access to education and mandates free and compulsory basic education (Grades 1 to 9; UNECE, 2020). To increase female enrolment, particularly in rural areas, the government has implemented several measures. These include raising the legal age of marriage from 17 years to 18, expanding the number of basic and general education schools in remote villages, and introducing the Presidential Quota System, which facilitates access to tertiary education for both women and men living in remote districts (World Bank, 2021d). The NDS-2030 Action Plan foresees the admission of a total of 1 227 students to higher education, with 629 of them, or 51.2 percent, being girls from rural areas (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2017).

Sustained efforts by state authorities and civil society organizations committed to promoting the inclusion of rural girls in education have contributed to achieving a relatively balanced gender ratio in rural schools – often more so than in urban areas, as seen in Table 6.

The situation is, however, more unequal when it comes to higher education. The 2017 DHS showed that more women had secondary education in rural areas than urban ones, while more don't have any education at all, and fewer rural women have professional middle education or higher education than urban women (see Table 7).

Despite the achievements, a persistent gender gap remains in secondary and tertiary education, driven by a combination of factors that are particularly acute in rural areas. Barriers to girls' education include limited financial resources – for items such as uniforms and textbooks – the withdrawal of girls from school

<sup>11</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection during the CGA Validation Workshop on 30 April 2024.

**Table 7. Education rates based on DHS survey data, 2017**

	Rural households		Urban households	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
% with secondary education	34.8	25.4	28.7	20.1
% with only primary education	3.7	3.5	3.2	3.1
% with no education	7.2	7.0	5.7	5.8
% with professional middle education	4.3	4.1	6.3	4.1
% with higher education	4.3	12.4	15.0	28.3

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF. 2018. *Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017*. Dushanbe, Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and Rockville, Maryland, USA, ICF, pp. 24–25.

to perform housework or agricultural labour, long distances between home and school, inadequate transportation, and concerns about girls' safety while commuting (FAO, 2016). Social norms also play a significant role, with many families prioritizing the education of sons over daughters, often influenced by early marriage practices and the traditional belief that daughters will ultimately marry and be supported by their husband's family. These patriarchal norms strongly affect household decisions regarding investment in girls' education beyond the basic level. Gender roles further compound the issue: girls are more likely than boys to leave school to take on domestic responsibilities and unpaid agricultural work, while boys also miss school due to labour demands, but they are more often involved in paid employment and experience this disruption to a lesser extent (ibid.).

Young women from rural areas face particular difficulties accessing tertiary education due to the fact that colleges and universities are in urban centres, there is an insufficient number of dormitories for female students, and cultural values make it difficult for a woman to travel far from home and live without her family while studying (ibid.). To overcome these challenges, in 1997 the Ministry of Education adopted the Decree "On procedure of annual admittance of certain number of girls from remote areas in universities of the country without entry exams". This was followed by Resolution No. 199 of 19 April 2001 "On ordering of admittance of girls in the Universities of the Republic of Tajikistan, according to the presidential quota". As a result, the number of female students pursuing higher education has been gradually increasing and according to the available data, in 2017, out of the total number of university students 26.4 percent were girls, while in 2006 this number was only 14.3 percent (CEIC, n.d.).

While a good practice, the presidential quota has not addressed the gendered patterns observed in academic

subjects. The large majority of female students enrol in secondary vocational institutions and study either health or education. In contrast, men made up almost 100 percent of students in technical subjects, including agriculture, in secondary vocational institutions (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). Similar patterns can also be observed in universities. Additionally, the quota system does not alleviate other barriers to female education, such as inadequate residence facilities for female students and the pressure to marry rather than continue with higher education or a career. Because of the poor quality of rural primary education, young women who are admitted under the quota system often find that they are unprepared for higher education and drop out (Silova and Abdushukurova, 2009). Even those women who complete their higher education rarely return to their home villages due to lack of job opportunities in their specialties (The Coalition of Public Associations "From de Jure Equality to de Facto Equality", 2012).

A particularly pressing issue affecting livelihoods in rural areas is the acute lack of preschool facilities – including public or privately run kindergartens, nurseries and daycare centres (FAO, 2016). In 2019, only 7.7 percent of children aged 1 to 6 years were enrolled in a preschool education institution, and of these, only 22 percent were living in rural areas (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). According to the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2020, 432 preschool institutions (64.6 percent) were located in urban areas, while only 236 (35.4 percent) were in rural areas. This disparity has not only persisted but has slightly widened in recent years, with 464 institutions (65.5 percent) in urban areas and just 223 (34.5 percent) in rural areas reported in 2022–2023.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Information shared by a Ministry representative during the CGA Validation Workshop held on 30 April 2024.

**Table 8. Violence reported by women, 2017**

	Total women	Rural women	Urban women
Have ever been subjected to physical spousal violence	18.7%	26.3%	22.2%
Have ever been subjected to emotional/psychological spousal violence	13.3%	16.3%	14.3%
Have ever been subjected to sexual spousal violence	1.4%	1.7%	1.5%

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF. 2018. *Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017*. Dushanbe, Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and Rockville, Maryland, USA, ICF, p. 216, p. 218, p. 221, p. 225, p. 229, p. 237.

Preschool centres in rural areas are often inaccessible to families living far from towns and cities. Fee-based centres, where available, may be unaffordable for some households, while others may not prioritize child care within their limited budgets. The absence of early childhood education facilities has significant implications not only for children's cognitive and social development but also for their long-term educational outcomes. Critically, it is a major barrier to women's participation in the labour force (FAO, 2016). During fieldwork conducted for this assessment, women in most surveyed villages expressed concern over the lack of kindergartens, noting that children under the age of 3 years are often taken to the fields during agricultural work. This gap in early childhood care infrastructure undermines the economic stability of rural households by restricting women's ability to engage in paid work or income-generating activities. It reinforces gender inequality and limits overall household earning capacity. Addressing this issue is essential to promoting inclusive economic development and ensuring that rural women are not left behind.

#### 4.5. Gender-based violence

State efforts to combat gender-based violence (GBV), especially domestic violence, is one of the most positive steps towards improving gender equality in Tajikistan. Specialized legislation on domestic violence and national policy, including the State Program for the Prevention of Domestic Violence for 2014–2023, have raised awareness of the serious nature of GBV and created a framework for greater state action. However, GBV, surrounded by a culture of silence, remains widespread and has a profound impact on the lives of many women (FAO, 2016).

The prevalence of domestic violence increased by 7 percent between the 2012 and 2017 DHS (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection

of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). This could be due to an increase in reporting GBV cases rather than an increase in the prevalence of GBV itself. After the Law "On Prevention of Domestic Violence" was adopted and numerous training sessions were conducted for the population and all agencies responsible for prevention and addressing GBV cases, women started raising their voices and seeking help for a problem long considered an internal family matter, especially in rural areas.

The 2017 DHS also demonstrated that rural women tend to experience violence slightly more than urban women, which reverses the numbers from the 2012 survey (see Table 8). Of all surveyed women in 2017 aged 15 to 49 years and older, around a quarter reported that they had experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from their husband or partner, and the percentages were higher in rural than urban areas (24.9 percent of rural women and 20 percent of urban women; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018).

Some types of controlling behaviour by husbands (for example, jealousy if his wife speaks to other men, insisting on knowing where his wife is at all times, and not permitting his wife to visit female friends) were also reported quite frequently, but the patterns hardly differ between rural and urban areas (ibid.). Only about 1 in 10 women (rural and urban) reported that they took steps to end domestic violence when they experienced it. Most (76.2 percent of rural women and 70.3 percent of urban women) never sought help or told anyone about the violence (ibid.). To end violence, 73.4 percent relied on their own families, 31.8 percent on their husband's families, 10.8 percent on a lawyer, 8.6 percent on a neighbour, 6.1 percent

on a physician or health staff, 5.9 percent on a police officer and 5.7 percent on a friend.

While rural communities are often said to have more conservative attitudes, it appears that there is a certain level of societal acceptance of domestic violence as “normal” across the country as a whole. Just over half of urban women (55 percent) and 66 percent of rural women agreed with at least one reason included in the DHS survey as justification for a husband using physical violence against his wife (ibid.). Not surprisingly, the proportion of women who say that they can negotiate safer sex with their husbands is larger in urban than in rural areas and increases with higher levels of education and wealth (ibid.). Women from all backgrounds experience social pressure to remain silent and tolerate abuse.

A study conducted among both urban and rural women to assess the degree of economic insecurity concluded that violence against women was widespread in rural areas due to communication issues, community pressure and lack of access to finances and economic dependency on men.<sup>13</sup> Women who engaged in the unregulated informal sector and daywork (as *mardikors*) were also at risk of sexual violence. To prevent abuse, as well as to regulate demand and supply, collectives have been created with appointed leaders through which women dayworkers receive opportunities, and to which they pay some of their income.

A critical difference for rural and urban women, however, is their ability to access services. Assistance to survivors of GBV is provided by both state and civil society-run facilities. The CWFA operates specialized centres in Dushanbe for women and girls who are victims of violence and a system of regional information advisory centres (RIKTs) located in district centres. Non-governmental organizations throughout the country operate a number of women’s centres that provide counselling in times of crisis, including in cases of domestic violence. Temporary shelter facilities are extremely limited, exist mostly in urban areas and are insufficient to meet the complex needs of survivors of violence. Funding for services is very low (and often provided by international donors), human resources are limited (for example, there are very few social workers and psychologists), and coordination across institutions is not effective. Services also do not reach most rural areas (FAO, 2016).

The United Nations CEDAW Committee made recommendations to Tajikistan in October 2018 to conduct a survey to determine the prevalence of GBV against women and girls, particularly those living in rural areas. The committee also suggested that the government allocate funds from the central budget to provide free legal support, medical and psychological assistance, housing, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes for women and girls living in rural areas who are victims of GBV. Statistical data should be collected on the number of victims who receive such support, broken down by age, ethnicity and location. In addition, targeted and mandatory capacity-building activities should be conducted for professionals who deal with GBV, including law enforcement and judicial officials, medical and social workers, and others who interact with victims in rural areas (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018).

#### 4.6. Access to justice

Access to justice refers to the ability to access fair and effective remedies for human rights violations. Rural women in Tajikistan are particularly in need of legal protections, but they are also a group who are often unaware of or unable to assert their rights. Research indicates that citizens generally have a poor understanding of their rights and rarely approach the legal system for resolving disputes (see, for example, Eurasia Foundation and Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2011). Rural women are especially disadvantaged by a low level of legal literacy and are often prevented from protecting their rights in several specific contexts concerning domestic violence, marital property rights, land disputes and labour rights (FAO, 2016).

Although not recognized legally in Tajikistan, a widespread harmful gender custom found in rural areas is male polygamy, in which men tend to initiate a religious marriage (*nikoh*) with their second or third wives, even though religious marriage is not recognized as a legal marriage by Tajik legislation (Fazilova, 2018). Religious marriage does not protect women’s fundamental rights as stipulated in Tajik law and divorce in such marriages can easily be initiated by the men repeating the word “*talaq*” three times. Women are left without rights when religious marriages break down, such as “establishing paternity, claiming child support [...], splitting up property among ex-spouses and determining where the child is to stay” (Fazilova, 2018, no pagination).

Early marriages and polygamous marriages are not legally recognized in Tajikistan and, therefore, they do not confer rights to property to either spouse. The impact of

<sup>13</sup> Interview conducted for this assessment with Mohru Mahmudova, CIPE country representative for the WAGE program, 19 November 2022.

a non-registered marriage is arguably greater on women who are financially dependent on their husbands. If the marriage is dissolved or the husband dies, typically the woman will receive no property from the marriage. Even in cases of legal marriage or divorce, women's rights to marital property are often violated because moveable property is customarily registered in the husband's name only or in the name of the father-in-law. Women themselves are often unaware of their rights to property or how to protect them (FAO, 2016).

Recognition of women's land rights is another important aspect of access to justice (FAO, 2016). Women's lack of access to information and the institutions that resolve land disputes is illustrated by the fact that of the people who apply to regional information advisory centres (more than 80 percent of whom are women), close to a third are seeking assistance related to the Land Code, followed by the Family Code (Tagaeva, 2012). Of the applications concerning land rights, records of the RIKTs show the following issues are the most common: establishing a dehkan farm, obtaining land certificates, resolving land disputes and determining individual holdings/land plots (ibid.).

Mobile court sessions, legal discussions, and television and radio broadcasts with judges have also been organized to ensure access to justice for the rural population (Committee on the

Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). During deliberations on the sixth periodic report of Tajikistan in 2018, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women praised the implementation of mobile court sessions and free legal aid through the Bar and Advocacy Act and free legal assistance framework. However, it also expressed its concerns that gender-based violence and discrimination against women often go unreported, especially in rural areas because of family or law enforcement dissuasion, social stigma and discriminatory gender stereotypes (ibid.).

Despite these formidable reforms of the justice system, women, especially in rural areas, still face obstacles in accessing justice because of their lack of knowledge of the laws and their own rights. In addition to their lack of awareness of their rights, rural women are particularly disadvantaged by gender-neutral barriers to justice, such as the fact that practising attorneys are concentrated in urban centres, most in Dushanbe. Rural women are physically and financially constrained from accessing professional legal services (FAO, 2016). Social pressure also plays a role in limiting rural women's access to justice as they are often "prevented from seeking access to their rights by constraints placed on them by family members and the community" (Eurasia Foundation and Caucasus Research Centers, 2011, p. 13).



# 5. Rural women's participation in public life and household decision-making

## 5.1. National policies for advancing the status of women

Since 1994, Tajikistan has initiated a number of policy and structural reforms to improve the status of women. The first National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women was adopted in 1998, and the Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan was established in 1991. Since then, the government has enacted legislation guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women and men. It has also adopted successive national strategies and state programmes to address specific areas of gender inequality (FAO, 2016). Tajikistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993 and its Optional protocol in 2014.

On paper, in programmes and strategies, the right language is used: the Agrarian Reform Programme of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2012–2020 and the consequent Development Programme of the Agri-Food System and Sustainable Agriculture for the period up to 2030, stipulated, for example, ensuring equality in long-term land tenure, improving access to financing for farming, capacity building, and mitigating the effects of climate change on particularly vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households.

In reality, however, despite efforts, there is much that needs to be done to address the gap between policies and their implementation, to ensure that women enjoy de facto the same rights and opportunities as men (FAO and Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022). Despite a strong legal and policy framework,

implementation remains weak and so commitments to improve the status of women often remain unrealized.

The government has adopted specific legislations, policies and strategies to support women in general, and women in rural areas in particular. These include:

- » Article 17 of the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, adopted in 1994, guarantees the rights and liberties for every person irrespective of their nationality, race, sex, language, religious beliefs, political persuasion, knowledge, and social and property status. The same article fixes the equal rights of women and men.
- » The Law “On State guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men” was adopted in 2005, which set a state target of a minimum level of 30 percent representation by women in public bodies, including 25 percent in decision-making. This law, operating as a “soft quota”, has led to an increase in the number of women working as civil servants. By 2022, every ministry had to have at least one woman deputy minister, an achievement corroborated in the interviews.
- » The government adopted a National Action Plan for Strengthening the Role and Status of Women for the period of 1998–2005 (renewed in 2001, 2011 and 2021), followed by the adoption of a State programme “On Guidelines for a State policy to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women in Tajikistan for the period 2001– 2010” to which an additional Section IV “Access of the Rural Women to Land” was approved in 2004.

- » The updated National Strategy for the Activation of the Role of Women in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021–2030, adopted in April 2021, identifies the low levels of education and labour skills of rural women, low-paid, dangerous and informal work, and lack of access for rural girls to secondary education as the main challenges affecting rural women in Tajikistan. For rural areas, the national strategy commits to improving women’s access to employment outside the agricultural sector, increasing women’s skills in using labour-saving agricultural machinery, enhancing women’s access to microfinance, simplifying the lending process, and supporting microfinance organizations with an emphasis on improving women’s access to loans needed for small- and medium-sized businesses. The national strategy also focuses on disseminating economic and legal knowledge and business skills by organizing training for rural women and increasing girls’ access to secondary and vocational education.
- » The Presidential Quota was introduced in 1997 to support girls from remote rural areas in accessing higher education. Since 2007, it has been implemented as an affirmative measure to address the shortage of qualified specialists in the country’s remote regions. Over time, the scope of the quota has been expanded to include boys as well.
- » The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Prevention of Domestic Violence” was adopted in 2013, followed in the next year (2014) by a State Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (2014–2023).
- » In 2022, the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Equality and the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination” was adopted which defines and prohibits all forms of discrimination as well as sexual harassment. A Commissioner for Human Rights (the Ombudsperson) is entrusted in ensuring the law is implemented by keeping records and analysing statistical data on facts of discrimination provided by state bodies and self-government bodies of towns and villages, and ensuring coordination and cooperation with state bodies and self-government bodies of towns and villages, civil society institutions and international organizations. However, this law does not define the rights of the duty-bearers, nor does it protect women’s safety in reporting to the Ombudsperson. Moreover, it does not stipulate what specific recourse is available for women in rural areas.
- » In November 2023, the State Programme for the Development of Women’s Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Tajikistan through 2027 was officially

adopted. The programme aims to promote women’s entrepreneurship nationwide and is aligned with the priority areas of socioeconomic development outlined in the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2030. It seeks to create an enabling environment for the growth of women-led enterprises by fostering entrepreneurial initiatives, encouraging innovation, and empowering women to realize their full economic potential.

## 5.2. Gender mainstreaming in agriculture and related policies

Issues pertaining to the status of women are recognized as a key priority by the government, both as a matter of equal opportunities and also in recognition of the role they play in advancing food security and the agricultural sector in Tajikistan. In the agricultural sector, for example, the government has stipulated since the early 2010s the promotion of gender equity “at every step of the reform” because the “success of agriculture reform will depend to a large extent on how the potential of women is realized and their rights are exercised” (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2012, p. 94).

In addition, the concerns of women in rural areas and women working in agriculture are mainstreamed in a number of legislative frameworks, and sectoral reform programmes and strategies, including:

- » In 2016, a new version of the Law on Dehkan Farms was adopted – marking the fourth revision in the past 30 years. Under this law, dehkan farms may be established either by individuals or groups in the following forms:
  - (i) without legal entity status, comprising between one and 50 members; or
  - (ii) with legal entity status, regardless of the number of members.
- » The assets of a dehkan farm are jointly owned by its members and may include crops, infrastructure, equipment, produce and income. In the event of reorganization, all assets must be distributed among the members. The law also mandates that dehkan farms formalize employment through written contracts and pay wages that are not lower than the national minimum wage. The current Land Code, originally adopted in 1996 and subsequently amended, outlines the rights and responsibilities of land users, including the rational use and protection of land resources, the improvement of soil fertility, environmental protection, and the balanced development of

agricultural activities. Article 12 of the Land Code allows for the inheritance of land use rights by family members or other individuals, provided the land is formally re-registered. However, the original version of the Land Code lacked explicit provisions on women's inheritance rights, particularly in the context of marriage, divorce, and the restitution of land shares. In 2012, amendments were introduced to enhance gender equity in land access. Notably, Article 7 assigns responsibility to local executive authorities for ensuring equal access to land for both women and men. Additionally, the Land Code now stipulates: "In cases where the right to land use has been obtained (acquired) by an individual during marriage and with the right of alienation, such land shall be considered jointly owned property of the spouses, in accordance with the provisions of the civil and family legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan" (Amendment introduced by Law No. 891 of the Republic of Tajikistan, dated 1 August 2012).

- » The Development Programme of the Agri-Food System and Sustainable Agriculture for the period up to 2030 reaffirms that women make an essential contribution to agriculture and food production and suggests technological modernization of the sector to increase labour productivity, yields and employment opportunities in the processing sector. Women will also be engaged in discussions and consultations regarding climate change, regarding climate change, for example, providing information about the impact of climate change on women. In addition, the programme considers women's empowerment and ensuring their meaningful participation in the agricultural and irrigation sectors.
- » The National Development Strategy for the period up to 2030, and its Action Plan for the period of 2021–2025, both recognize rural women as a specific category and identify the promotion of gender equality as one of seven critical areas of social development. The cross-cutting issue of gender equality and climate change in the strategy is considered in Chapter 4: "Development of Human Capital". While it notes that Tajikistan has improved gender equality, rural women and children remain in a disadvantaged situation due to a weak implementation mechanism. The NDS also states that in recent years, the main problems for Tajikistan have been the high level of risk of natural disasters, including those related to climate change, from which, first and foremost, women and children suffer. The NDS-2030 commits to strengthening legal literacy among rural women, improving infrastructure, social welfare, municipal services (including water supply and sanitation) and transport to increase the connectiveness of rural areas, ensuring a sufficient and diversified supply of energy, improving access to financial services via digital technologies, promoting entrepreneurial skills among rural women, and fighting gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. The NDS also calls for improving land use of dehqan farms to create more jobs for the rural population, increasing the income of rural women, and creating a multi-structural rural economy to help private farms supply food to the cities. Specific measures called for in the action plan include, among others: (1) conducting training for rural women heads of dehqan (farm) enterprises on climate change and adaptation to it; (2) expanding rural women's access to land and developing their entrepreneurial activities; and (3) monitoring the implementation of the rights and guarantees of equal rights of women and men to the land, to identify the ratio of women and men between managers and shareholders of dehqan farms. The NDS-2030 also sets forth gender-relevant indicators for tracking progress until 2030.
- » The section on the environment in the Draft Medium-Term Development Program of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021–2025 includes specific targets and indicators related to the gender dimension of climate change, such as raising the level of women's awareness of climate change risks from a base of 15 percent to 35 percent in 2025. Gender-sensitive indicators are also included in sectors of the economy such as agriculture, water and energy, social protection, education and health (FAO and Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022).
- » The National Strategy of Adaptation to Climate Change in the Republic of Tajikistan for the period up to 2030 lists some gaps that need to be overcome in order for the risks and impacts of climate change to be gender neutral in Tajikistan. The main problems of climate change from a gender perspective are considered at the systemic, organizational and individual levels. Based on the fact that the majority of women, due to the high level of labour migration, are engaged in agriculture, which is most exposed to the risks of climate change, the following are proposed: improving women's access to land resources, simplifying women's access to loans, and teaching new skills in agricultural production, including taking climate change into account. The strategy proposes work to improve the educational level of women, especially those living in rural and remote areas, as well as in low-income families (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2019a).

### 5.3. National machinery

The Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (CWFA) is the central executive authority responsible for implementing state policy on the protection and promotion of the rights and interests of women and families. Its mandate includes creating equal conditions for the realization of women's rights, promoting gender equality, and expanding women's participation in addressing socioeconomic challenges, as well as in state and public administration. The CWFA also plays a key role in regulatory legal development, the provision of public services, the management of state property in its sector, and the oversight of laws and policies aimed at advancing women's rights.

To support the integration of gender perspectives across all levels of government, a Gender Network has been established to assist ministries and other state entities in mainstreaming gender in their work. The CWFA collects reports from all government agencies and compiles a comprehensive analysis of national progress in achieving gender equality. At the time of preparing this report (2023), the analysis was collectively reviewed at an annual roundtable, typically held in February or March, prior to its formal submission to the President's Office. A dedicated Legal Department has been established within the structure of the CWFA, with a mandate to conduct gender-based legal analysis of draft legislation before its submission to the government and parliament. The department's primary objective is to ensure that proposed laws are consistent with gender equality principles and do not inadvertently reinforce gender-based discrimination.

The CWFA, through its regional chapters, is responsible for conducting awareness-raising campaigns, building capacity within governmental agencies at the national and local levels, and coordinating joint monitoring and follow-up activities. At the district level, the CWFA is represented by Departments of Women and Family Affairs (DWFAs), supported by women's councils in each village. These women's councils, operating under the Mahalla Committee (neighbourhood committee), are often active in supporting women facing domestic violence and advocating for women's issues in community meetings. Nevertheless, interviews with women farmers conducted for this assessment revealed a generally low level of engagement with the DWFA among rural women.

The CWFA collaborates with the Gender Network composed of gender focal points within ministries. Despite having received training in gender mainstreaming, assessment interviews revealed that

understanding of gender issues remains limited, particularly outside traditionally female-dominated sectors such as health and education. Not all line ministries and state institutions have designated Gender Focal Points, and where these positions exist, they are frequently held by individuals lacking decision-making authority. The primary responsibility of most focal points is limited to personnel policies, without the requisite mandate or expertise to provide substantive policy recommendations for gender mainstreaming. As a result, many ministries demonstrate insufficient integration of gender perspectives in their sectoral policies and programmes.

Interviews conducted for the CGA further revealed that the role of gender focal points – predominantly women – is often confined to ensuring the numerical representation of women within ministry staff, rather than addressing broader gender dimensions. There is a notable lack of awareness regarding the gender dimensions within sectors traditionally perceived as male-dominated, including transportation, agriculture, industry and technology.

In addition to the need for strengthening gender-mainstreaming competencies across state institutions and the inclusion of gender considerations into technical sectors, there is insufficient evidence of adequate gender expertise within CWFA staff.<sup>14</sup>

The UN CEDAW Committee has consistently noted that human and financial resource constraints have hindered the CWFA from fully carrying out its mandate. Although there have been increases in the Committee's budget and staffing in recent years, it remains significantly understaffed and under-resourced, limiting its capacity to effectively implement gender equality policies and programmes.

### 5.4. Women's role in formal and informal decision-making structures

Women's participation in public life and decision-making is widely recognized as a fundamental indicator of women's empowerment and a critical component of achieving gender equality. It signifies progress towards breaking down systemic barriers that have historically marginalized women and acknowledges the essential role of women's perspectives in the formulation of inclusive and effective policies. Globally, increased female representation in governance is associated with

<sup>14</sup> Interview conducted for this assessment with Javohir Akobirova, Head of the International Relations and Gender Issues Department, Committee on Women and Family Affairs, Dushanbe, 22 November 2022.

**Table 9. Percentage of women in the total number of public officials, 2020**

Entities	Percentage of women in the total number of public officials
Audit Chamber of the Republic of Tajikistan	7.8
State Committees of the Republic of Tajikistan	12.3
Central Commission for Elections and Referenda of the Republic of Tajikistan	14.3
Human Rights Ombudsperson in the Republic of Tajikistan	16.0
Departments under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan	19.7
Administrative Offices of the courts of the Republic of Tajikistan	23.8
Ministries of the Republic of Tajikistan	29.6
Agencies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan	33.1
Central Office of the Majlisi Milli and Majlisi Namoyandagon of the Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan	44.0
Prosecution Agencies of the Republic of Tajikistan	48.3

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2020a. *Women and Men of the Republic of Tajikistan 2020*. Dushanbe, p. 134. [https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen\\_tajikistan\\_statistical\\_publication\\_eng.pdf](https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen_tajikistan_statistical_publication_eng.pdf)

improved social outcomes, enhanced accountability and the promotion of human rights.

In Tajikistan, women are represented at all levels of governance, including local government councils, regional administrations, and national institutions such as the Parliament (Majlisi Oli). Ongoing governmental and non-governmental initiatives aim to increase the share of women's representation through gender quotas and capacity-building programmes.

At the time of preparing this assessment, women held 27 percent of the seats in the Majlisi Namoyandagon (the lower chamber) and 25.8 percent of the Majlisi Milli (the upper chamber, where members are appointed; IPU, 2023). While challenges remain, the representation of women at all levels of governance in Tajikistan marks a positive step towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Following the most recent elections held in March 2025, the proportion of women among the people's deputies increased to 28.5 percent in the Majlisi Namoyandagon, and 32 percent in the Majlisi Milli.<sup>15</sup>

The proportion of women among all public officials, as of 1 January 2020, was 23.8 percent (Agency

on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a; see also Table 9). The number of women in management and specialist posts varies by ministry and agency, with women better represented in government offices that deal with the social sector, such as the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population.

Women's representation in local governance structures in Tajikistan – 26.7 percent of all civil servants and 21.5 percent of all managers – is slightly more notable. Out of them, three women have chaired districts, equivalent to head of local government at the district level (Committee on Women's and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2021; see also Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2014).

Women constitute approximately 14.9 percent of all deputies across 369 rural jamoats, which are the fundamental administrative units in rural areas. In addition, women represent an even larger proportion – 21.6 percent – of deputies in the 58 township jamoats, which primarily serve as administrative centres within districts. Women's higher representation at the jamoat level may be attributed to several factors. These leadership positions generally carry less power and prestige, and, when combined with the high rate of male outmigration, women often face less competition for these roles. Conversely, anecdotal evidence suggests that women are viewed as well-qualified

<sup>15</sup> The official website of the Lower Chamber of the Parliament of the Republic of Tajikistan is available at <https://www.parliament.tj/deputats>.

to address community issues and are perceived as being less susceptible to corruption and personal interests, making them preferred leaders at the local level. Nevertheless, despite these positive perceptions, relatively few women hold positions that allow them to directly influence the work of local councils – the institutions closest to ordinary citizens.

Women’s participation in associations and groups that serve as networks for farmers, or which deliver extension services and training, is also generally low. For example, women are generally not active in water users’ associations (WUAs), even in regions with high levels of male outmigration, and despite the significant role that women play on farms and in kitchen gardens (FAO, 2016). These associations are one of the most important social assets for rural communities because they regulate water use for irrigation. Introduced at the beginning of the 2000s with support from USAID, they allow farm managers to take charge of their own water management decisions. Most WUA members, however, consist of men representing farms and *jamoats*, especially given that traditionally, control over water for irrigation is considered a “male” sphere, with women responsible for household water management. By not including more women members, WUAs are not able to integrate an important contingency of local water users. Including women in WUAs and training them adequately is especially important now that more women have been thrust into farm management roles in Tajikistan as men migrate from farms.

Another key position in WUAs is the *mirob* – a local water technician responsible for controlling and monitoring irrigation systems. The role is almost always held by men, largely because it involves physically demanding tasks such as opening and closing canal gates. However, in many rural areas where men are frequently absent, women – who are primarily responsible for securing water for their gardens and household needs – have increasingly engaged with male *mirobs* and WUAs, often through informal interactions. While women may not hold formal positions within WUAs, they frequently play a crucial role in supporting these organizations, such as by helping to collect fees for irrigation services, thereby contributing significantly to the management and functioning of local water resources (ibid.).

The 2019 ADB study on “Women’s Time Use in Rural Tajikistan” showed that while the involvement of women in community organizations such as WUAs or farmers’ associations was minimal, nearly 80 percent of women participated in the most recent general elections (see Figure 2). Only 0.9 percent of women participated in WUAs, compared with 34 percent of

## Box 2. Leaving women out of training in water users’ associations

An evaluation of WUAs conducted by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) over a four-year period found that repeated agronomic training of farm managers significantly improved WUA financial performance, farmer participation and fee recovery, as well as improvements in water delivery services, cultivated area and crop diversity (Buisson and Balasubramanya, 2019). But there was an unexpected finding: managers who received training on how to take part in WUA activities passed on their knowledge to other male shareholders of their farms, but not to female shareholders. The evaluation also found that training programmes were seldom tailored to the timing, location and educational needs of women. This left women ill-equipped to step in and run the farms, secure water for irrigation, or even cultivate their home gardens (IWMI, 2018).

Based on these findings, the IWMI recommended targeting women farmers. With more knowledge and skills, women could then better contribute to WUA decisions and secure water for their farms and kitchen gardens. The IWMI also recommended redesigning training materials, using women trainers, organizing child care support and holding training in locations that are easily accessible for women. The recommendations were then incorporated into USAID’s Feed the Future Global Learning Agenda, and contributed to a retargeting of programmes in Tajikistan. Chemonics, the implementing agency, refocused the programme on building the capacities of female irrigators.

Sources: (i) Buisson, M. and Balasubramanya, S. 2019. The effect of irrigation service delivery and training in agronomy on crop choice in Tajikistan. *Land Use Policy*, 81: 175–184; (ii) IWMI. 2018. *Strengthening participatory irrigation management in Tajikistan*. Water Policy Brief, Issue 41. Colombo, Sri Lanka. [http://www.iwmi.org/Publications/Water\\_Policy\\_Briefs/PDF/wpb41.pdf](http://www.iwmi.org/Publications/Water_Policy_Briefs/PDF/wpb41.pdf)

men. Interviews conducted in detail revealed that older women, primarily in their 50s and who are financially stable and have comparatively higher levels of education, are more likely to participate in community organizations and local government structures (ADB, 2020b).

Women are more likely to be engaged in civil society organizations that represent their particular interests as women. Tajikistan has well-developed women’s non-governmental organizations and NGO networks that are led by committed individuals. Such

organizations engage in advocacy, conduct research and provide services to other women, for example through associations of businesswomen and women lawyers (FAO, 2016). In Khatlon region, for example, women, including those in rural areas, demonstrated a great ability to mobilize through civil society organizations and networks for a campaign to end violence against women and girls (Shozimov, Sharipova and Mirov, 2022).

In summary, despite enduring cultural and traditional challenges – such as entrenched patriarchal norms and limited economic opportunities – women in Tajikistan are progressively assuming leadership roles across various sectors, including politics, civil society, education and business. To sustain and build upon these advances, ongoing commitment from the government, civil society organizations and international partners is essential. Such collective efforts will help ensure that women's perspectives and contributions are fully integrated into the country's broader development agenda, promoting more inclusive and equitable progress.

### 5.5. Rural women's role in households and everyday decision-making

Within households, women's agency has grown significantly, as they take on multiple responsibilities and make important decisions both for themselves and for their children. Over the past decade, the outmigration of men has notably transformed women's roles within the household, including their involvement in farming practices and agricultural management.

The 2020 ADB study of women's time use in rural Tajikistan, based on the Khatlon region, shed significant

light on decision-making processes in rural households. When married rural women were surveyed about their participation in decision-making, 51.8 percent responded that they did not participate at all in decisions concerning visits to family or relatives, major household purchases or their own health care (ADB, 2020b). In one-third of households, adult married men were responsible for making decisions about how household income was allocated, decisions which they shared with parents and male siblings. As women age, they are more likely to become one of the primary decision-makers regarding household income (ibid.). Younger women (both married and unmarried) were only able to make these decisions when there were no adult men present in the family. As Table 10 shows, rural women were less likely than urban women to take part in decision-making on this range of subjects.

Family dynamics are an important predictor of women's decision-making. In traditional and multigenerational households, younger family members usually defer to the decisions of the head of household, and for a woman this would include her husband and his family. A young and newly-married woman traditionally has low social status in the family, but this position changes once she has children and especially if she becomes a mother-in-law to her son's spouse. Joint decision-making within households is also common, especially when multiple family members are living together (FAO, 2016). Women's participation in decision-making is also positively correlated with their age, the number of children they have, their education level and financial status (whether they are employed for cash earnings; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018).

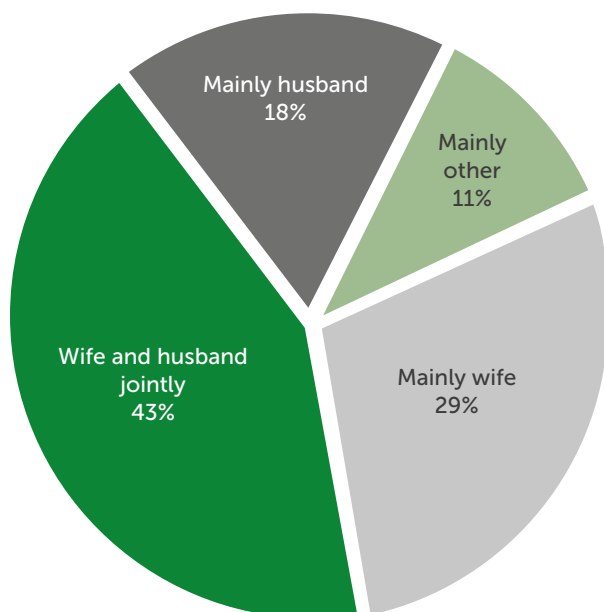
**Figure 2. Share of rural women and men participating in water users' associations, farmers' associations and voting in 2019 elections**



Source: Reproduced from ADB. 2020b. *Women's time use in rural Tajikistan*. Manila, p. 31. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/609486/womens-time-use-tajikistan.pdf>

**Figure 3. Who decides how married women's cash earnings are used, 2017**

Percent distribution of currently married women age 15–49 with cash earnings in the 12 months before the survey



**Note:** Cash earnings in the 12 months before the DHS took place.

**Source:** Reproduced from Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF. 2018. *Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017*. Dushanbe, Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and Rockville, Maryland, USA, ICF, p. 23.

Economic empowerment refers to agency or the ability to make decisions about, and use of, economic resources. The fact that a woman has wage employment does not necessarily mean that she also independently makes decisions about how her earnings will be used (FAO, 2016). Questions included in the DHS about women's control over their earnings revealed that around one-third of women "mainly" make decisions about how their earnings will be used, with a slightly greater likelihood for women in urban households of making such decisions. Women in rural households, more often than urban women, reported that it was mainly their husbands who made such decisions (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and ICF International, 2013).

It is notable that when comparing answers to questions about who decides how the wife's cash earnings are used with decisions about the husband's earnings, in both cases, about half of respondents reported that such decisions are made jointly by the husband and wife. Men are not much more likely to be the main decision-makers about their income than their wives, and in many rural households, other family members (such as mothers and uncles), make decisions about

the husband's earnings (see Figure 3). These findings reflect the dynamics of many rural families, in which working-age men migrate and send their earnings home in the form of remittances. In the typical multigenerational family, the head of the household, the migrant's father, followed by the mother-in-law, receive and make decisions about how the remittances are used (FAO, 2016).

In general, women have more agency over non-economic decisions, especially those concerning children, and decisions pertaining to their spheres of influence (for example, concerning kitchen gardens or medical care for family members). Men, in contrast, take leading roles in decisions about savings and spending, taking loans, large purchases, choice of crops and the sale of agricultural products or livestock. Even when they are working abroad, husbands are often consulted about key decisions concerning agricultural production (ibid.).

As a result of men leaving the area, women have taken on the role of household heads and decision-makers. Women may be granted land use rights to farm or rent out, and in some cases, men may transfer land tenure rights to their wives to avoid complications during their absence.

Female farmers make most of the production decisions often with the help of male family members, especially when it comes to buying quality seeds and fertilizers. However, there are hierarchies within female-headed households, and decisions made by older women are generally accepted by other household members (ADB, 2020c). Other studies suggest that in extended families, migrants' wives seldom receive remittance income directly, and therefore they are not involved in major decisions about how it will be spent. Typically, the wife receives a portion of the income to make small household purchases. In addition, many migrants' wives also work, and contribute their income to the family budget (FAO, 2016).

In interviews and focus group discussions conducted for this CGA in the villages in DRS, Khatlon and Sughd, when asked about how decisions were made in households, the division of labour was clear. Decisions about agricultural production (what to plant and when) were made by men, including from abroad, and communicated through other male members of the family or through mothers-in-law. The implementation of these decisions was shouldered by younger women when the men were absent. Remittances were sent to mothers-in-law, and spent by the wives on children's clothes, school supplies and markets. If the husbands were present, they

**Table 10. Women's participation in decision-making, by settlement type (percentage of women who usually make decisions by themselves or jointly with husband)**

	Woman's own health care	Making major household purchases	Visits to her family or relatives	All three decisions	None of the three decisions
Urban	54.2%	47.5%	49.1%	40.1%	39.5%
Rural	43.1%	34.5%	42.0%	31.1%	51.8%

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF. 2018. *Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017*. Dushanbe, Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and Rockville, Maryland, USA, ICF, p. 244.

were involved in selling products in the markets or dealing with intermediaries for the sale of their crops. Decisions to hire temporary workers (*mardikors*) for the farm were made by mothers-in-law. Younger married women were in charge of cooking for the day labourers and were also responsible for looking after the livestock. Decisions about sales, either directly or through intermediaries, were always made by the men in the family. Women, young or older, were not involved in setting prices and negotiating costs. In other words, they were not making economic decisions. Even though women in Sughd appeared to be wealthier and more empowered than women in Khatlon, there was not much regional variation when it came to decision-making.

These observations should be viewed with some caution as responses may be influenced by how a question is phrased. In addition, there are likely to be variations between different localities within the country and even between families within the same villages. Still, the results suggest that greater efforts are needed to support women to take a more active role in decision-making in general and concerning agricultural production.

## 5.6. Burden of unpaid care work: time use

Rural women in Tajikistan face significant constraints on the time they can dedicate to formal employment and participation in public associations due to their limited free time. This scarcity of free time stems from their multiple responsibilities, including farming and caring for livestock, compounded by the lack of labour-saving farm and household appliances, such as milking machines and automated washing machines (FAO, 2016).

The role of women in the household includes a formidable list of tasks:

- » Responsibility for domestic work and care for children, and older and sick family and household members.

- » Securing food for the family – growing vegetables and fruit on the household plot.
- » Taking care of domestic animals (cows, goats, poultry) including feeding, milking, cleaning them, and selling them.
- » Securing water for household drinking and for subsistence farm irrigation (fetching water, storing water).
- » Preparing food for winter (food processing, drying, canning, pickling, storing).
- » Collecting cotton stems as fuelwood for cooking and heating.<sup>16</sup>

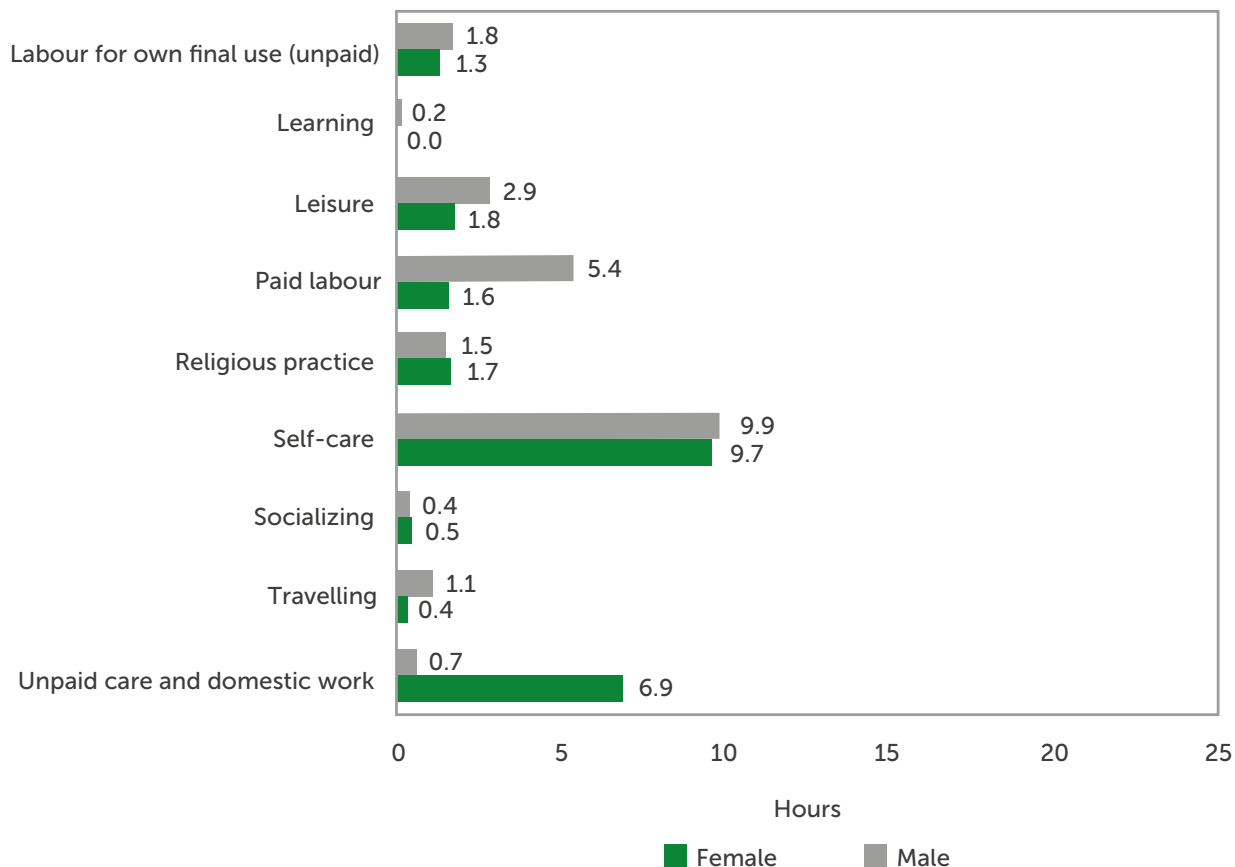
The gender-based division of labour is significant, with women mainly responsible for unpaid care and domestic tasks, for an average of 7 hours and 40 minutes per day, while men only spend 40 minutes per day on these tasks. On the other hand, men perform more paid work, averaging 5 hours and 30 minutes per day, compared with women who only work 1 hour and 40 minutes per day (see Figure 4; ADB, 2020b).

In a survey conducted by FAO among 1 800 households, 30 percent of respondents cited child care as the primary reason for their lack of participation in the job market. A similar proportion indicated that domestic responsibilities, such as food preparation and cleaning, were the main factors. Additionally, 20 percent reported that women lacked the necessary education to be considered "viable in the job market" (FAO, 2022b, p. 50).

According to the ADB (2020b) study, women spend over 70 percent of their total work time on unpaid care and domestic tasks, while men dedicate a similar share to paid work (see Figure 5). When secondary activities are included, the gap widens further, with women

<sup>16</sup> Observations from the fieldwork conducted for this CGA (see also FAO, 2022a).

**Figure 4. Time use, by activity and sex, 2019 (in hours)**



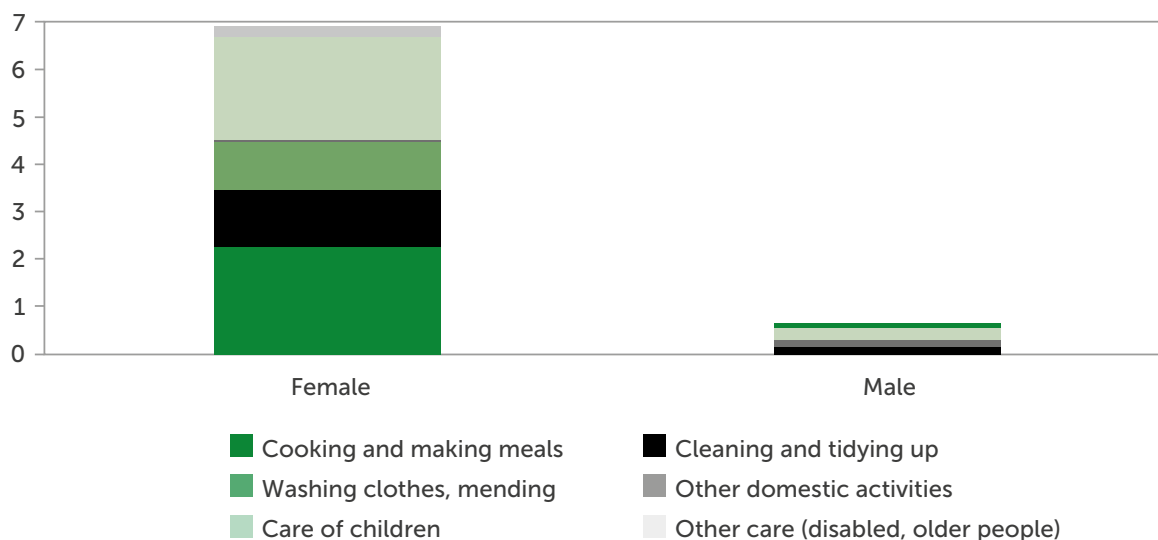
**Note:** "Leisure" incorporates watching television and resting; "self-care" includes sleeping, eating, personal hygiene and medical care.

**Source:** Reproduced from ADB. 2020b. *Women's time use in rural Tajikistan*. Manila, p. 33. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/609486/womens-time-use-tajikistan.pdf>

performing an additional 2 hours of simultaneous domestic and care work. Overall, women carry out about 10 times more direct and indirect care work than men, totalling nearly 7 hours daily (ADB, 2020b).

In most households, clothes are washed by hand, and women lack access to washing machines that could reduce washing time by 30 percent. Additionally, using traditional fuels such as wood or animal dung for

**Figure 5. Unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, 2019 (in hours)**



**Source:** Reproduced from ADB. 2020b. *Women's time use in rural Tajikistan*. Manila, p. 42. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/609486/womens-time-use-tajikistan.pdf>

cooking increases the time women spend cooking. Women who cook using traditional fuels spend 2.5 hours to 3 hours per day on this task, whereas those who use gas spend 1.5 hours and those who use electricity spend 2 hours (ADB, 2020b).

Young women work the most out of all age groups and genders, dedicating approximately 11 hours per day to both paid and unpaid work. This phase of life coincides with the presence of small children and a relatively low level of power in the household. As a result, the amount of time available for leisure is significantly reduced for young women, with only half as much free time as young men. Women's time poverty has implications for their ability to be formally employed in full-time work, to start and run their own businesses, to pursue education or training opportunities, to enjoy rest and free time, and to their overall health. For this reason, interventions targeting young women in particular should include active measures to reduce their time burden, such as providing free child care for women attending training courses, and access to new farm technologies and domestic labour-saving devices.

However, as women age, the time available for leisure and socializing gradually increases. Women aged 60 years and older have the most amount of free time compared with other age and gender groups, even surpassing older men. Nevertheless, they still have a significant amount of household responsibilities, spending around 5 hours per day on such tasks. In the absence of kindergartens, they are the ones who look after grandchildren while younger women work in the field. Additionally, older women not only delegate tasks to other household members but also play an important role in maintaining good family relationships (ADB, 2020b).

## 5.7. Social norms and stereotypes

Social norms, conservative values and stereotypes may be the most significant factors that influence gender roles in rural households and societies in Tajikistan. These not only restrict women's agency and free time, but also their participation in public life in rural areas and agricultural production and decision-making.<sup>17</sup> Gender-based stereotypes and social practices that assign all domestic and care work to women are systematic barriers that restrict women's access to formal employment, education and decision-making, depriving them of opportunities to participate equally and actively in society and achieve work-life balance.

Qualitative research, based on interviews and focus group discussions conducted to update this CGA, revealed the persistence of a range of gender-based stereotypes and viewpoints, although their intensity differed between regions and across generations. For example, in rural areas, traditional attitudes towards women have significantly hindered their growth and participation in public life. These societal norms include practices such as requiring younger women to cover their heads with a *Satr*, a sense of shame when speaking to men who are not part of the extended family (including representatives of administrative bodies collecting payments for utilities), and the general control over girls' lives by their brothers, fathers, husbands and in-laws. However, it is important to note that these observations cannot be generalized to all families, as variations in practices and attitudes exist even within the same community.

Based on broader observations during focus group discussions and field data collection, three types of women were identified who might be in a position to find ways to escape these traditional mindsets and assert greater autonomy in their lives: (i) divorced women, who, out of necessity, have become accustomed to making economic decisions for themselves, often managing their own finances and household responsibilities; (ii) women from very poor households, where men are unable to find stable work, leaving women to shoulder the dual burden of earning a living while simultaneously caring for children and maintaining the household; and (iii) women whose parents have been exposed to alternative lifestyles, either through migration or by participating in training programmes provided by international organizations, which have broadened their understanding and acceptance of different ways of living and working. These women, through varying circumstances, have developed a level of independence and resilience that enables them to challenge traditional gender roles and participate more actively in public and economic life.

Fieldwork conducted by the research team at the NGO Fidokor in 2022 in six districts of three regions within the framework of the United Nations Spotlight Initiative, to identify and map harmful social norms and practices that affect the prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Tajikistan, shed light on the power of mothers-in-law in rural areas and the extent to which the control over younger women is tied to the reputation of the household. Social and economic mobility is restricted in rural areas, where the mother-in-law views the daughter-in-law (*kelin*) as a "housewife" and expects her to follow the same pattern of relationships within the household that she experienced herself. The daughter-in-law is responsible

<sup>17</sup> Observations from the fieldwork conducted for this CGA (see also ADB, 2020b).

for household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, milking cows, and serving her husband's parents, while the mother-in-law controls her.

Women's education before marriage is often encouraged as a means to enhance their social status and improve their prospects within the community. However, while education is valued, studying abroad is frequently viewed with suspicion, as it is seen as a potential threat to the family's reputation and traditional values. In many rural villages, early engagement of girls – typically in the 8th or 11th grade – is considered a social norm (Shozimov, Sharipova and Mirov, 2022). This practice is driven by the belief that it will protect the girls from improper behaviour, as early engagement is seen as a way to maintain control over their actions and

safeguard family honour. As a result, girls' educational and social opportunities are often curtailed to ensure conformity with these deeply ingrained cultural expectations.

Changing the social norms that keep rural women in vulnerable and disempowered positions is a crucial step to combat time constraints and promote women's empowerment, but this can be a slow and complex process. Policies can play a role in changing these prevailing norms by offering incentives or providing the information needed to challenge them. To address this, action is needed in three areas: investing in social care and social assistance, changing social norms, and applying the legal framework for gender equality.

# 6. Gender issues in agriculture and rural livelihoods

## 6.1. The “feminization” of agricultural labour

Agriculture remains one of the main sectors contributing to the national economy of Tajikistan, with a 22 percent share in the structure of GDP (Sevimli and Jungbluth, 2022).

While Tajikistan has made progress in increasing agricultural productivity and exports, there are still structural, institutional and political challenges that prevent transition to sustainable agrifood systems. The agrifood industry has the potential to drive economic growth in the country, but it faces significant obstacles including depleted natural resources, limited arable land, reliance on imported inputs, insufficient government spending, incomplete reforms, small-scale agricultural production, exclusion from agrifood value chains, weak processing and exporting capacities, and difficulties in responding to shocks such as food price surges, climate risks and pest infestations (World Bank, 2021e). Despite these challenges, Tajikistan possesses significant potential due to its abundant labour force, access to water resources and favourable climatic conditions (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2021a).

The contribution of women to the agricultural sector cannot be overlooked, given the growing “feminization” of agricultural labour over the past few years as a result of the high levels of migration of men. The centrality of women’s role is especially true in the context of family farming.

## 6.2. Land distribution and women’s access to the use of land

Tajikistan is a country with a farm structure dominated by a large number of small (dehkan) farms and a small number of large, corporate farms. Rural populations are highly dependent on land for agricultural purposes, both for crops and raising livestock. Rural households typically have small plots, or kitchen gardens, close to the house, and may also have access to other types of land plots: independently-held farmland (dehkan farms) or presidential land (which is located further from the household and may not be irrigated; FAO, 2016). Dehkan farms are privately-owned commercial farms that function as legal enterprises and can be based on the work of an individual (a sole entrepreneur), a family, or a group of persons (a collective).<sup>18</sup>

The current farm structure is the outcome of land reforms implemented from the beginning of the transition from a planned economy to a market economy that began after 1990. This led to the restructuring and dismantling of large state-owned collective farms, and the distribution of land among farmers. Dehkan farms grew in number when collective farms (*kolkhozes*) and state farms (*sovkhozes*) were reorganized, and their land and logistical resources distributed among employees (FAO, 2020b).

The concept of access to land in Tajikistan has a specific legal significance. There is no private ownership of land, but people are entitled to land use on a land-management basis. Land “ownership” refers to the rights to land use vested in individuals whose names appear on land certificates and licences.

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<sup>18</sup> As stated in the Law “On Dehkan Farms” (2009).

**Table 11. Trends in dehkan farm management, by sex, 2017–2022**

Year	Total number of dehkan farms	Proportion of dehkan farms headed by men (%)	Proportion of dehkan farms headed by women (%)
2017	164 631	80.8	19.2
2018	172 668	81.3	18.7
2019	171 975	77.9	22.1
2020	179 005	78.3	21.7
2021	167 009	76.5	23.5
2022	172 107	77.6	22.4

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2023b. *Gender indicators in dehkan farms*. Dushanbe, pp. 54–60.

The Land Code of Tajikistan was last amended in 2012, including a clause on ensuring equal access of women and men to land plots. Yet, women were particularly disadvantaged by processes which, while not intended to exclude women, nevertheless had a discriminatory impact (FAO, 2016). For instance, one of the criteria for receiving land was the availability of male productive labour in the household, and “lack of manpower” was a reason for denying land applications. This practice had an exclusionary effect on female-headed households, as well as households with older members, without adult males or with people with disabilities, and, arguably, pushed such households further into poverty (Ahmed *et al.*, 2007). Women were also disadvantaged by gender-blind practices such as giving individual shares in former collective farms only to full-time members of the collective (excluding women on maternity leave and non-member workers) and to those with experience in farming and farm management which fewer women were able to meet (EAT and Fintrac Inc., 2014).

Because of women’s limited awareness about their economic rights and because of the widespread belief that women should not own or inherit land, women have not benefited as much as their male counterparts from land reform. Yet, trends have changed with more women becoming de facto or de jure heads of farms, especially with the migration of men.

The number of dehkan farms has increased annually, from a total of 30 842 in 2008 to 171 975 in 2019, and 172 107 in 2022 (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022b; see Table 11). The number of dehkan farms headed by women has also steadily grown. Over the past decade, the share of farms registered in the name of a woman has almost doubled, from 13 percent in 2005 to 22.4 percent in 2022 of the total number of dehkan farms (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022b). Yet, while the majority of agricultural workers are women,

the number of dehkan farms headed by women remains much lower than that of men.

The growth in women-led dehkan farms is attributed to state and donor efforts to increase women’s involvement in dehkan farming and to register individuals who once worked on collective farms as individual farmers.<sup>19</sup> But it is also significantly related to the outmigration of men. Women’s de facto role in farm management, because of the absence of men due to labour migration, is not captured in official statistics. It is a common practice for men to remain the legal head of dehkan farms even though they are absent from the country, and it is mainly the female family members who are involved in day-to-day farm management (FAO, 2016). This represents a reversal of the previous situation, where women were only nominally recognized, and farmland was effectively managed by male relatives such as husbands, sons or other family members.

Land legislation across the region is gender neutral, granting women the same legal rights as men. However, in practice, the reality is different. Although significant gender-sensitive reforms have been made to the Land Code to improve women’s access to land use rights, tradition and custom mean that land use certificates are most often registered in the name of the male head of the household. Due to prevailing gender norms, farmland is predominantly controlled by the oldest male family member, regardless of formal registration. Even when a single woman legally obtains land use rights, these often shift to the family’s collective control upon marriage. Property laws stipulate joint access for married couples, which effectively limits women’s independent control

<sup>19</sup> The US-led Feed the Future programme, for example, has a component on legal aid centres that assist women to assert land use rights and to legalize family farms. More information is available at <http://www.feedthefuture.gov/country/tajikistan>.

over land they had prior to marriage. Furthermore, unregistered married women – common in rural areas where men may take multiple wives through Islamic *nikah* ceremonies – lack legal recourse to claim their husband’s land use rights if the husband dies or permanently relocates abroad (Caspian Policy Center, 2021).

The fact that social taxes for dehkan farms are calculated as a fixed monthly fee for each shareholder on the certificate is a further disincentive to register wives or daughters-in-law as shareholders (FAO, 2016). While taxes can be reasons for omitting women from land certificates, focus group discussions conducted for this CGA also pointed to a reverse trend: in the hope that tax collectors would not pursue women to pay taxes, some families would actually put the name of women on certificates.

Women often lack information about their rights to land as members of collective farms or about the process of land registration. Other women do not have the means, either financial or time resources, to undertake the registration process. Furthermore, although women are legally permitted to enjoy land use rights, “in practice, they may be restricted in accessing and managing land, water, and other agricultural services” (ADB, 2020c, p. 21).

### 6.3. Challenges to women’s agricultural productivity

Dehkan farms are often not economically viable because of their small size and a range of other issues which are discussed below. Yet, because they represent a key resource in achieving food security and decent livelihoods, and reducing rural poverty, they are an important asset in need of more sustainable utilization, intensification of production, better organization, adequate public services and improved integration into agrifood value chains. This is especially important for women-run dehkan farms.

#### 6.3.1. Size and productivity: dehkan farms are too small to be profitable

Dehkan farms are small on average. About 70 percent of dehkan farms established in the country today have no more than 2 hectares of land (according to the State Committee for Land Management and Geodesy and the National Association of Dehkan Farms [NADF], cited in FAO, 2020b, p. 75). Although public information is not available, dehkan farms owned by women tend to be smaller than men-owned farms. As will be discussed in the next chapter, small land size means a lack of access to equipment and resources, which remains a predicament for women-owned farms and an obstacle to their productivity.

In terms of the characteristics of land that is registered to women, women’s land plots are generally located further away from their homes. Women also report that during processes to re-register their land rights (after divorce or the death of a spouse), they received “the worst land plots”, at a distance from irrigation facilities or with poor quality soil (Kobzar, 2007, p. 20). This is most likely because women farmers generally have smaller harvests and lower yields than men farmers, and as such, are not in priority positions to receive good quality land.

The productivity of female-headed farms measured by yields and per hectare sales is generally lower than the productivity of male-headed farms (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020c). This not because of an intrinsic male-female gap in abilities, experience or intensity of involvement, but because of factors such as seed quality, availability of water and fertilizers, and access to equipment, credit and services, as well as the size of the farms. Research carried out by ADB in 2020 revealed that female-led farms tend to produce mostly fruit trees, early vegetables and potatoes, requiring minimal maintenance, while they tend to be less productive in crops such as cucurbits, melons and gourds, leguminous crops and grains which have high value (ADB, 2020b). However, official data from the Agency on Statistics released in 2022 shows that the dynamics of crop production on female-headed dehkan farms have changed since 2020 and that women have succeeded in growing crops that were traditionally dominated by men, such as grain, grapes, cotton, wheat, vegetables, potatoes, melons and gourds, and corn (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023b).

#### 6.3.2. Lack of direct access to markets

The sale of products is another challenge for women farmers for several reasons: (a) farmers do not always have up-to-date information regarding the prices on the market for their products; (b) they have limited access to markets; and (c) farmers from one locality often produce different products of different volumes, which becomes a barrier for wholesale buyers and supermarkets. Women farmers interviewed for this CGA mentioned that men had better access to transportation, credit and knowledge that market transactions require. Hence, there was often a clear division of labour in households where men were responsible for dealing with the markets while women work in the fields. Given the difficulties that smallholders face in initially obtaining a place at the market, dehkan farms also rely on the services of intermediaries who purchase at a low price and resell at wholesale markets with significant profit. The rare

times that women dehkan farmers are able to sell their products to end users, they are able to do so by pooling with other smallholders to be able to arrange and afford transportation to markets.<sup>20</sup> At the end of the day, women farmers find it too costly, both in terms of time and money, to get involved in sales.

### 6.3.3. Lack of female specialists and targeted extension services

Rural women often lack the relevant skills for managing their farms. They are in need of rural advisory services (RAS) and agronomists who can provide advice for the entire production cycle, from buying seeds and preparing the soil for sowing, to storing the collected harvest. The absence of consultation services on taxation issues, production technologies, agribusiness, exports, sales, marketing and other topics is a challenge faced by all types of dehkan farm, not just those headed by women. But the lack of knowledge, compounded by the paucity of RAS specifically targeting women, leaves them at a disadvantage.

Women farmers need skills in financial planning and making decisions based on the current market prices. They often rely on the prices of products from the previous year when deciding on the crop to sow, which is unrealistic in current market fluctuations. They also base their choices on what the neighbouring dehkan farms plant, which then prevents them from taking advantage of diversification for higher value.<sup>21</sup>

Most often, consultations are disseminated through projects carried out by international organizations. Usually these projects target women who farm at the household level and on commercial dehkan farms. Through jamoat agricultural extension teams and farmer learning groups, women gain knowledge about new farming practices (for example, selection of high-quality seeds, pest and weed management, improved practices to reduce crop loss and for storage and food preservation; FAO, 2016). While such initiatives bring much needed support, a reliance on donor-funded and skilled experts is not always sufficient. These activities are not always coordinated, which results in scattered and duplicative efforts (Kazbekov and Qureshi, 2011). In addition, many of the projects supported by international organizations to increase the capacity of farmers are localized, focusing on specific geographical areas, and are of a short-term nature. At the system level, access to practical information is limited for dehkan farms.

Knowledge is also provided through agronomists attached to local district governments (hukumats and jamoats), but their numbers are not enough. State-supported advisory services for farmers receive insufficient funding and do not have enough personnel.

Women report that they would like to call upon local agronomists when they need assistance or advice about their household plots, but in reality they do so through informal exchange of knowledge among farmers, by turning to neighbours or other family members, or by relying on their previous experiences (FAO, 2016). If their crops fail one year, they will try something else the next year.<sup>22</sup> It is clear, therefore, that “within villages, female-headed households do not seem to benefit from the knowledge-sharing networks that male farm heads enjoy” (World Bank, 2014a, p. ix). Moreover, when RAS systems function, advice is presented to the household without distinguishing between the different needs and constraints of women and men farmers.

Organizations like the Sarob Cooperative, which have been created as incubators of extension services for rural areas, exert specific efforts to engage women in regional training centres and in annual roundtables to exchange experience. Sarob keeps a database of the number of women who have accessed training but does not systematically collect statistics on their clients in a disaggregated manner. While its senior staff have all received training on gender issues, they do not introduce gender-targeted information and advice in their training, in the belief that agricultural practices are mostly gender neutral.<sup>23</sup> There is a need for gender-specific knowledge for extension services.

Women’s ability to access extension services is further constrained not only by factors such as more limited mobility and fewer networks, but also by a lower level of education than men and their lack of specialization pertaining to agriculture. With the growth in dehkan farming, agriculture graduates and extension specialists are in high demand. In contrast to the large number of women who are engaged in agricultural work, however, only a very small number enter professional and higher educational institutions to study agriculture. In the 2019/20 academic year, only 0.8 percent women in higher vocational education institutions were studying agriculture (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of

<sup>20</sup> Observations from the fieldwork conducted for this CGA (see also FAO, 2020b).

<sup>21</sup> Observations from the fieldwork conducted for this CGA.

<sup>22</sup> Discussions and interviews conducted for this CGA (see also EAT and Fintrac Inc., 2014, p. 19).

<sup>23</sup> Interview for this CGA with Muhamadi Muminov, Chairperson of Management Board/Director, Sarob Cooperative, Dushanbe, 19 November 2022.

Tajikistan, 2020a). Of the 6 868 students registered at the Tajik Agrarian University (TAU) in 2022/23, only 2.7 percent (189) were female students. Of them, 43 were from Dushanbe, 30 from GBAO, 24 from Sughd, 36 from Khatlon, and 56 from DRS. Fifty-three girls were studying in the faculty of agronomy, 48 girls in gardening and 33 in the veterinarian faculty. Thirty-two girls were studying through presidential quotas for rural girls.<sup>24</sup> The overall low presence of women in academic institutions on agriculture is attributed to the fact that most agricultural specialities are perceived as “male work”, and there has been little support for women to enter such fields.

Even though certification is given after they work for 3 years in the field, most students choose to stay in towns where there are more employment opportunities, instead of rural areas where posts are very rare. The lack of interest of graduates is connected with the unprofitability and seasonality of the sector and, accordingly, with the instability of income. Upon graduation, students either do not go on to work in their area of specialization or they migrate and use their knowledge abroad. There is a need to organize surveys among TAU alumni in order to identify gaps and barriers to employment in rural areas, including for women graduates.

#### 6.4. Rural finance and access to credit

One of the constraints hampering the development of dehkan farms is limited access to investment and financial services. Women and men face common barriers to accessing credit, such as high interest rates (FAO, 2016), but on top of this, women encounter gender-based barriers such as lack of access to specific knowledge and assets.

There are no legal restrictions on women’s ability to apply for loans, and loan requirements are gender neutral. But it is precisely this neutrality that is problematic because loan procedures do not take into consideration a number of factors affecting women specifically. For example, female-headed households, which includes women “left behind” by migrant husbands, also have fewer resources that could be used to start an agriculture business venture and do not have the necessary knowledge for financial planning and management (ibid.).

Women’s lack of collateral precludes them from applying for large loans, and women can generally only borrow small amounts using jewellery or some household property as collateral. Most of the land

certificates are registered under the names of men, which results in a shortage of collateral for women, preventing them from being eligible for larger loans (Skakova and Livny, 2020). In published studies, as well as opinions expressed through interviews conducted for this CGA, women voice concern over high interest rates and their ability to meet repayment requirements, and this deters them from applying for loans. Women who have agricultural businesses express particular reluctance to acquire debt because they are not confident about predicting crop yields. Because women have generally lower levels of education and specifically have limited financial knowledge and experience of making decisions about finances (for example, about household budgeting and savings), they are more likely to lack confidence to take loans or even to be unnecessarily fearful of taking on debt or interacting with financial institutions (ADB, 2016).

Dehkan farm women have consistently had the highest female tax contributions compared with individual entrepreneurs and legal entities from 2015 to 2021, and this number continues to increase. However, banks often fail to understand the financial and non-financial needs of rural women engaged in agriculture and hesitate to facilitate access to their services. On the one hand, the total number of microloan recipients has increased annually in Tajikistan since 2008, and, according to data from the National Bank of Tajikistan, women have consistently represented around a third of borrowers (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020b). These numbers, however, do not take into consideration the specific practices of rural populations. In general, banks do not easily take risks by lending to farmers in a sector known for low profitability. Credit interest rates for agricultural activities are higher than the average interest rates in the country. In the absence of official evidence, anecdotal information given by those interviewed for this CGA was that banks willing to lend to rural dehkan farmers would charge as much as 20 percent interest rates.

Due to their more limited mobility and restrictions on their time, rural women also face obstacles simply accessing financial institutions. While financial operations can be done increasingly online using modern technologies, rural women lack digital financial literacy and still go to financial institutions in the nearest towns to pay fees, withdraw money, receive their pensions and retrieve remittances. In interviews conducted for this CGA, in addition to problems of transportation, some women also mentioned social norms that prevented them from dealing with finances or engaging with formal institutions, such as banks. The 2017 DHS notes that only 0.5 percent of rural women

<sup>24</sup> Interview for this CGA with Iskandar Samandarzoda, Vice rector of International Relations Department, Dushanbe, 15 December 2022.

**Table 12. Women's and men's average wages in agriculture, 2008–2019**

Average monthly nominal wage (in somoni)									
2008		2009		2011		2013		2019	
Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
74.40	113.79	79.44	121.64	142.68	212.80	211.34	367.59	504.6	624.5

**Sources:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2020a. *Women and men of the Republic of Tajikistan*. Dushanbe, p. 116 [data for 2008, 2011], p. 118 [data for 2009, 2013], p. 130 [data for 2019]. [https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen\\_tajikistan\\_statistical\\_publication\\_eng.pdf](https://www.stat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/womenmen_tajikistan_statistical_publication_eng.pdf)

use a bank account compared with 3.0 percent of urban women (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Even when they do have access to banks, rural women are often unable to meet the formal loan requirements, and cope with the paperwork required to pursue a loan application. It is evident that women would benefit from access to dedicated, gender-sensitive training programmes developed by financial and business institutions and that bureaucratic procedures should be made more gender-responsive.

Alternatives to loans from financial institutions for female-headed households are sometimes provided through international organizations. For example, in the past, USAID has supported five microfinance organizations to provide subsidized interest rates.<sup>25</sup> There are several grant programmes for female entrepreneurs in Tajikistan, including a Presidential Grant for Women Entrepreneurs awarded by the Committee on Women and Family Affairs and paid from the state budget. However, these are not specifically targeting rural women (FAO, 2022b).

To resolve financial issues, women come together to accumulate funds for urgent expenses through an informal financial instrument without any interest to be paid back. Known as “*kassabozi*”, the system is formed when 10 to 15 women in the same neighbourhood or groups of relatives, wage workers or *markdors*, come together. The group appoints a cashier to keep the cash collected during each selected period, usually monthly. During each round, the collected cash is given to a member with priority needs, such as for a wedding or the purchase of furniture. The monthly amount collected per member may vary “depending on the level of earnings (e.g. teachers may contribute up to TJS 50

per member per month), and the agreement among the group” (ADB, 2020c, p. 22).

## 6.5. Gender inequalities in agricultural labour

For the rural population, agricultural work is a fundamental aspect of life for both men and women. Some members of rural households engage in formal employment in agriculture, but almost all adults undertake some form of work on household plots and tend livestock even though they may have other, non-agricultural employment or even be considered unemployed.<sup>26</sup> Women especially tend to be concentrated in manual labour as informal, seasonal or unpaid family workers.

Between 2013 and 2019, the number of workers in the agricultural sector increased from 4.96 million to 5.49 million people. Of these, women represented 2.54 million people and men 2.94 million people. In 2019, 46 percent of women were in paid employment in work related to agriculture (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). Agricultural employment is far more common among women in Khatlon (51 percent) and Sughd (30 percent) than among women in other regions (13 percent or less; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018).

Despite women's prominent role in the sector, they face discrimination in terms of remuneration. Women's salaries in agriculture have increased, but the gap between women's and men's wages has also widened (see Table 12). In recent years however, this situation seems to have improved according to official statistics.

<sup>25</sup> Interview for this CGA conducted with Lilia Tverdun, Chief of Party/ Director of ACAT and Khosiyat Komilova, Social Inclusion, Advocacy and Communication Senior Manager, USAID/Winrock, 2 December 2022.

<sup>26</sup> According to the International Labour Organization's methodology, “agricultural employment includes employment on farms that deliver products for sale. If the farm produces mainly for self-consumption, then persons are considered as being in own-production work and not in employment. Persons in own-production work are considered part of the labour force if they are available and actively looking for work, otherwise they are considered outside the labour force” (FAO, 2020b, p. 11).

In 2013, women's wages only equalled 57.5 percent of men's wages, but in 2019, they represented 80 percent (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2014). The wage gap can be partly attributed to the fact that men more often perform specialized labour, and women are more likely to be engaged in seasonal and part-time work.

These numbers, however, fail to take into account the unpaid work that women do on household plots and the large number of women who undertake agricultural work without receiving any wages at all. According to the 2017 DHS, 26.6 percent of women who had worked in agriculture in the previous 12 months were not paid, while 18.7 percent were paid in cash and in-kind, 7.5 percent were paid exclusively in-kind, and 47.3 percent were paid in cash only (compared with 88.7 percent of women who were engaged in non-agricultural work; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018).

The important role of women in agriculture and rural life more broadly, including their contributions in terms of labour, knowledge and leadership, remains largely invisible in official statistics. This is primarily because much of their work is classified as "reproductive" labour or unpaid care work,<sup>27</sup> which is not monetized within the agricultural economy. Furthermore, deeply entrenched gender norms and patriarchal values continue to assign women the roles of household caretaker and non-wage worker. As a result, women's substantial labour on rural farms, in household gardens, with livestock, and within the domestic sphere, is consistently undervalued and often goes unrecognized.

Despite the significant contribution women make to the agricultural sector and family well-being, their labour's potential remains largely untapped. The disparity is evident in the fact that women's share of total and agricultural employment is considerably lower than their representation in the rural population. Although women are highly active in the economy and contribute immensely to household livelihoods and the productivity of dehqan (smallholder) farms, their employment and economic participation are neither

properly acknowledged nor adequately valued. This lack of recognition not only undermines their economic contributions but also hinders the full development of rural economies, as the potential of women's labour remains largely uncaptured.

## 6.6. Informality of employment in agriculture and temporary work

Another significant manifestation of labour market discrimination is the widespread informality of women's work in agriculture. Many women are engaged in short-term, seasonal or temporary positions that often do not offer legal protection or benefits typically associated with formal employment. These informal roles fail to provide women with basic social benefits, such as entitlement to sickness or parental leave, adequate rest time, health insurance, or paid vacation leave. As a result, women in agriculture face precarious working conditions that undermine their well-being and economic security. The lack of access to these essential benefits not only exposes women to financial instability in times of illness or family emergencies but also reinforces their economic vulnerability. This systemic inequality in labour conditions further perpetuates the cycle of gender-based economic marginalization in the rural agricultural sector.

State statistics do not provide accurate data on the level of informal employment in Tajikistan, but according to some estimates, approximately 1 million women in rural areas could be classified as informally employed (FAO, 2020b). The number of women working as day labourers (*mardikors*) on agricultural land is not officially known but the numbers are increasing with the need to earn extra income for the household. The word "*mardikor*" in Tajik means "man for (ready to) work". Interestingly, while women are now flooding the sector of temporary day labourers, the appellation *mardikor* is still used instead of "*zanikor*" (which would mean "woman for [ready to] work").

To be hired as *mardikors*, women organize themselves in informal groups, or brigades. While they could also be working as cleaners in rural buildings, they are mostly employed in seasonal agricultural jobs (see Figure 6). Women's tasks are largely restricted to field labour, such as weeding, sowing, transplanting and harvesting (EAT and Fintrac Inc., 2014). Notably, a large proportion of women working as *mardikors* do not have formal contracts, and while this type of labour allows flexibility, women may receive very low pay or only in-kind payments, which can be cotton stalks or mulberry branches that can be used as household fuel.

<sup>27</sup> "Unpaid care work" is a term that is assigned to the work at (usually) household level, which includes provision of care to family members, from child rearing to looking after the sick and the elderly. This is closely linked with other types of domestic work, such as cleaning and cooking, and in rural households, involves water and fuel fetching, working on the households' plot, etc. In most societies this work is usually performed by women and is seen as extension of their 'natural' role. This term calls attention to how women in particular are assigned to the domestic sphere where their work is uncompensated and unrecognized" (FAO, 2019b, p. 4).

### Box 3. Profile of *mardikor* workers

A 2020 study by the Asian Development Bank of women's role in irrigated agriculture in the lower Vakhsh River Basin described the profile of a temporary day worker. *Mardikor* workers are typically below the age of 50 years, with the youngest being 13 to 15 years old. They do not have written contracts or registration as farm workers, and oral agreements are made on a weekly or daily basis. Female workers are involved in seasonal agricultural work for around 9 to 10 months, working an average of 12 to 15 days per month. These jobs involve weeding, tilling and harvesting, which begin in March and end in November. Working on crops such as carrots and potatoes requires a lot of effort and tools such as scissors, shovels and gloves, which the workers must buy themselves.

Female agricultural workers can earn USD 400 to USD 700 per season but need to buy their own tools. Cotton picking is considered the easiest job, and female workers can earn an average of TJS 150 per month, with those picking cotton for Chinese companies earning TJS 800 to TJS 900 per month. However, this remuneration is very low, and it is difficult to survive on it alone. *Mardikor* women work in teams of 30 to 50 people, and each community has at least one to four groups. They work for large dehkan farms, leaving their children with their parents or bringing them to the field to help with the work.

**Source:** ADB. 2020c. *A study of women's role in irrigated agriculture in the lower Vakhsh River Basin, Tajikistan*. Manila. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/663141/womens-role-irrigated-agriculture-tajikistan.pdf>

Women also report receiving food items, soap, or even empty jam jars (Kobzar, 2007). Women's labour is also concentrated at peak times, such as harvest season and they can be hired by women farm owners, or by the matriarch of the family in charge of organizing the household farm in the absence of their sons.

Although informally-employed women receive a compensation in cash or in-kind (as farm products or services), which adds to household income, the very nature of informal employment is insecure and uncertain, and deprives women of all the social benefits that are associated with formal jobs, such as health insurance, pension accrual and maternity benefits. The working conditions of the informally employed in agriculture are usually harsh, including exposure to

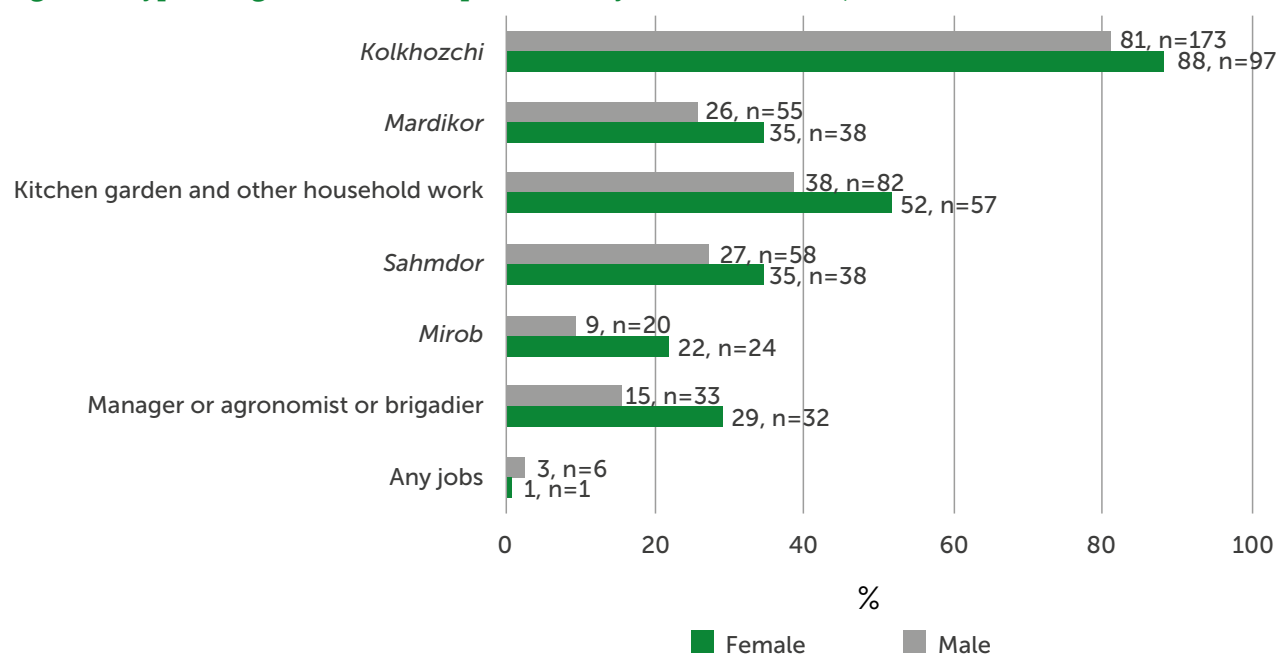
extreme heat during the summer season, longer hours of daily field work, and low standards of sanitary and hygiene facilities (FAO, 2016). According to the World Bank, one of the reasons for shadow hiring might be the high rate (20 percent) of the social tax, which is calculated as a monthly fee for each employee (World Bank, 2012).

Female workers usually spend their earnings on their children's education and other expenses, and the majority of children help their mothers and older sisters with agricultural work. The leaders of these work groups are experienced negotiators and team managers, receiving additional remuneration for their organizational efforts and management skills. They use phones to exchange information, find work, and inform each other of availability. These leaders are also pioneers in changing the conventional restrictions and stigma for women working for individual farmers in various villages.

## 6.7. The growing and potential role of women in agribusiness

Women's entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important priority for the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. In recent years, the government has taken significant steps to foster a more supportive environment for women to start and expand their businesses. A key milestone in this effort is the adoption of the State program on development of women's entrepreneurship in the Republic of Tajikistan for the period up to 2027, which outlines a comprehensive approach to promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and start-up activities among women (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023). An Inter Agency Working Group to Support Women's Entrepreneurship was established under the auspices of the State Committee on Investments and State Property Management, to provide a collaborative platform that brings together various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders with responsibility to coordinate and oversee the execution of the programme. Its mandate includes developing supportive policies, identifying systemic barriers to women's participation in entrepreneurship, and implementing targeted initiatives aimed at fostering a more inclusive and equitable business environment for women throughout Tajikistan.

The Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with other key government agencies, donor organizations and civil society actors, played an active role in the development of the programme, and continues to support its implementation as a member of the taskforce.

**Figure 6. Types of agricultural work performed by women and men, 2019**

**Note:** The occupations are *kolkhozchi* (collective farm worker); *mardikor* (day labourer or helper); *sahmdor* (land shareholder); and *mirob* (water master; ADB, 2020c, p. 33).

**Source:** Reproduced from ADB. 2020c. *A study of women's role in irrigated agriculture in the lower Vaksh River Basin, Tajikistan*. Manila, p. 34. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/663141/womens-role-irrigated-agriculture-tajikistan.pdf>

In addition to this national strategy, several targeted initiatives have been introduced. These include the launch of a Presidential grant scheme to support women-owned businesses, and the establishment of an annual regional forum designed to provide women entrepreneurs with opportunities to network, share experiences and access practical support. Complementing these efforts, a series of property and tax reforms have also been implemented to help lower the structural barriers that women face in owning and operating businesses.

As a result of these combined efforts, a notable increase in women's economic activity has been observed. According to a policy brief issued by the Caspian Policy Centre (2021), between 2015 to 2020, the number of registered women-owned businesses grew by approximately 30 000, and the volume of government loans extended to female entrepreneurs rose by 63.3 percent. As of 1 January 2022, the number of registered businesses owned by women was 79 003, which accounts for 23.1 percent of the total number of registered businesses (UN Women, 2024b).

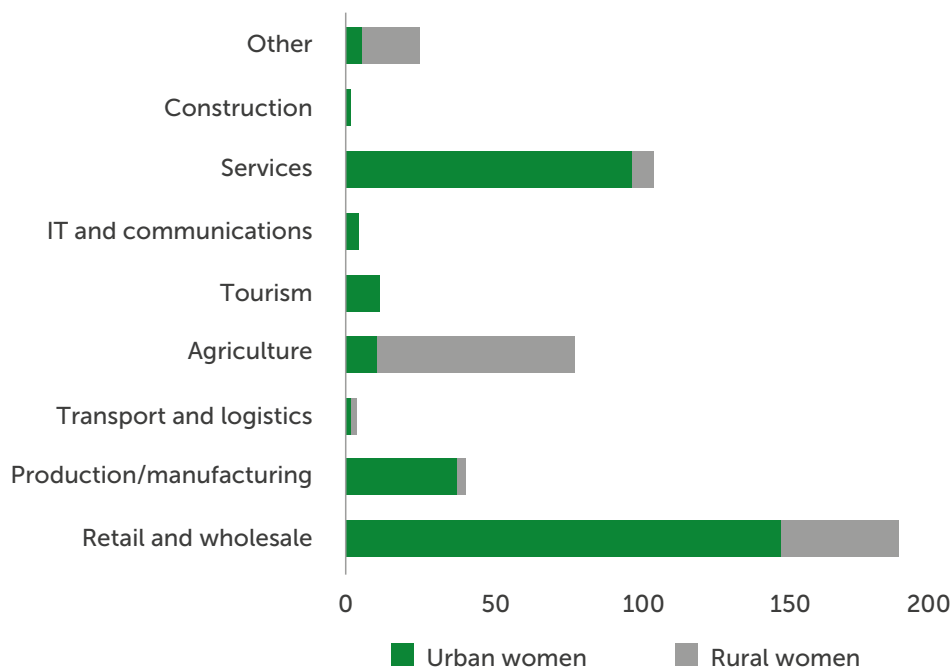
While still a smaller group among farmers who lead and own the agricultural value chains, the number of women entrepreneurs is notable in the trade sector (46 percent of enterprises are headed by women), the services sector (26 percent) and agriculture (19 percent of dehqan farms; FAO, 2022a). It is difficult to assess the share of rural women among the total

number of women entrepreneurs. According to some evidence, however, they are increasingly represented in sectors such as construction, transport and logistics, information technologies, medicine, tourism, finance and manufacturing (UNECE, 2020; see Figure 7).

Despite the progress, significant challenges persist. Formal financial institutions remain twice as likely to issue loans to men compared to women, reflecting ongoing gender bias in access to finance. Rural women encounter more barriers, suffering from underdeveloped infrastructure, both physical and digital, which limits their mobility, and access to markets and time-saving technologies. Moreover, a lack of business knowledge and start-up capital, compounded by persistent societal norms around traditional gender roles and family responsibilities, continues to hinder the growth and sustainability of women-led enterprises.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted policy interventions and sustained investment in gender-responsive infrastructure, financial inclusion and education, along with efforts to shift deep-rooted social norms and institutional practices. These are crucial to creating an enabling environment where women's entrepreneurship can truly thrive in Tajikistan.

In rural areas, women continue to bear the overwhelming burden of household and care

**Figure 7. Women-owned businesses, by sector and settlement type, 2019**

**Source:** Reproduced from Skakova, D. and Livny, E. 2020. *Tajikistan diagnostic*. London, EBRD, p. 25.

responsibilities, most of which remain unpaid. This significantly limits their time, mobility, and overall capacity to engage in economic activities. Despite these constraints, fieldwork conducted for this publication – as well as findings from other FAO studies – has shown that rural women are increasingly open to exploring new opportunities in agricultural entrepreneurship and leadership. There is a growing interest among women in areas such as agribusiness, food processing, trade and agritourism. These sectors not only offer pathways for income generation but also provide opportunities for women to gain greater control over resources, expand their roles in agricultural value chains, and contribute more visibly to rural economic development.<sup>28</sup>

One of the most promising areas for engaging rural women, both in mountainous regions and on farmlands, is agrotourism. This sector offers opportunities to combine agricultural knowledge with hospitality and cultural heritage, creating income-generating activities that are well-suited to the rural context and often compatible with women's existing responsibilities. In addition, there is significant untapped potential in developing "farm-to-table" home delivery initiatives for food products, as well as in the distribution of seeds and seedlings through women-led networks that connect suppliers, small-scale producers and consumers.

Women play a central role in household food systems, as they are typically the primary decision-makers when it comes to purchasing and preparing food. This places them in a critical position to influence family nutrition and household food security. Recognizing this, a gender-sensitive value chain approach is essential – one that goes beyond the traditional focus on primary agricultural production. Such an approach would involve women's active participation in the development and marketing of high-value agrifood products, including honey, spices, mushrooms, and medicinal or wild plants, cultivated on farms and household plots.

However, for these initiatives to have meaningful impact, it is not enough for these products to reach the family table. It is equally important that the income generated directly contributes to household well-being. This requires targeted strategies to ensure women have greater control over both production and distribution processes, enabling them to make informed decisions that enhance family income while promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

Despite their potential, women's participation in agribusiness is often hindered by a range of systemic challenges. These go beyond limited access to resources and training. A major barrier is the shortage of trained specialists in key areas such as agricultural technology, marketing and business management – skills that are essential for women to effectively lead and sustain agribusiness ventures. Moreover, poor infrastructure,

<sup>28</sup> Interview for this CGA conducted with Javohir Akobirova, Head of the International Relations and Gender Issues Department, Committee on Women and Family Affairs, Dushanbe, 22 November 2022.

including degraded roads, insufficient transportation options, and the absence of basic services like waste management, further restricts women's mobility, access to markets and operational efficiency.

These infrastructure gaps not only limit the economic opportunities available to rural women but also reduce

the overall viability and attractiveness of rural areas for agribusiness investment – particularly in ventures where women could serve as key entrepreneurs, managers or innovators. Addressing these barriers is crucial to developing a more inclusive and dynamic agribusiness sector – one that recognizes and harnesses the full potential of women as drivers of rural economic growth.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Observations from the fieldwork conducted for this CGA (see also Karaev, 2020).



# 7. Rural infrastructure and its impact on women

Infrastructure shortcomings are a significant constraint to rural development, given the mountainous landscape in Tajikistan. They also present a formidable challenge to the access of the rural population – including and especially women – to services, and as such, limit opportunities for women to play a more proactive role in agriculture and rural livelihoods.

## 7.1. Housing conditions and durable goods

In rural areas, housing consists primarily of self-built houses where members of the extended family live together in semi-detached buildings. Most of the rural population lives in houses made of local materials – stone or adobe brick – compared with the Soviet-era brick and cement buildings that are common in urban areas. Traditional adobe construction methods can result in more energy-efficient buildings than the materials used in urban housing, provided that proper insulation, plastering and foundations are used. However, due to financial constraints and lack of knowledge about energy efficiency, many rural houses do not provide good quality or safe accommodation, and they are often not in conformity with building regulations (UNECE, 2011).

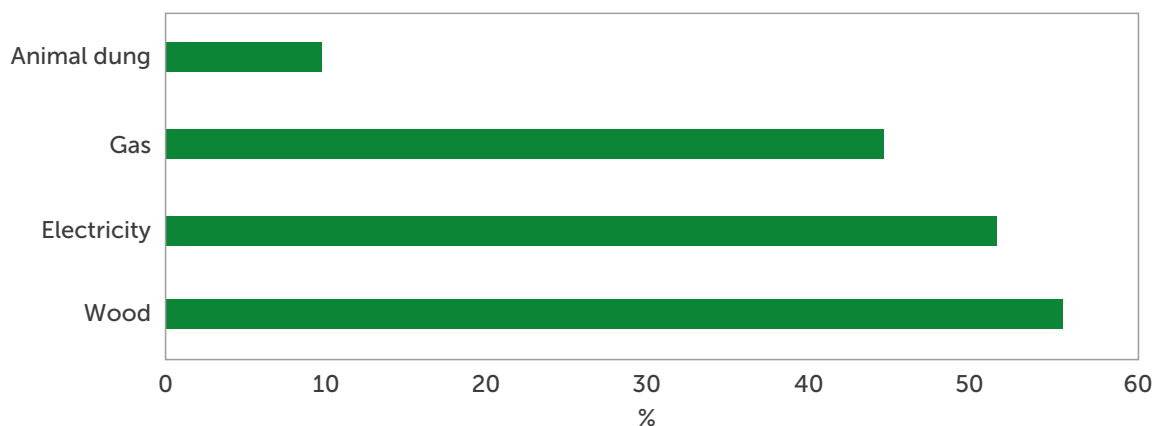
According to the 2017 DHS, urban households are more likely than rural households to possess common household goods. For example, 90 percent of urban households own a refrigerator compared with 60 percent of rural households (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). The 2020 ADB women’s time use study noted that the floors of dwellings are “rudimentary or natural (earth, adobe or wood planks) in one out of three households” (ADB, 2020b, p. 20). Furthermore, none of the surveyed households had flush toilets, but all had pit latrines (ADB, 2020b). A large proportion of Tajikistan’s housing

stock is in poor condition and in need of renovation, which leaves the population vulnerable to the country’s harsh winters, risk of earthquakes, floods and mud slides, and overcrowding. After expenses for basic necessities, most remittance income sent back to Tajikistan is used for home repairs. The housing “boom” in rural Tajikistan has been associated with corrupt practices by local officials, specifically the illegal sale of agricultural land, including valuable irrigated land, for the construction of residences. This problem has received attention at the highest levels – the country’s president has called on the relevant ministries and law enforcement agencies to exercise greater control over land distribution processes (FAO, 2016; see also, for example, Avesta Information Agency, 2012).

## 7.2. Energy sources

Access to electricity through the national grid is nearly universal in Tajikistan, covering 99 percent of rural and urban households (Agency on Statistics under the President of Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). Despite this high accessibility to electricity, blackouts and electricity cuts are frequent during the winter months in some regions. In the winter of 2022 when this report was being prepared, electricity was provided for only a few hours during the early morning and late afternoon in much of Khatlon region, a schedule that had been reinstated after four years of constant electricity supply. Electricity cuts were explained in terms of shortages in reserves until the Rogun dam became fully operational. In Dushanbe and Sughd, there was 24-hour electricity coverage and no cuts. Electricity cuts not only create challenges in terms of heating and cooking; they also hamper the operation of equipment used for farming.

Due to frequent and seasonal energy shortages, most households rely on purchased or locally-sourced fuel. While the use of personal generators has increased (in large part based on remittance income), it is uncommon for families to rely on a household

**Figure 8. Fuel for cooking: share of households using different sources, 2019**

**Source:** Reproduced from ADB. 2020b. *Women's time use in rural Tajikistan*. Manila, p. 21. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/609486/womens-time-use-tajikistan.pdf>

generator. The choice of fuel depends on the season and use (whether for cooking, heating the house or heating water). In the separate building they use for cooking, 39.5 percent of households in rural areas use electricity as cooking fuel, 37.7 percent use propane or natural gas and 13.7 percent use wood (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Just over three-quarters of the rural population (75.2 percent) relies on clean fuels and technology (clean fuel for cooking; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). Still, ADB's research (2020b) found that more than half of rural households burned solid fuels for cooking (most commonly wood, followed by animal dung briquettes; see Figure 8).

Poor quality housing and energy poverty affect the whole population, but women, children and older people, who spend the most time at home, are impacted on to a greater extent. Collecting and preparing solid fuel (for example, making dung or coal dust briquettes) and cooking are tasks primarily carried out by women and girls, and so insufficient clean sources of energy have a significant effect on their health and also limit the time they have for other productive activities or for rest. Use of unclean solid fuel sources for cooking is correlated with indoor air pollution and respiratory illnesses. The large majority of rural households have a separate building for cooking, so this practice likely reduces exposure to harmful pollutants (ibid.).

### 7.3. Water supply, safe drinking water and sanitation

Almost all rural households have improved sanitation facilities (96.8 percent), with the most common type a pit latrine with slab (84.7 percent of rural households),

which is located in the private yard or plot of 94.4 percent of households (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Flush toilets connected to a central sewage system are virtually non-existent in rural areas (FAO, 2016). Their absence leads to problems of hygiene and health insecurity.

In 2020, more than two-thirds of the rural population had access to improved (safe) drinking water sources (72.0 percent of rural households, 96.7 percent of urban ones). Among rural households, 34.4 percent make use of water piped into the dwelling, 13.8 percent of a public tap, 2.3 percent of water piped to a neighbour and 9.3 percent of a tube well or borehole (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). Almost one-third of rural households (27.7 percent), however, rely on unimproved water sources. Of these, the majority (17.2 percent) use surface water, that is, water from rivers, lakes, ponds, or similar sources, followed by water delivered by tanker truck/car with small tank, 2.4 percent on unprotected spring water and 0.5 percent on an unprotected dug well (ibid.).

In all the villages in Jomi, Dusti and Vakhsh districts (in Khatlon region) where fieldwork was conducted for this CGA, all households interviewed mentioned they were using the same source for water and irrigation. By contrast, in Hissor district (in DRS), closer to the capital, and the northern districts of Bobojon Ghafurov and Jabbor Rasulov (in Sughd region), drinking water was piped into the village with a tap/faucet in street corners, from which households could withdraw water through buckets or pipes they would attach to their own houses. Women interviewees mentioned that they would wake up very early to collect water, straight after it is let down the stream and before it gets polluted in the village brook.

According to a Khatlon household survey (Feed the Future FEEDBACK, 2014), adult female-only households are less likely to have water (for drinking or washing) piped into the dwelling, and are more likely to collect water from taps in the yard or public taps. Likewise, they are much less likely than households with male and female adults to purchase water from tanker trucks or in bottles (ibid.).

As is the case with limitations on energy supply, women are especially burdened by water scarcity since they are the family members who use the most domestic water (for cooking, cleaning, laundry and bathing children) and expend the most time collecting water when it is not piped into the home (FAO, 2016). Women and girls under 15 years of age are primarily responsible for collecting water and cleaning sanitation facilities in rural areas, and the shortage of water and sanitation places a particular burden on them (UN Women, 2020). A lack of hygienic sanitation facilities (as well as clean water for hand washing) is associated with a risk of diarrhoeal illnesses and transmission of other diseases within the household. Children and older people are especially at risk. Given their traditional responsibility for treating family members who are ill, substandard sanitation facilities can also increase women's care work (FAO, 2016).

#### 7.4. Water for irrigation

Channelling water for the irrigation of agricultural farms is a challenge for rural households and for both male and female farmers. To water their land, farmers typically use manual irrigation methods, with only 11 percent utilizing drip irrigation. About 60 percent of Tajikistan's irrigated lands are served by gravity irrigation systems built in the middle of the twentieth century which have not been properly restored. Because of this, during drought years, some dehkan farms do not receive water for several weeks. The remaining 40 percent is irrigated through pumping stations and wells. This system also suffers from inefficiencies given wear and tear of pumping and power equipment, the condition of pressure pipelines, and high energy costs, leading to a deficit in available water in the spring (FAO, 2020b). Another obstacle to pumping water for irrigation is the systematic increase in electricity prices and the unstable supply of electricity, which has a high cost for farmers who cannot rely on a stable supply to operate their machinery.

Access to irrigation is also an acute concern for women farmers in Tajikistan who need to compete with neighbouring farms, often larger and better organized, for water resources. As smallholder farmers, they also have to make use of irrigation canals, streams, rivers

and rainwater, a physical task that is difficult to navigate. Furthermore, irrigation canals are a main source of household drinking water, and women are required to devote productive time to cleaning irrigation system drainage overflows and preventing flooding (World Bank, 2009; FAO, 2016).

For FHHs without male support, access to irrigation water is a formidable task, especially given that, as discussed in Chapter 2, women tend not to participate in WUAs – the local system of governance created to manage rural water resources. Water users' associations were created with international donor support as early as 2004. Their role is to ensure that water use is equitable (a critical concern in areas at risk of drought). They also collect user fees and have a role in settling conflicts over water resources. Conflicts of interest among various water users, dehkan farms, agricultural enterprises and private subsidiary farms have become one of the consequences of the lack of management.

When the WUAs were first initiated, almost all (98 percent) of dehkan farms were run by men. Today, despite the increase in the number of women as de facto and de jure heads of dehkan farms, women's representation in such organizations is minimal although growing. Researchers at the IWMI interested in learning about how the increase in outmigration of male labour and the consequent "feminization" of agriculture affected water management in Tajikistan, found that female-run dehkan farms were 9 percent less likely to pay fees to WUAs. This would mean that less money is going towards vital repair and maintenance works on the irrigation canals (IWMI, 2018). Women were also "11 percent less likely to sign water contracts, meaning district offices will budget for less water than is needed for their communities ... [and] 3 percent less likely to attend WUA meetings, ... consequently [having] little say over decisions such as the irrigation timetable, for example" (Balasubramanya, 2018, no pagination). In order to involve the many more women who have become the heads of dehkan farms, women need access to training on how to participate in WUAs. However, because of "established gender roles which do not associate women with technical work, this has not been happening widely enough" (ibid., no pagination). According to some experts, "women should also be supported through training to participate in WUAs in a meaningful and sustainable way because they are less likely to waste money, have a strong work ethic, and are less likely to become involved in tensions related to the running of the WUAs" (ibid., no pagination). Considering the loss of knowledge and skills in WUAs due to migration, there is a growing need to design irrigation management programmes that directly target female members.

Given the increase in the number of women who are responsible for plots of land, more women are reporting problems with lack of water for irrigation. In an ADB survey, more than 50 percent of female respondents stated various issues such as water scarcity, poor canal conditions, unfair distribution of water by canal users at the head, drought, and inadequate performance by WUAs. Additionally, about 20 percent of women reported facing verbal or physical abuse when requesting water (ADB, 2020c). In Khatlon region, the study area of ADB, households reported that they typically pay local government representatives for irrigation services. However, WUAs do not always respond when households experience water shortages or receive no water at all. As a result, some households refuse to pay fees to WUAs and arrange water supplies independently (ibid.). The ADB in Tajikistan is supporting the creation of new functioning WUAs in the Panj river basin, which could assist in saving over 60 percent of the irrigation water that is lost, via the use of application-based meters that systematize payment of water in advance and online payment.<sup>30</sup>

Within the government's programme of water resources development for 2021–2025, five river basin councils have been created: Syrdariya, Zarafshan, Kofarnihon, Panj and Vakhsh. The Syrdariya River Basin Council has a solid representation of women, with 30 percent of its 35 members being women. At the time of writing, the model of the Syrdariya River Basin Council was being duplicated by the Association Woman and Society for the Kofarnihon River Basin in order to create a platform for dialogue and enhance the role of women and young people in water management (The Regional Environment Center for Central Asia, 2025; Green Central Asia, 2025). The proposed Basin Women's Forum (BWF) intends to bring together all stakeholders to identify and strengthen the participation of women and young people in water management, supporting the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management.

Effective water management in rural areas of Tajikistan can only be achieved through close collaboration among key stakeholders. In addition to government agencies responsible for geology and environmental protection – particularly in the areas of monitoring and quality assurance – this collaboration should also include women's associations and relevant NGOs, who can play a vital role as implementers on the ground.

Currently, however, several factors are exacerbating water shortages: ageing and deteriorating infrastructure, insufficient investment in water systems, low public awareness, and the growing impacts of climate change. These challenges highlight the urgent need for more comprehensive research and assessments of water management in the country, particularly from a gender perspective.

At the same time, local authorities – mahallas, which oversee water system management – must engage in targeted education and training efforts. These should focus on improving the efficiency and sustainability of water use, while also promoting gender-sensitive approaches. Sharing this knowledge broadly within local communities will be essential to ensuring lasting impact.<sup>31</sup>

## 7.5. Rural transport and women's mobility

The gender dimensions of transport use are not always well understood, including by policymakers. The State Target Programme for Development of Transport Complex of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2010–2025, for example, has no gender section or gender considerations. Furthermore, there are no gender-specific data on transport use in Tajikistan. An assessment of passenger flow has not been carried out since 1984 and there are no sex-disaggregated data about the use of transportation in rural and urban areas.<sup>32</sup> However, it is clear that Tajikistan's poor road infrastructure (the result of deterioration over time, limited investment in repair and the harsh climate) makes travelling from rural areas to urban centres difficult (FAO, 2016), and that this difficulty has gender impacts.

Women in rural areas experience limited mobility not only due to poor road infrastructure but also the lack of reliable and safe public transport options and the cost of private transport. Car ownership has almost doubled in the last decade (ibid.). A majority of rural households (55.6 percent) own cars, while 75 percent own bicycles, and only a small percentage (1.4 percent) owns motorbikes (ADB, 2020b). Although there are no prohibitions on women driving, most rural women rely on male drivers for transportation. The most commonly used mode of transportation for men in rural areas is bicycles, followed by walking, and lastly, cars. Women, on the other hand, primarily travel on foot, followed by cars, and animal traction (ibid.).

<sup>30</sup> Interview conducted for this CGA with Shanny Campbell, Country Director, and Gulnora Kholova, Gender specialist, Asian Development Bank, Dushanbe, 23 November 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Interview conducted for this CGA with Muslihiddin Kholiqzoda, Head of Water Resources Department, Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, Dushanbe, 22 November 2022

<sup>32</sup> Interview conducted for this CGA with Shoista Saidmurodzoda, Deputy Minister, and Laylo Ulugzoda, Head of Women's Council, Ministry of Transportation, Dushanbe, 22 November 2022.

Social norms about women, especially young women, travelling independently also impede their travel options. More than the quality of road infrastructure or safety as obstacles to their mobility, women often report that the extent of their freedom to move around is mainly influenced by their family, when they have to ask for permission from their husband and mother-in-law before leaving the house (ibid.). Interaction with formal institutions is generally considered a “male” role (partly because men predominate in administrative structures as leaders and employees), and women are discouraged by family members, or they themselves choose not to engage with public entities (FAO, 2016).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the state-run public transportation system that once connected rural areas of Tajikistan – particularly remote mountainous towns and villages – with urban centres began to deteriorate. The decline in infrastructure and services, combined with a lack of investment in the sector, led to the gradual collapse of the public transport system. As a result, rural residents have become largely dependent on private transportation, which, while sometimes available, is not always affordable for many households. This shift has created significant challenges, particularly for those in more isolated regions, where transportation costs can consume a large portion of family incomes, hindering access to education, health care and economic opportunities. The absence of a reliable and affordable public transportation system further exacerbates the challenges faced by rural communities, contributing to social and economic inequalities between rural and urban areas. It also has a particularly significant impact on rural women’s mobility, restricting their access to essential services, markets and opportunities.

Interviews conducted for this assessment in the Vakhsh and Dusti districts of the Khatlon region confirmed this reality. For many women, the only option to transport their products to the local bazaars or purchase goods from markets in nearby towns is to pay for private taxis. In some cases, young women expressed hesitation about taking taxis with strangers, which adds an extra layer of difficulty. However, this concern is less pronounced in areas where local taxis are operated by men who are well known to the villagers, providing a sense of safety and familiarity. In many rural communities, women often pool their resources to hire a private car, a practice that helps mitigate the costs but still reflects the ongoing challenges they face. Additionally, logistical challenges in transportation are a significant barrier to the growth of e-commerce and delivery services. The lack of reliable and affordable transport options limits women’s ability to participate

fully in e-trade, further restricting their economic opportunities.

Such limitations on women’s mobility have important implications for women’s ability to take part in agricultural production at various levels of the value chain, such as selling goods by roadsides, in local markets or engaging in trade in urban centres. In addition, women’s more limited mobility complicates the process of registering farming enterprises, applying for loans, paying taxes on land or livestock, taking part in training, accessing extension services, as well as other activities associated with agricultural production (ibid.).

Increasing the rural population’s access to transportation can have distinct gendered impacts: the construction of safe, reliable and efficient roads can bring women – and men – out of the physical isolation which contributes to poverty. This not only promotes a regionally interconnected economy for the landlocked Tajikistan, but also facilitates women’s access to markets, schools and health care facilities, and creates new jobs and livelihood opportunities (ADB, 2021).

## 7.6. Information and communications technologies

According to the Agency on Statistics, there were more than 3.4 million internet users and more than 6.3 million mobile communications subscribers in Tajikistan as of 1 January 2022 (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022c). Data from DataReportal, which publishes the annual Global Digital Report, shows that “Tajikistan’s internet penetration rate stood at 40.1 percent of the total population at the start of 2022” (Kemp, 2022, no pagination). While the numbers available are not disaggregated by sex or by rural/urban area, they point to the growth potential of ICTs as both a mode of communication and for the economy.

Yet, while Tajikistan has made significant investments in its telecommunications infrastructure and internet access in recent years, access is not equal between urban and rural areas, and between women and men. People in rural areas still tend to experience limited access to, and high prices for, internet services. In 2019, fewer than one in 100 households had broadband internet access (primarily in urban areas), and only 35 percent had mobile internet access (Asia-Plus, 2021).

The 2020 ADB “Women’s Time Use in Rural Tajikistan” study indicated that only 10 percent of women had the opportunity to use the internet, compared with one-quarter of men. The vast majority of men (93.4 percent) possessed a mobile phone, whereas

only 40 percent of women did (ADB, 2020b). The DHS survey of 2017 also pointed to rudimentary use of the internet and a vast rural-urban gap among women. Mobile phone ownership was much lower in rural areas (48 percent) than in urban areas (71 percent). Among women who owned a mobile phone, urban women were much more likely (18 percent) than rural women (4 percent) to use the phone for financial transactions (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). Only 7.7 percent of rural women had used the internet in the past 12 months (compared with 26.3 percent of urban women). Of these, 41 percent of rural women (50.2 percent of urban) used the internet almost every day (ibid.).

These numbers, however, are likely to need frequent updating, with more women having access to mobile phones and to the internet, especially to keep in touch with their migrant family members. The most important reason why the use of mobile internet has grown in rural areas is migration. Interviews conducted for this report showed that in the majority of families where a son or husband was working in the Russian Federation, they had purchased smartphones connected to the internet, often bought cheaper abroad, in order to keep in touch with the household, especially with wives. While the internet was used to contact the migrant worker through online platforms, women also used it to access information about, for example, cooking, cosmetics and lifestyles. In fact, interviews conducted for this assessment in rural areas showed that a large number of rural young women had smartphones which they were using to access videos and content on social media platforms.

The use of mobile internet in Tajikistan is also growing because of the increasing popularity of online services such as online banking and e-commerce, although these services remain rudimentary in rural areas and are not being actively used by rural women. While the potential of online activities opens up new possibilities for agriculture and the education of rural women (including on information about crops, markets, cultivation, prices, etc.), much needs to be done in order to close the rural-urban gap.

The potential for growth of the ICT sector for innovative ways to improve women's empowerment and contribution to agriculture is vast. This would require facilitating rural women's access to the internet, providing digital literacy, enhancing communication and digital skills to promote products and services, and creating platforms for the exchange of knowledge and experience.

## 7.7. Access to agricultural inputs

Agricultural inputs refer to resources that improve agricultural production and efficiency, such as farm equipment and machinery, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation, as well as veterinary services. There are no sex-disaggregated data on the availability of key agricultural inputs to rural women and men in Tajikistan, so conclusions must be drawn from other available information. In general, lack of key inputs (lack of machinery, seeds, fertilizers, chemicals or water) prevents many people from taking up farming as a business, and especially women for whom access is even more difficult (FAO, 2016).

### 7.7.1. Equipment and machinery

Access to agricultural equipment or machinery (such as tractors, combines and cultivators) is a serious challenge for small dehkan farms – especially for those led by women – hindering the optimal organization of production and potentially reducing yield.

Accurate and updated data about the ownership and use of farm equipment, as well as average number of farming equipment, for male and female farmers are lacking. However, it can be stipulated that the majority of small-scale farmers have very limited access to agricultural equipment or machinery (ibid.). Many use obsolete equipment or rely on labour-intensive practices, such as harvesting by hand, and traditional tools. In 2019, the country as a whole had 27 776 tractors, 1 024 grain combine harvesters and 70 mechanized cotton-pickers for 171 975 dehkan farms, while in 2022 these numbers had slightly changed to 27 324 tractors, 1 060 grain combine harvesters and 34 cotton-harvesting machines for the total of 172 107 dehkan farms (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023e). The tractors and agricultural machinery fleet currently available in the country is insufficient to meet the full needs of the country's agricultural sector, covering only 30 percent to 40 percent of demand. There is also evidence that the number of machines such as tractors is decreasing due to wear and tear, despite the efforts of the government with support from international donors to import new farm machinery.

Many women owning or working on dehkan farms use outdated equipment (often rented), but most commonly, manual labour is used. Typically, work such as ploughing the land, harvesting, and using traditional tools is performed by women, while the control and use of agricultural machinery is mostly done by men. Even when agricultural machinery is part of the farm holding, prevailing gender roles mean that it is men who usually

perform specialized tasks, operating tractors and machines. Women generally undertake menial work such as weeding, sowing, transplanting, harvesting and cotton picking, using basic tools (FAO, 2016). Households headed by women also have few types of animal-drawn equipment (for example, ploughs, wagons).

Women-led dehkan farms, being on average smaller, need to rely on tractors that are usually hired from large farms. When female-headed households do not own farming equipment, they share it with other farmers or, if funds are available, they lease it.

A project delivered by USAID supported women through the provision of machinery and equipment to reduce women's workload. These included drip irrigation, agricultural machines, and equipment for processing cheese, drying fruits and dairies. They were initially provided for free and then gradually required cost sharing.<sup>33</sup> The agency implemented a programme to provide training for pre- and post-harvest activities and handling of horticultural crops, and included the basic tools for pruning, grafting and fruit picking. Their equipment-heavy projects have helped women to improve the whole value chain cycle, including farming, processing, logistics, aggregation and sales.

### 7.7.2. Seeds and fertilizers

Lack of proper access to quality seeds, fertilizers and pesticides is a serious constraint to the development of dehkan farms, especially those led by women. The reasons include: (a) the presence of low-quality goods (seeds, pesticides and fertilizers) on the market; (b) the lack of financial capacity of dehkan farms to invest in seeds, pesticides and fertilizers; (c) the lack of an accessible dealer network for the sale of fertilizers and other agrochemicals; and (d) insufficient knowledge of farmers on the proper use of seeds, pesticides and fertilizers.

Currently, many smallholders cannot afford to purchase pesticides. Dehkan farms that invest in the purchase of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides do not receive the expected results and incomes. Farmers often purchase cheaper, low-quality products especially given the increase in the cost of fertilizers in the world market.

An FAO study (2022b, p. 14) noted that "70 percent of the interviewed farmers reported that they use seeds purchased from seed farms and agro-shops, while about 20 percent use their own seeds from the previous year's harvest. The remaining 10 percent of farmers use seeds purchased at the market, which have low quality and unknown origin". This may be the cause of the increase in disease and low yields. However, information about the differences in terms of acquiring seeds, fertilizers and pesticides in women-led and men-led dehkan farms is not available.

One coping mechanism for female farmers is to work their land less intensively, meaning they use smaller amounts of fertilizer and seeds than male farmers (EAT and Fintrac Inc., 2014). In the last few years, the use of organic fertilizers has also increased, especially after training provided by international organizations. In interviews and focus group discussions conducted for this CGA, a number of women in the districts of Dusti, Jomi and Vakhsh in the region of Khatlon mentioned that they had taken up using limestone and other natural products after being trained by international organizations. At the same time, women repeatedly noted that they were using much of the remittances received from husbands or sons abroad on the purchase of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, the prices of which were soaring in the market.

The regulation of the safe handling of pesticides and the practice of their disposal are important issues for Tajikistan. The practice of pest control during the Soviet era was based on the intensive use of chemical pesticides, especially when growing cotton. While today many smallholder farmers cannot afford to purchase pesticides and so do not use them, some chemical pesticides are still used to combat cotton pests. There is an acute need for research to identify any gendered impacts in the handling and disposal of pesticides in Tajikistan. On the one hand, men are most often engaged in hazardous work such as chemical spraying, but women also risk exposure to pesticides as the primary cotton pickers. Existing projects in Tajikistan on introducing ecological pest management practices and technologies could also benefit from information about the specific practices of male and female farmers, as well as differences in their levels of knowledge (FAO, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Interview conducted for this CGA with Maliika Jurakulova, Program Development Specialist, Design and Social Inclusion, USAID Tajikistan, 16 December 2022.



# 8. Crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry

## 8.1. Crop production and horticulture

Specific data about harvests indicate that dehkan farms headed by women have lower harvests than men's farms in every category of crop (see Table 13). Smaller harvests can be explained by the fact that female-managed farms are smaller on average, but female farms also have smaller yields for every crop with the exception of corn and cotton (where female-headed farms yield more than male-managed farms). Lower yields could be related to poorer quality of the land, lack of irrigation, fertilizers, pesticides and tractors, or women's more limited knowledge of farming practices to increase yields (for example, seed selection, planting practices, hybrids), as well as lack of access to extension services (FAO, 2016).

Table 14 shows that only 13.3 percent of land dedicated to crops is cultivated by female-headed dehkan farms. Although female-headed dehkan farms play a larger role in corn, cotton, vegetable and fruit tree production, their share of the land dedicated to growing each of these four types of crops remains less than a quarter.

The first (main) season crops are planted in part in the autumn, from October to December (mainly wheat, but also barley and pulses), and in part in the spring, in March and April (wheat, barley, maize, rice and cotton). Planting of the second (small) season crops (maize, sorghum, soybeans, beans, vegetables and potatoes) takes place after the harvest of the winter and spring cereals in June and July. The planting of vegetables can take place throughout the year, especially in farms with greenhouses (ibid.).

**Table 13. Yields of female-headed and male-headed dehkan farms, 2022**

Categories of crops	Female-headed dehkan farms	Male-headed dehkan farms
	Yield (centner per hectare)	Yield (centner per hectare)
Grain	32.9	44.6
Wheat	32.5	35.4
Corn	63.7	210.0
Cotton	17.8	22.4
Potatoes	210.7	246.0
Vegetables	300.5	462.2
Melons and gourds	276.5	417.0
Fruit trees	2.3	29.0
Vineyards (grapes)	67.3	159.5

Source: Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2023d. *Gender indicators in dehkan farms*. Dushanbe, pp. 84–92.

**Table 14. Percentage of crops from female-headed dehkan farms, 2022**

Categories of crops	Total hectares dedicated to crop	Percentage of hectares cropped by female-headed dehkan farms	Total hectares cropped by female-headed dehkan farms
Total cropped area	545 639	13.3	72 835
Grain area	–	11.9	28 888
Wheat area	–	11.6	19 768
Corn area	–	20.3	2 118
Cotton area	–	15.2	21 387
Potato area	–	11.6	2 904
Vegetable area	–	16.6	5 776
Melon and gourd area	–	13.5	2 096
Fruit tree area	–	14.6	14 257
Grape area	–	26.3	3 221

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2023b. *Gender indicators in dehkan farms*. Dushanbe, pp. 66–74.

That women-led dehkan farms are continuing to invest in the production of cotton is surprising for a number of reasons. First, cotton is cultivated on irrigated land and this necessitates a large volume of inputs, which women farmers lack (FAO, 2022b). Second, since 2007, “the mandatory quota system for cotton areas has become less stringent and farmers have been able to allocate their land to other crops with greater flexibility” (ibid., p. 12).

Growing cotton involves many challenges. But to be able to diversify, farmers need the proper and timely functioning of water delivery systems, as well as sufficient resources to acquire the inputs needed for the cultivation of other crops, which women-headed farms do not have. In areas where cotton was previously grown, wheat is now the main grain and food crop produced in the country. Wheat, like cotton, requires

little irrigation, and water is supplied no more than once or twice per season. Wheat planting in household farms and garden plots has gradually increased over the years: “Domestic wheat production covers about half of the local demand for bread and the rest is imported mainly from Kazakhstan” (FAO, 2022b, p. 14). As Table 13 and Table 14 show, however, wheat is one of the least-planted crops in women-led dehkan farms.

## 8.2. Livestock

Animal husbandry is a major agricultural activity, and raising livestock is the norm for rural households (73 percent have livestock, which includes cattle, horses, donkeys, mules, pigs, sheep, goats and poultry). Most households own between one and three lactating cows and five and ten sheep and goats for domestic consumption or local sales of milk (FAO, 2016).

**Table 15. Livestock distribution by region, 2022 (all types of ownership)**

Region	Cows	Sheep and goats	Horses	Poultry	Bee colonies
Dushanbe	4 305	2 633	33	100 532	17
GBAO	45 607	349 069	304	94 536	8 392
Sughd	394 209	1 767 333	9 069	5 485 219	80 312
Khatlon	540 999	2 557 864	60 788	2 287 748	64 885
DRS	340 080	1 640 274	15 440	3 318 264	109 750

**Source:** Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2023e. *Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023*. Dushanbe, pp. 221–261.

At the end of 2022, the total number of cattle in the country was over 2.5 million, including 1.3 million cows, 6.3 million sheep and goats, 85 634 horses, 11.2 million poultry of all types and 263 356 bee colonies (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023e; see Table 15). After the privatization of the collective livestock holdings in the 1990s, livestock ownership mainly changed towards households and dehkan farms, with the exception of poultry holdings, of which 63 percent are owned by agricultural enterprises and 37 percent are owned by households and dehkan farms (FAO, 2016).

According to a 2021 FAO and World Food Programme (WFP) Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM), “the population of cattle, sheep and goats has been slightly, but constantly, increasing in all regions since 2015” (FAO, 2022b, p. 14). Simultaneously, the total planted area of fodder crops (excluding pastures with rough grass) has decreased in all regions since 2019 due to the increase in planted areas for other crops such as wheat, maize and rice. As a result, the use of fodder crops as livestock feed has been steadily replaced by other (food) crop waste. During interviews conducted by the FAO and WFP mission, participants described the challenges of providing livestock with fodder. The lack of irrigation water, and a dry summer in parts of the country affecting pastureland, meant there was not enough grass to feed livestock (FAO, 2022b).

There are gender differences in the extent to which households are engaged in raising livestock. Households headed by men are more likely to keep livestock and to have a larger number of animals across all categories than female-headed households. When female-headed households have livestock, they tend to have cattle and poultry, possibly because dairy farming is traditionally “female” work or because selling extra milk and eggs is a relatively low intensity means of supplementing the household income. The pattern of livestock ownership is generally the same for women and men; most households own cattle, followed by poultry.

Gender differences in the ownership of livestock are not only a reflection of differential access to the resources needed to buy or keep animals, but also indicate the gendered roles in livestock management. For instance, feed preparation, household dairy production (tending cows and milking) and poultry farming are generally perceived as women’s responsibilities. Men have greater involvement in grazing, feed production, and purchase and sale of livestock. Women and men also have differing roles in the processing of livestock products; men are more often involved in activities such as sheep shearing, transporting products to market and butchering, while women undertake meat and dairy processing, as well

as preparing wool for sale or making handicrafts (for example, cleaning, carding, spinning and dyeing wool; FAO, 2016).

As is the case in other areas of farming, women’s ability to be successful in livestock raising is dependent on their level of information and knowledge about running a farming enterprise, and their access to finance and other key resources such as veterinary and extension services and training. For example, a programme that addresses gender issues within the livestock sector found that women often lack knowledge about the annual livestock registration processes at the jamoat office (ibid.). During field research, female farmers explained that male officials ask them about the number of animals they own and inform them of the amount they must pay, but the women do not know how the figures are calculated, how much they pay per head or why the sum differs from year to year.<sup>34</sup>

### 8.3. Pasture management

The Fourth National Communication of the Republic of Tajikistan under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change estimates that up to 80 percent of pastures are at risk of degradation and erosion, prompting high demand and competition in pasture use (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022). The availability of pastureland is a challenge constrained by a lack of technical knowledge of small livestock holders, poor governance of pasture management, inefficient management of community livestock, shortage of feed during winter months, environmental degradation, and lack of access to good-quality feed (FAO, 2022b).

Specific methods of livestock raising in Tajikistan have also put a strain on pasture resources. Under the Soviet system, livestock production relied heavily on the use of animal feed that was grown on large-scale state farms. Today, the number of livestock owned by smallholder farms has increased significantly, but feed for purchase is in short supply or not affordable, and so farmers rely heavily on grazing – a situation that has led to “an intensive, year-round overgrazing [of] traditional spring/autumn pastures” (Rakhimov, 2014, no pagination). Furthermore, under the 2013 Law “On Pastures”, these can be registered to individuals for long-term or permanent use and, thus, some pastureland was annexed into private farms while “the majority of animals remained in households with no formal access

<sup>34</sup> Material provided by Angelika Brustinow, International Consultant on the Forest and Biodiversity Governance including Environmental Monitoring (FLERMONECA) project, implemented by GIZ in Tajikistan.

to grazing lands” (Robinson and Fabian, 2014, no pagination). The law created a system of pasture users’ associations (PUAs), but exclusive property rights persist and give rise to conflicts of interest. Dehkan farms or other agricultural enterprises can organize as PUAs (FAO, 2016).

One of the most important issues facing women is the limited recognition of the roles they play in animal husbandry or the ways in which these roles are allocated on the basis of gender. Since women tend to have less access to land, they are also more constrained in their access to pastureland. Field studies indicate that some PUAs and small-scale livestock farmers have no access to pastureland. While women are well represented in PUAs (46.7 percent of all members), they are less visible in management roles. Fewer than a third of PUA management positions are held by women (31.4 percent), and there are only seven female PUA leaders in total.<sup>35</sup>

While there are a number of projects in Tajikistan dedicated to developing livestock production and improving pasture management that acknowledge the specific needs of female farmers, experts also note that “specific analyses of changing gender roles in pasture management and ways to improve the situation of women have not been conducted” (Pasture Management Networking Platform/FLERMONECA, 2015, p. 4).

## 8.4. Forestry

Tajikistan is a mountainous country, with forests accounting for little more than 3 percent of the country’s total land area (FAO, 2014), and a total forest cover area of 1.33 million hectares (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). The forests are also under severe threat. It is estimated that in the past century, forestland has been reduced by 75 percent, and the rate of deforestation has increased dramatically in recent decades (Tandon, 2011), due to illegal felling and overexploitation of timber for domestic fuel, farming and uncontrolled grazing. Deforestation and subsequent soil erosion has serious ramifications for the likelihood and severity of natural disasters.

In Tajikistan, all forests are state property but are considered a shared asset of the Tajik people. State forestry enterprises (*leskhoz*) manage almost all forestland and are engaged in forest protection and conservation, as well as management of forest wildlife (including for hunting and fishing). Because their

operating budgets are small, *leskhoz* are largely funded through the harvesting and sale of non-timber forest products (Kirchhof and Fabian, 2010). Smallholders can enter into lease agreements with the *leskhoz*, for example, for planting fruit trees, and villagers can purchase fuelwood from *leskhoz* staff.

The forestry sector should be considered an important sector of the country’s economy. Due to insufficiencies in other fuel sources, rural forest households depend on timber for cooking and heating, with the demand for fuelwood outpacing the supply. Grass-cutting and hay gathering are both a source of income and used for livestock fodder (ibid.). Forests provide fruits, nuts and berries (for example, apricot, apple, plum, cherry, walnut, pistachio, almond, mulberry and hawthorn), honey, medicinal plants and herbs, all of which are consumed by forest villagers or sold, thus contributing to the local economy (FAO, 2016). While the volume of non-timber forest products has declined since the Soviet period, hundreds of tonnes of fruits and nuts are still processed annually and the figures have been increasing (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022d). Experts suggest that there are also opportunities to expand forest vegetation, and that the forestry sector could “enhance the value of the land” and be a more effective use of the country’s agricultural production capacity (Kirchhof and Fabian, 2010, p. 11).

In terms of how gender intersects with forestry in the context of Tajikistan, the picture is unclear. Sex-disaggregated data about employment in *leskhoz* or in other enterprises that deal with forest products are limited and inconsistent, perhaps due to the use of differing methodologies (FAO, 2016). Labour market statistics for 2018 suggest that the total number of people employed in forestry was 1 700, of which 200 (or 12 percent) were women (according to the Agency on Statistics cited in Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022).

The fact that *leskhoz* are underequipped, and staff are required to carry out patrol functions on foot (covering several thousand hectares of forestland can take a number of days), suggests that such work is unlikely to be considered suitable for or accessible to women (FAO, 2016). Salaries for *leskhoz* staff are low and not sufficient to support a family, so most employees must seek other sources of income (Kirchhof and Fabian, 2010). Men dominate in educational fields related to forestry, but there are very few trained specialists overall in Tajikistan (FAO, 2016).

Women’s near invisible role in forestry enterprises does not mean that they are not engaged in forest activities

<sup>35</sup> Material provided by Angelika Brustinow, International Consultant on the Forest and Biodiversity Governance including Environmental Monitoring (FLERMONECA) project, implemented by GIZ in Tajikistan.

in other ways (*ibid.*). Rural women spend a significant amount of time collecting fuelwood as domestic fuel. In comparison, men usually purchase fuelwood for household consumption (World Bank, 2014). Ecological organizations have noted that due to deforestation in many areas, women and children are now having to spend more time collecting wood. In the case of some villages in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, women and children have to travel 15 kilometres or more for fuel (where they once travelled 2 to 4 kilometres).

As a general rule, women in forest-dependent villages engage in the informal collection of non-timber forest products, for home consumption and for sale, and this pattern likely holds true for Tajikistan as well. Dedicated research is needed to better understand how both women and men are engaged in the processing and sale of forest products (FAO, 2016).

Women and men can play important roles in conserving forest areas by eliminating harmful agricultural practices (cropping and grazing) and by identifying the types of indigenous plants that can be used in the long term for regrowing forests (Tandon, 2011). Both women and men have specific knowledge about trees and non-timber forest products that should be taken into consideration in forest management and planning. However, because women are virtually absent from the formal forestry sector (in employment and in policy positions), special efforts are required so that they can contribute their knowledge to forest management activities. In one example of this, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) introduced “the Joint Forest Management (JFM) approach, which helps local residents and *leskhoz*es to jointly manage forest areas, restore degraded areas, and resolve conflicts between forest and pasture users” (GIZ, 2024, no pagination). Local residents have the right to use the forestland, and participate in the restoration of the degraded land in return. Other activities include that “the local population, [including women], together with the *leskhoz*, [are] involved in the planning and management of forests, and in monitoring activities and results. Comprehensive land management measures are incorporated in management plans and annual plans to ensure sustainable forest management” (*ibid.*).

## 8.5. Fisheries and aquaculture

The fisheries and aquaculture sector contributes to food security, nutrition and healthy diets, but also provides opportunities for income generation, employment and economic empowerment. As such, fisheries and aquaculture represent a significant resource and the potential to support rural livelihoods. International

evidence points to women as important contributors to fisheries and associated economies, where they work as fishers, fish farmers, processors and traders. However, in similar ways to the agricultural and forestry sectors, gender inequalities are also common in fisheries and aquaculture systems.<sup>36</sup>

During the Soviet period, fish production largely focused on pond culture, with the government supporting large-scale fish farms. Fish breeding in Tajikistan reached its culmination in 1991. In that year, pond culture contributed 3 298 tonnes or 84 percent of the total fish production, mostly carp and to a lesser extent, freshwater bream. However, many fisheries were privatized after independence, and fish production has declined since then (FAO, 2016). Multiple factors, such as the impact of the civil war, insufficient policy and technological support, deteriorating facilities, loss of former trade channels, and limited support for research, with fewer investors have contributed to this process (Khaitov *et al.*, 2013). Between 1990 and 2019, overall fish production decreased from 3 887 tonnes to 2 452 tonnes (FAO, 2022d). As a consequence, fish consumption per capita has decreased to a level less than 0.1 kg, compared to 3 kg at the end of the 1980s (FAO, 2013). Tajikistan’s average daily per capita protein intake in 2019 was 71.6 g, an intake lower than the averages for the world (83.2 g/day) and Central Asia (95.5 g/day). Similarly, its per capita animal protein intake and fish share in animal protein were also lower (see Table 16).

Despite such challenges, the government has recognized the potential of the fisheries sector to contribute to rural development. In 2006, the state unitary enterprise “Mohii Tojik” was established under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan. It plays a coordinating role in the fish farming industry and aims to support the growth of fisheries production. The objectives of the state unitary enterprise are the improvement and development of breeds, fish breeding, increasing and providing the population with fresh products, and fish farming. “Mohii Tojik” also consults farmers on issues of production, vaccination, feeding, preparation and maintenance of ponds.

In 2010, the Ministry of Agriculture formulated the Policy and Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture Development for Poverty Alleviation. The policy consists of four interlinked goals for the fisheries and aquaculture sector, including social goals on poverty alleviation, food security, and increasing employment

<sup>36</sup> This section is largely based on unpublished research conducted with FAO support in 2021–2022 by CACFish Members, including Tajikistan (see FAO, 2023).

**Table 16. Per capita protein intake, 2019**

	Tajikistan	Central Asia	World
		g / capita / day	
<b>Total protein intake</b>	71.6	95.5	83.2
<b>Animal protein intake</b>	23.2	42.8	33.2
<b>Fish and seafood</b>	0.1	0.7	5.5

**Source:** FAO. 2022d. *Aquaculture growth potential in Tajikistan – WAPI factsheet to facilitate evidence-based policy-making and sector management in aquaculture*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/621d3380-27fb-4081-8fc7-83a51e03c00b/content>

“while improving gender equity and [generating] higher incomes and better livelihoods in rural and mountain areas” (Khaitov *et al.*, 2013, p. 53). Small-scale dehkan farms that are engaged in the fisheries sector seem to have the potential for growth.

Despite these significant steps towards improving productivity, there is little recognition of the gender dimensions within the sector. Women are usually engaged in fish feeding, clover cultivation (fodder), cleaning around ponds, and administrative work, as well as in roles such as technical worker, accountant, cook and auxiliary worker; they are also frequently involved in processing, trade and marketing. These jobs are mostly low-skilled, low-paid and of a seasonal nature (and not sustainable). Women’s work in fisheries gets little or no visibility, and there are no specific efforts to improve their access to the sector’s jobs and resources.

In 2019, the Agency on Statistics reported on 300 people employed in the fisheries sector (FAO, 2023). As women often perform their work as informal workers, there could be a significant number of unregistered jobs in the fisheries sector, and, as is also found in agriculture, many jobs are of seasonal nature. A representative from “Mohii Tojik” reported that in 366 fishery farms, “more than 2 500 people are employed, [and] of them, about 20 percent are women” (FAO, 2022e). Furthermore, in interviews with

fish farmers and “Mohii Tojik” enterprise, women’s representation in the fisheries sector was estimated to be between 20 percent and 45 percent (FAO, 2023). A small number of women are heads of fish farms and production enterprises, representing between 10 and 15 out of 366 enterprises (about 3–4 percent). There were no data on the scale of those 366 existing fish farms, how many jobs were created, and to what extent women and men benefited from those jobs (*ibid.*).

The lack of research on fish value chains results in a significant gap in understanding the potential economic benefits that increased investment in the fisheries sector could bring to both women and men. Without comprehensive studies, it is impossible to fully assess how such investments might enhance livelihoods, create job opportunities, or improve the financial stability of individuals within these communities. Furthermore, this knowledge gap prevents policymakers from making informed decisions that could help maximize the economic and social outcomes of the fisheries sector, ensuring that both women and men benefit equitably from its growth. The absence of research also limits the identification of opportunities to promote gender-inclusive development and to address the specific challenges faced by different groups within the sector (FAO, 2016).

# 9. Food security, nutrition and climate change

## 9.1. Food security and nutrition

Despite the progress made in recent years, Tajikistan has the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the Europe and Central Asia region (FAO *et al.*, 2025). It is caused by inadequacies in terms of access, availability, affordability and choices, all of which affect women and men differently. The consequences of food insecurity related to malnutrition and health insecurity also impact on women more acutely. As such, policy choices need to address food and health security in a compound and gender-informed manner.

### 9.1.1. Rates of food security and malnutrition

Despite the annual growth in basic food production, food insecurity remains an issue of concern in Tajikistan. According to the 2021 FAO and WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) across Tajikistan (FAO, 2022b), 19 percent of the households surveyed were classified as moderately and severely food insecure<sup>37</sup> using the Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators for Food Security (CARI) approach.<sup>38</sup> Surprisingly, a larger proportion of the households in urban areas (40 percent) were found to be food secure compared with the households in rural areas (31 percent). This shows that the ability to grow food provides more security than purchasing. Not surprisingly, the prevalence of food insecurity was found to be higher among female-headed households (28 percent) than among male-headed ones (18 percent; *ibid.*).

This gap can be explained by the substantial differences that were observed in food consumption between male-headed and female-headed households. Male-headed households were consuming all food groups in higher frequency compared with female-headed households and the differences were more pronounced for meat, milk, pulses and fruits. Female-headed households were more likely to have poor food consumption with less meat, pulses, milk and milk products. The consumption of cereal, oil and sugar was similar in both types of households.

While concerns over food security persist, Tajikistan has achieved significant progress in the reduction of the prevalence of undernourishment, from 18.5 percent in the period 2013 to 2015 to 8.6 percent in 2019 to 2021 (FAO *et al.*, 2023). There was a large reduction in the number of undernourished people in Tajikistan (from 2.6 million in the period 2000 to 2002 to 800 000 in 2019 to 2021; *ibid.*). In the period 2020 to 2022, 9.3 percent of the population was undernourished, down from 40.4 percent in the period 2000 to 2002 (FAO, 2024).

Despite this progress, Tajikistan continues to experience a relatively high prevalence of multiple forms of malnutrition – overnutrition, undernutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies – both as a result and consequence of food and health insecurity for urban and rural women and their children alike (FAO *et al.*, 2023).

Wheat flour is the main staple in Tajikistan, and household diets, especially in rural areas, are characterized by “too high consumption of bread and oil [and] too little diversity” (WFP, 2018, p. 4). More than three-quarters of food consumption consists of carbohydrates, which results in overweight and obesity among the adolescent and adult population. Forty-one percent of urban women and 36 percent of rural women are likely to be overweight or obese (Agency on Statistics

<sup>37</sup> Moderate food insecurity is characterized by significant consumption gaps, or by being marginally able to meet the minimum food needs only with the aid of irreversible coping strategies. Severely food insecure households often have often extreme food consumption gaps or have suffered significant losses of livelihood assets that will eventually lead to a food consumption gap.

<sup>38</sup> The World Food Programme CARI Guidelines are available at <https://resources.vam.wfp.org/data-analysis/quantitative/food-security/the-consolidated-approach-for-reporting-indicators-of-food-security-cari>.

under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). The proportion of overweight and obese increased from 30 percent in 2012 to 37 percent in 2017 (FAO, 2020c). Tajikistan had the largest increases in the prevalence of adult obesity from 2000 to 2016 among Central Asian countries (FAO *et al.*, 2023). At the same time, in 2020, the prevalence of overweight children under 5 years in Tajikistan (5.2 percent of girls and 9.4 percent of boys) was one of the lowest in the Europe and Central Asia region (*ibid.*).

Obesity is on the rise in rural areas, and so too are rates of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency. In 2020, 21.5 percent of women in rural areas and 13.9 percent in urban areas had not achieved minimum dietary diversity, which consists of consumption of five and more food groups (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020a). Women who live in households with only female adults tend to have less dietary diversity than those who live in households with both male and female adults (Feed the Future FEEDBACK, 2014).

Rural households are less likely than urban ones to consume iodized salt, and rural women are less likely than urban women to take iron tablets during pregnancy and vitamin A post-partum (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and ICF, 2018). At the national level, around 59 percent of women and 53 percent of children under 5 years show iodine deficiency, which results in stunting and wasting. In 2019, 35.2 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years had anaemia, a rate that continues to be higher than the world average, though it has decreased from the 2000 rate, when it was 39.2 percent (FAO *et al.*, 2023).

Nutrition problems are decidedly related to gender inequality. Many women cultivate, purchase and prepare much of the food eaten by families, but they often have limited access to resources, including information about nutrition (FAO, 2017). Women are also affected by undernutrition and malnutrition because they tend to prioritize the nutrition of other members of the family (FAO, 2012), relying more on carbohydrate-based foods such as bread, rather than sources of protein, which they leave for children and male members of the household. Food insecurity for women is one of the most damaging outcomes of gender inequality. It undermines women's health, hinders their opportunities for education and employment, and impedes progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women (FAO, 2005).

Food shortages impact on entire households, but food insecurity can have an especially detrimental effect on prenatal health and development, breastfeeding and child nourishment (FAO, 2016). Because lack of information about nutrition can play a role in household food insecurity, deeper analysis would be useful of how men's role in purchasing food and women's responsibility for preparing meals affect intra-family food choices.

### 9.1.2. Causes of malnutrition and food insecurity

Malnutrition and food insecurity in Tajikistan can be explained by various factors: lack of access to sufficient and nutritious food due to the unavailability of such foods, limited purchasing power, distribution problems at the macro level and choices about how food is used at the household level. They can also be shaped by factors outside the household, such as periodic shocks: weather, irregularity of remittances, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of armed conflicts around the world, high inflation, and the escalating effects of the climate crisis.

Lack of affordability is one of the main reasons for food insecurity in Tajikistan. The 2021 CFSAM survey found that households in both urban and rural areas were reliant on markets to meet their food needs since their own production was not sufficient to cover their domestic needs for the entire year. On average, households were spending 53 percent of their total expenditure on purchasing food and almost one-third of the surveyed households were spending 65 percent or more of their total expenditures on food.<sup>39</sup> No major differences were observed between rural and urban areas, or by the gender of the household head. Respondents also reported that over the last few years, demand for imported high-quality food items had been increasing.

This meant that households were able to spend less on fulfilling their other critical needs, including education and health. It also showed how households were under stress in relation to risk and highly susceptible to any type of shock such as price fluctuation or loss of livelihood (crop failures, loss of employment, sickness of household members, decrease in remittances, and so forth).

In rural areas, the risk of food insecurity is additionally dependent on factors such as the season, size of harvest, amount of remittance income, increase in food costs and even intra-household decision-making. In general, February to April are the months in which the risk of food insecurity is highest because this is the

<sup>39</sup> Refer to the WFP CARI guidelines, available at <https://resources.vam.wfp.org/data-analysis/quantitative/food-security/the-consolidated-approach-for-reporting-indicators-of-food-security-cari>.

time when rural household food reserves are coming to an end, agricultural work that requires expenditure is beginning, and migrant family members are preparing to leave, which also requires additional funds (FAO, 2016).

Food insecurity is also closely associated with gender roles. Severely food insecure households are those that have few assets, cash or savings; they also lack access to kitchen gardens, have little cultivated land and generally do not keep livestock or poultry. These are most likely to be female-headed households. Typical coping strategies for food insecurity include relying on less preferred but less expensive food, limiting portion sizes, borrowing food in-kind or purchasing food on credit, adults restricting food consumption so small children can eat, and not eating for entire days. It appears that women, to a higher degree than men, resort to harmful coping strategies such as restricting food or skipping meals (WFP, 2015). This pattern may reflect the number of food-insecure female-headed households, women's role in food preparation, and the decision to privilege men's nutrition if possible (FAO, 2016).

## 9.2. Climate change adaptation and management

Tajikistan's high vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters represents an additional challenge to the successful management of agriculture. Climate change-induced changes in temperatures and rainfall disproportionately affect rural women and female-led households in Tajikistan who lack the resources to recover from climate-related losses.

### 9.2.1. Manifestations, causes and consequences

Tajikistan's natural environment makes it greatly exposed to drought, but the country also faces the risks of flooding, earthquakes, wildfires, erosion issues on sloping terraces, mudslides and greater water demand during the summer – all disasters that the country is currently ill-equipped to mitigate and that are likely to affect women more.

Although rural and urban populations face similar lifecycle risks and contingencies, rural communities are more vulnerable to natural and environmental risks due to their livelihoods and income-generating strategies, for example farming, which are more susceptible to events such as flooding, drought and land degradation. Climate change-induced variations in temperatures and rainfall are expected to increasingly impact on agricultural production. The World Bank estimates, for example, that as the effects of climate change intensify, average yields of grain and fruit production

are expected to decline in Tajikistan by 15 percent, and 9 percent to 11 percent, respectively by 2050, compared with 2015 (World Bank, 2022d). These decreases are likely to affect the livelihoods of dehkan farmers, especially women dehkan farmers, who have limited adaptive capacity.

Households headed by women with limited resources and funds in rural areas of Tajikistan are especially vulnerable to disasters connected with climate change.<sup>40</sup> Women, along with children and older people, are more likely to be affected by severe weather events such as flooding, landslides and mudslides because of their societal roles (ADB, 2020c). In periods of climatic stress, they have to cope with large volumes of work using fewer resources.

Women are exposed to indoor use of coal and kerosene during lengthy daily power outages in autumn and winter in parts of Tajikistan. Women who collect fuel and cook in households are at risk of developing respiratory problems due to exposure to indoor pollution resulting from traditional fuels or kerosene. Moreover, a lack of access to clean water and fuelwood increases the risk of malaria and water-borne diseases for families, which can cause additional work for women who are responsible for caring for the sick (Ismailova, 2021).

Poor farmers and smallholders – including women – tend to rely on non-sustainable agricultural practices that exacerbate resource depletion and land degradation. These practices may be necessary for their short-term survival but have negative long-term consequences and can increase rural communities' vulnerability. This could be due to lack of awareness and knowledge or the inability of households to afford the required investments and changes in farming practices.

In Tajikistan, women in general, and those in rural areas in particular, lack awareness and have insufficient knowledge about preparing for extreme weather events and responding to them. They also have limited decision-making power to implement adaptive measures.

Due to insufficient state investment in agriculture and the absence of an agricultural insurance system, dehkan farms have little protection against risks associated with climate hazards and emerging adverse weather conditions. The only assistance that dehkan farms receive is state aid in the form of small subsidies for

<sup>40</sup> For a more in-depth analysis, see UNDP (2012).

agricultural inputs or temporary suspension from taxes. Information is not available on the extent to which women heads of dehkan farms receive such aid. In general, though, it is safe to say that they have limited resources to manage or bounce back from climate-related losses (ADB, 2020c).

At the same time, rural women have a good understanding of the interconnected nature of agriculture and are adept at identifying examples and solutions for adapting to climate change. They have the potential to be instrumental in climate change adaptation efforts; that is why a number of government and donor initiatives have increasingly focused on the role of women.

In the process of developing the 2019 Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, the Advisory Group identified a number of gender gaps that prevented women from playing a role in adaptation and mitigation strategies, and these remain valid in 2025 (FAO and Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022):

- » Governmental women's organizations are not tasked with addressing climate change issues.
- » State and non-state institutions lack awareness of the magnitude of climate threats for women, especially women in rural areas.
- » Women's rights NGOs have low awareness of climate change issues.
- » Social norms limit women's decision-making power to undertake adaptive measures.
- » Women lack opportunities to attend climate risk reduction and management workshops and training, while social norms and other structural obstacles hinder women's presence and level of participation in training, particularly in a mixed-gender group.
- » Women lack information on extreme weather event preparedness and response, including knowledge about evacuation and basic survival skills like swimming.

A number of initiatives are currently underway in Tajikistan aimed at closing gender gaps and empowering rural women to become active agents of change – particularly in the context of climate adaptation. These efforts recognize that women are not only disproportionately affected by climate change, but also possess unique knowledge, skills and community connections that can contribute meaningfully to building resilience. One notable

example is a project supported by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), implemented in remote villages across Tajikistan. In many of these communities, the outmigration of men for work has left women to take on expanded roles, including those related to disaster preparedness and community protection. In the Rasht district, for instance, women have been trained by NGOs such as Welthungerhilfe and Mercy Corps to become frontline responders during the rainy season, when the risk of floods and mudslides is highest. These women volunteers now play a critical role in physically protecting their communities, establishing early warning systems, and sharing vital information to reduce disaster risk. Through these training programmes, women not only gained technical knowledge but also enhanced their leadership roles within their communities. The initiative helped foster greater resilience among women and their families, equipping them to respond more effectively to natural hazards while also reducing their long-term vulnerability (OCHA, 2017). To scale up and sustain such efforts, it is essential to adopt a multipronged approach. This includes ensuring women's access to timely and relevant information, building robust communication channels, and leveraging digital technologies such as mobile applications, internet-based alert systems and web networks. These tools can play a vital role in enabling women to participate more actively in climate adaptation strategies, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development planning – especially in remote and underserved areas.

### 9.2.2. Policies

To date, Tajikistan has produced four Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), a requirement to report on how the country is working to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement through National Communications on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2002, 2008, 2014 and 2022 (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022). The First and Second National Communications only partially reviewed the gender aspects of climate change alongside the issues related to the climate change impact on public health. In the Third National Communication, the gender aspects of climate change were considered in more detail in assessments of the vulnerability of women's reproductive health to climate change, while the report focused on raising the level of education and awareness, especially of pregnant women, in connection with climate change. The Fourth NDC had a much more extensive analysis of gender, based on the support provided by FAO and UNDP through the CWFA to mainstream gender concerns. As a result, Tajikistan's enhanced NDC included a dedicated chapter on gender (Chapter

6: “Other information on achieving the goals of the Convention”) which reviewed research, policies and projects related to the impact of climate change on gender and made extensive recommendations (ibid.). How these recommendations were to be implemented, however, was missing, as were indicators of achievement.

The NDS-2030 recognizes the need for more research on the gender impact of climate change, and how, by empowering women, especially in rural areas, durable solutions could be found to mitigate risks and adapt to changes induced by climate change (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2016).

In addition, as mentioned before, the Medium-term Development Program of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021–2025 includes specific tasks and indicators related to the gender aspects of climate change in the Matrix of Actions to be taken under “Environment: Climate change and disaster risk management”. Thus, one of the gender indicators is to increase women’s awareness of the risks of climate change from the base of 15 percent to 35 percent by 2025 (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022).

The National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Disaster Risk Reduction for 2019–2030 (NDRRS), in line with the Sendai Framework, commits to strengthening the evidence and raising awareness of the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to environmental degradation and natural disasters. At the same time, it recognizes that women are not only a vulnerable group but also a valuable resource for disaster risk reduction (FAO and Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022). The NDRRS envisages: establishing a national mechanism to collect, analyse and disseminate information on losses from natural disasters by gender, age and disability; taking into account gender, age factors and disability within regular risk and threat assessments of natural disasters; and developing and implementing gender-sensitive information and a training system to inform the

population proactively about protective and restorative actions following natural disasters. However, there is no indication of how these measures will be implemented, what budget will be allocated or who the partners will be.

The Committee on Environmental Protection has been actively raising awareness on protection of the environment and ecology among rural women, as part of the State Comprehensive Programme for the Development of Environmental Education and Awareness of Population for 2021–2025. Through six centres across the country, awareness is raised about protection of the environment, and training is offered about everyday practices in rural households, such as the dangers associated with burning plastic waste.<sup>41</sup> While the Committee on Environmental Protection cooperates with the Committee on Women and Family Affairs to inform women about innovative technologies in agriculture and food security, they estimate that it will also be important to engage the Imam Khatibs of mosques in order to take the ecological messages to the grassroots.

All of these documents and strategies point to the recognition that methods of adaptation to climate change and disaster risk reduction need to be gender-sensitive. Yet how this will be achieved is not currently clear. Additionally, more knowledge and methodological support is necessary for organizations working on climate change in Tajikistan. An FAO assessment of the NDC did not find any schemes that prioritize women or men in the numerous normative documents adopted by the government or in the number of financial mechanisms from local sources for renewable energy (FAO and Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022). The report emphasized the need to increase efficient collaboration across agencies and sectors on gender equality and climate change. To reach this goal, all parties involved – government institutions, civil society actors and international organizations – should understand the benefits of connecting gender equality and climate change policy.

<sup>41</sup> Interview conducted for this assessment with Zarafo Kiyomzoda, First Deputy Chairperson, and Shahlo Azizbekova, Lead Specialist of the International Relations Department, Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 18 November 2022.



# 10. Conclusion

**Main message:** Women are important agents and innovators in the modernization and transformation of agriculture and improvement of rural livelihoods. However, to be able to act as the engine of growth and innovation, they need to be empowered, educated and supported, not only on farms, but also within households and rural communities. Empowering women farmers by giving them access to resources, such as land and credit, not only increases their incomes and empowers them within their communities, but it can also increase agricultural productivity, reduce poverty in rural communities, and improve food security and nutrition. Investing in rural women and their quality of life is investing in food security and the future of the country.

The agricultural sector plays a central role in the economic life of Tajikistan and in the lives of the majority of the population of the country, which is mainly rural and employed in the sector. However, the sector has faced significant challenges relating to modernization and improving its profitability. Household income from agricultural activity rarely provides enough to cover family expenditure on health care, education and everyday livelihoods. Low incomes and the non profitability of the sector are not only leading to poverty in rural areas, but also to labour migration, mostly by men. Where men have migrated, “left behind” married women are among the most socially and economically vulnerable women in Tajikistan. They are responsible for child care and household management, in addition to family farms and livestock. Increased responsibility, however, has not translated into increased support for rural women to overcome gender-related challenges.

Although women are the primary labour force in agriculture and contribute significantly to food security, their work is undervalued, under-recognized, and largely unpaid. Consequently, women not only make up the majority of the rural population living in poverty, but they are also at risk of multidimensional poverty and vulnerable to other social risks, in particular

food insecurity, malnutrition and use of child labour. Additionally, the increased burden on women – in the absence of men and compounded by the lack of specialized advice and guidance – prevents small-scale farmers, particularly female farmers, from participating in public life as well as in agrifood supply chains.

All of this makes women in rural areas – particularly young women – highly vulnerable, especially because their work and household responsibilities increase when men migrate for work. Rural women lead difficult lives, shouldering the burden of heavier labour on the land, often with inadequate or poorly adapted equipment. Despite having land certificates in their name, they frequently lack the rights to fully control or benefit from the land. In addition, while they are responsible for household expenses, they are often excluded from decisions about how to invest remittances sent by migrant workers. These women face all of these challenges without having greater decision-making power in the household or on the farm. Their situation is further compounded by social norms and stereotypes that discriminate against them, reinforcing their marginalization and limiting their opportunities for empowerment.

Overall, women bear more responsibilities but have fewer rights. Ultimately, the situation of women working in agriculture cannot be separated from a set of interrelated issues, including:

**1) The resurgence of traditional values and social norms that hinder the advancement of women and restrict their ability to capitalize on opportunities in agriculture and rural livelihoods.** Patriarchal social norms, which have become more entrenched in rural areas, limit women’s mobility, participation and rights, creating significant barriers to their full engagement and empowerment in agricultural activities.

**2) The burden of having to run farms and households in the absence of men who are in migration.** The growth in the number of de facto FHHs as a result of men’s migration has not led to a positive impact on

women's economic empowerment. This is because of women's inadequate access to resources, limited opportunities for employment, unsatisfactory working conditions and significant domestic and work burdens. Furthermore, additional responsibilities do not necessarily translate into decision-making power over productive resources (farms, equipment, livestock, etc.), or income generated as a result of this work, because even when men are abroad, they continue to perform the role of head of the household.

**3) The agricultural sector has long been neglected and needs to be prioritized for modernization and support to strengthen the country's economy.** In Tajikistan, rural areas are largely relegated to the private sector and donors, with insufficient government investment and attention. While donors and international organizations are heavily involved in rural livelihoods and agriculture through various innovative projects, significant challenges remain. These include issues of sustainability, the ad hoc nature of many projects, a lack of scaling up of successful initiatives, and insufficient national ownership, particularly beyond donor-funded pilot programmes. For the sector to thrive, it is crucial to address these gaps and establish a more coordinated, long-term strategy with greater government involvement.

**4) The availability of social infrastructure varies greatly between different regions – mountainous areas versus valleys, southern versus northern parts of the country, and areas closer to regional centres versus remote villages.** The lack of social infrastructure in rural areas significantly hampers the work of women in agriculture and value chains, often forcing them to bring their children to the fields as there is little support for child care. Women also bear the burden of dealing with infrastructure challenges, such as inadequate access to water, transportation and electricity, and the absence of kindergartens and preschools in rural areas. In the valleys and southern regions, water shortages, including issues with salinity, gravity flow and inadequate piping systems, create significant barriers to irrigation, while mountainous areas are less affected. Rural areas frequently experience electricity cuts during the winter months, further disrupting daily life. Transportation options are more accessible in the north, where public transport routes continue through mahallas, whereas other rural areas rely on neighbour-driven taxis to travel between villages and towns. The lack of reliable and affordable transportation limits women's ability to access markets and other essential services, while the ongoing issues with water and electricity availability

obstruct progress in the agricultural sector. These infrastructure challenges create major obstacles for women and hinder overall development in rural areas.

**5) Decent work opportunities are lacking, which forces a large proportion of the working-age population, particularly women, to take up precarious on- and off-farm employment and low-productivity jobs.** In rural areas, non-farm labour opportunities are scarce, especially for women. Temporary solutions, such as women working as day labourers (*mardikors*), are common, but this sector is highly risky, with unregulated work conditions that leave women vulnerable to abuse. These limitations have contributed to growing inequalities: between urban and rural areas; within rural areas, between large farms and their workers; between families with sons in labour migration, who can provide stable financial support, and those without; between households with access to water for irrigation and those who face daily challenges in obtaining it; and between large farms that benefit from access to markets, equipment and extension services, and smaller, often female-managed farms that lack such opportunities. Women in rural areas, particularly female-headed households, tend to be the most disadvantaged in these inequalities. **Notwithstanding these fundamental challenges, women should be recognized and treated as agents of change.** By focusing on the growing role and potential of women in agriculture, the country can revitalize the agricultural sector while also addressing critical issues such as land degradation and biodiversity loss.

Young women, in particular, represent a highly resourceful group with the potential to drive the modernization of agriculture and rural development in Tajikistan. They have demonstrated innovation, a willingness to take risks, a strong desire to learn, and are adept at using information and communications technologies. Both young and older women are the most likely to join organizations, actively seek solutions to improve family land productivity, explore market opportunities, and manage their households. With the right education, they can become powerful catalysts for innovation and change.

Therefore, there is both an opportunity and an urgent need to invest in the potential of women in rural areas. This investment can serve as a gateway to modernizing agriculture through innovation, technology, mechanization and improved value chains, ultimately driving increased productivity and economic growth.

# 11. Recommendations

The findings and conclusions from this Country Gender Assessment lead to the following key recommendations. These recommendations are primarily directed towards FAO, but also extend to policymakers, especially those in state structures with mandates related to agriculture, rural development and women's status in Tajikistan. Additionally, civil society organizations are also key stakeholders in these recommendations.

The central objective of the recommendations is to foster an enabling environment that ensures the protection and fulfilment of rural women's rights, while simultaneously enhancing the productivity and sustainability of agrifood systems. The recommendations aim to address existing gender disparities and provide actionable steps for improving rural women's participation and decision-making power in agricultural processes, ensuring that they have equal access to resources, opportunities and technologies. By creating a more inclusive environment, the goal is to empower rural women economically and socially, contributing to more resilient and sustainable agrifood systems that benefit both women and wider society.

The recommendations encompass both short-term and long-term interventions. These include policy reforms, capacity-building efforts, support for infrastructure development, and the integration of gender-sensitive approaches in agricultural practices. Through these efforts, Tajikistan can improve the overall well-being of rural women while advancing its agrifood sector towards greater efficiency, equity and sustainability.

## 11.1. For FAO

1. In compliance with FAO's Gender Equality Policy 2020–2030, and FAO's Environment and Social Management Guidelines, ensure that gender equality concerns are explicitly addressed in the Country Programming Framework and all FAO interventions in the country. Ensure that in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects their impact on socially deprived and disadvantaged groups, and primarily rural women and men, are adequately taken into account. Priority areas, targets, outcomes, outputs, activities and indicators of the CPF and all FAO interventions should be based on thorough gender analysis and address the gaps as part of the broader commitments made by the government both internationally and nationally towards achieving the SDGs and pro-people and pro-poor development.
2. Continue to actively support the government in formulating and implementing evidence-based, gender-responsive agricultural and rural development policies to achieve sustainable agriculture and food security and to ensure equal access to natural and productive resources, services, decent employment and markets. For this, promote and support gender-sensitive research and value chain analysis (for example, in cotton, horticulture, livestock breeding, sericulture and apiculture) in collaboration with national stakeholders.
3. Build knowledge and competencies in gender equality and women's empowerment to support rural and agricultural development, by providing support to collect, analyse and disseminate gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated data, and raise gender awareness in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Forestry Agency and other key national stakeholders, including the agencies responsible for formulating and implementing rural development policies to meet international commitments on gender mainstreaming in the formulation of state policy on agriculture, rural development and food security.
4. Support the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan to promote the use of FAO's Core Set of Gender Indicators in Agriculture to generate and disseminate statistics about women's role in agriculture and increase the use of gender-specific indicators in data collections that are currently gender neutral.

5. Engage more actively to address the strategic needs of rural women and girls, increasing their access to resources, qualifications and economic empowerment, through learning, training and income diversification. Improve women's access to productive resources, such as land, water, quality and climate-resilient inputs (seeds, seedlings, fertilizers) which increase yields and production value.
  6. Expand women's access to extension and rural advisory services through gender-sensitive measures, such as training and employing female extension agents, developing extension materials based on the needs of women farmers, accommodating women's schedules (during the day and also seasonally) and establishing information portals that can be accessed digitally or through existing social networks.
  7. Develop pilot or demonstration sites for gender-responsive smart agriculture that can serve as models and be replicated throughout the country. Support women in specific value chains and promote their engagement in models such as "one village one product" and geographic indicators in Tajikistan. Implement other potential measures wherever possible in compliance with FAO commitments.
  8. Support advocacy campaigns to raise the profile of rural women, dispel gender stereotypes and promote the benefits of gender equality for households, smallholders and the economic development of the country. Working in close cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and other national counterparts, consider celebrating prominent rural woman, including women farmers from the most economically depressed and remote areas, for the annual event of International Rural Women's Day on 15th October.
3. Support income diversification and off-farm employment for rural women through small businesses and self-employment opportunities. Develop policies and programmes that support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), helping women and men in rural areas expand from individual entrepreneurship to larger business ventures. Formalize the work performed by rural women on family farms and enterprises. Policies should foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem that includes business development services, and access to skills, finance and markets, in line with priorities under the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan.
  4. Invest in education and vocational training for women, both in-person and online, focused on farming, agribusiness, water management, livestock care, food safety and climate adaptation. Scale up successful initiatives, such as presidential quotas for girls from remote regions to access higher education, and support scholarships for women agricultural specialists (for example, agronomists), focusing on creating employment opportunities on family farms. Identify barriers to rural employment for female graduates by conducting surveys among Tajik Agrarian University alumni to understand their employment outcomes, farmers' needs and local social dynamics.
  5. Raise awareness of the gender dimensions in agricultural policies, climate change, food security and rural development.
  6. Adopt FAO's Core Set of Gender Indicators in Agriculture and collect sex-disaggregated data. Ensure farm registries are gender-sensitive and regularly analyse and share results with stakeholders.

### **11.2. For the Ministry of Agriculture and other national counterparts in Tajikistan**

1. Conduct a gender analysis of national legislation on agriculture, rural development and food security, ensuring alignment with CEDAW Article 14 and the SDGs. Develop recommendations to integrate the needs and priorities of rural women into existing and upcoming legislative acts.
2. Address harmful social practices that undermine the roles of girls and women. Incorporate gender equality and women's rights into curricula at all educational levels. Raise awareness among men and older women about the importance of empowering young women to improve household livelihoods and overall well-being.
7. Increase women's access to extension services through gender-sensitive measures, such as employing female agents, developing materials tailored to women's needs, and accommodating flexible schedules. Conduct gender-sensitive assessments to create responsive, demand-driven services for female farmers and entrepreneurs.
8. Improve women's access to credit and provide training to invest in farming, agribusinesses, machinery, and inputs such as technology, seeds and fertilizers. Encourage banks to offer low-interest loans and preferential rates to rural women, especially the most vulnerable. Increase access to information and new technologies (internet, mobile apps, online services) to enhance women's resilience and reduce their vulnerability. Simplify online banking

access and provide digital banking training for women in remote areas. Support credit unions and revolving funds for rural women, especially those in need.

9. Enable landless women to access land and other productive resources to engage in crop planting, and form cooperatives. This promotes land equality and gives women a voice in irrigation, production and environmental management. Support should include loans, training and technologies. Develop educational campaigns on climate change, environmental hazards, waste management and agricultural adaptation, targeting women and providing resources for implementation. Ensure women with expertise hold decision-making roles in climate change delegations.
10. Identify and address barriers to women's participation in water users' associations, such as time constraints and gender stereotypes, and create strategies to boost involvement. Strengthen the capacity of WUA staff and ensure water infrastructure meets women's needs and is culturally appropriate.
11. Provide women with small-scale, manageable farming technologies and equipment to reduce reliance on hired services. Establish greenhouses to grow high-value crops year round, boosting rural profitability. Facilitate access to the internet, mobile phones, and digital skills for agricultural knowledge exchange. Create platforms for women in agriculture to share insights and trade, and use mobile phones to deliver agricultural advice, financial services and legal consultations. In areas with limited internet access, set up call centres to offer these services.
12. Invest in rural infrastructure (water, roads, transport, child care). Establish daycare centres for children of women working outside villages and improve health services, particularly for pregnancy and childbirth.
13. Explore agricultural insurance schemes to enhance resilience against climate and other shocks. Encourage small farms to unite for collective ownership, shared production and joint marketing.
14. Promote the cultivation of high-value products such as honey, spices and medicinal plants among rural women, and encourage farm-to-table delivery models and shared production for processing and sales. Foster innovative business models to promote rural entrepreneurship.

### 11.3. For civil society organizations

The following recommendations are directed to NGOs, civil society organizations including service-providing and advocacy groups, professional associations, the private sector, academia, and the media.

1. Focus on engaging disadvantaged rural women and girls in economic activities, ensuring decent working conditions and equal pay.
2. Help rural women access both material (land, water, finance, equipment, seeds) and non-material (ICT, knowledge, technology, skills) resources.
3. Ensure women and girls participate in training and learning activities that lead to economic empowerment, and create programmes for young women and men to generate income in rural areas.
4. Facilitate rural women's access to social protection benefits.
5. Raise awareness of rural women's challenges and contributions through research, reports and media coverage.
6. Involve women and NGOs in monitoring food security and climate change impacts, and support the creation of a Rural Women's Association or a Women in Agriculture group.
7. Support data collection on gender-based violence, particularly economic violence against rural women and girls from disadvantaged groups.
8. Address barriers to young rural women's participation and leadership by raising awareness of their rights, including economic rights.
9. Advocate for improvements in infrastructure (water, roads, transport, child care), which impact on both agriculture and women's unpaid care work.
10. Encourage academic institutions to develop curricula focused on women in agriculture and the implementation of the SDGs.
11. Raise gender awareness among policymakers and the public, educating both men and women on rural women's contributions to food security and the negative impact of violence on women and society.
12. Work with men to challenge stereotypes and promote a more balanced gender division of labour.



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# Appendix 1.

## Research participants

**Table A1.1 List of people interviewed**

Organization	Name	Position
FAO Representation in Tajikistan	Oleg Guchgeldiyev	FAO Representative in Tajikistan for Debriefing
	Daler Domullodjonov	National Technical Officer, Land and Water
	Tolibjon Khakimov	National Project Coordinator, Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)
	Guljahon Arbobova	Project Coordinator
	Firuz Asoeva	Community Mobilizer
Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan	Qiyomzoda Zarafo Sufijon	First Deputy Chairperson
	Shahlo Azizbekova	Leading specialist of Department of International Relations and Work with Environmental Conventions
Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan	Javohir Akobirova	Head of Department for Gender Development and International Affairs
Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan	Nigina Anvari	Deputy Minister
	Nigina Rajabova	National Expert, Secretary of Agrarian Reform
Ministry of Energy and Water Resources of the Republic of Tajikistan	Muslihiddin Kholiqzoda	Head of Department of Water Resources
	Shokhrukhi Rakhmatzoda	Chief Specialist, Department of Water Resources
	Zamira Davlatova	Chief Specialist, Department of International Affairs
Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan	Malika Yarbabaeva	Head of Light Industry and Sericulture Department
Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan	Shahnoza Nodiri	Deputy Minister
	Mehrobsho Amirbekzoda	Deputy Director of Labour and Employment Agency
	Nilufar Mizrobzoda	Chief Specialist of International Relations
Ministry of Transportation of the Republic of Tajikistan	Shoista Saidmurodzoda	Deputy Minister
	Laylo Ulugzoda	Head of Women's Council
Tajik Agrarian University	Iskandar Samandarzoda	Vice Rector of International Relations Department
Asian Development Bank	Shanny Campbell	Country Director
	Gulnora Kholova	Gender Specialist

Organization	Name	Position
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	Lola Salimova	National Gender Expert, Central Asia Women in Business Project
International Organization for Migration	Elizabeth Linklater	Programme Support Officer
	Muzafar Shodiev	Senior Programme Assistant
	Davron Hikmatov	Project Assistant
	Shokirjon Shokirov	Project Assistant
Sarob Cooperative	Muhamadi Muminov	Chairperson of Management Board/Director
UN Women	Aziza Hamidova	Country Programme Manager
	Diana Ismailova	Programme Coordinator
United States Agency for International Development	Malika Jurakulova	Program Development Specialist, Design and Social Inclusion
USAID Agribusiness Competitiveness Activity in Tajikistan	Lilia Tverdun	Chief of Party and Director
	Khosiyat Komilova	Social Inclusion, Advocacy and Communication Senior Manager
Women and Girls Empowered Program/Center for International Private Enterprise	Mohru Makhmudova	CIPE Country Representative for the WAGE Program

**Table A1.2 Participating organizations and fieldwork locations**

Government	Donor and international organizations	Private sector organizations	Fieldwork locations
Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan	FAO Representation in Tajikistan	Sarob Cooperative	<b>Districts of Republican Subordination</b> » Hisor district » Shahrinav district
	Asian Development Bank		
Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	United States Agency for International Development	<b>Khatlon region</b> » Dusti district » Jomi district » Vakhsh district
	International Organization for Migration		
Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan	UN Women	USAID Agribusiness Competitiveness Activity in Tajikistan	<b>Sughd region</b> » Ayni district » Bobojon Gafurov district » Jabbor Rasulov district » Shahruston district
Ministry of Energy and Water Resources of the Republic of Tajikistan			
Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan	Women and Girls Empowered Program/Center for International Private Enterprise		
Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan			
Ministry of Transportation of the Republic of Tajikistan			
Tajik Agrarian University			

# Appendix 2.

## Questions and keywords used to guide focus group discussions

Categories for general questions posed, depending on the context

### Overall

- » How has life changed in the past ten years? Twenty?
- » What is your main problem?
- » What is your recommendation for improving life?

### Household

- » How many children?
- » How many in household?
- » Anyone in migration?
- » Mother-in-law
- » Who is responsible for care work?
- » Distribution of gender role

### Education level

#### Employment and budget

- » Where income comes from
- » Salaries? Remittances? Market? (Percentages)?  
Mardikor?
- » If mardikor, how is it organized?
- » Use of budget in households
- » Who brings money?
- » Who uses money and on what?

#### Time use

- » Time used in household
- » Time used in field
- » Free time
- » Seasonal work

### Housing conditions

#### Health

- » Diseases
- » Access to medical sites
- » Prevention

#### Food

- » Decision about food
- » Nutrition knowledge decision
- » Food waste
- » Safety of food knowledge

#### Land

- » Acres of land of household and when acquired
- » In whose name?
- » Main crops
- » Garden plots
- » Access to equipment
- » Procurement of seeds, pesticides and fertilizers  
(Who? How?)

#### Where they get advice from

- » Rural advisory services
- » Agronomist?
- » Extension services?
- » Older generation

#### Livestock

- » Who tends them?
- » What to do when sick

#### Agricultural equipment

- » Own any labour-saving technologies?
- » Access to equipment by women?

- » Storage facilities

#### **Infrastructure**

- » Electricity?
- » Source of water for irrigation
- » Source of water for drinking
- » Member of water users' association?
- » Transportation
- » Medical point?
- » Kindergartens?

#### **Information and knowledge**

- » Access to information, source of learning
- » Internet?
- » Desire for training

#### **Access to markets and agribusiness**

- » Purchase (who, prices)
- » Entrepreneurial experiences?
- » Access to financial services loans?
- » Value chain?
- » Access to markets for selling produce?

#### **Coping mechanisms**

- » Social security
- » Barter
- » Borrowing
- » Market trade
- » Produce

#### **Spending on what?**

- » Food
- » Clothes
- » Wedding
- » Leisure

#### **Participation in local governance and representation**

- » Contribution to associative work?
- » Collectives?
- » Contact with government committees?

#### **Disaster risk**

- » Knowledge about and adaptation to climate change, how?

#### **Social protection**

- » Cash transfer
- » Public work
- » Pensions

#### **Gender-based violence**

- » Physical, mental, sexual?
- » Where to go in case?



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National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods: The Republic of Azerbaijan. (2022)

National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods: The Republic of Moldova. (2022)

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National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods: Serbia. (2021) – also available in Serbian

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