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Organization of the
United Nations

NATIONAL GENDER PROFILE OF AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS - **KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT SERIES



COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT

National Gender Profile
of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods
- Kyrgyz Republic

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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Preface

This National Gender Profile for the Kyrgyz Republic was written by Elisabeth Duban under the guidance of Dono Abdurazakova, Gender and Social Protection Specialist, and Giorgi Kvinikadze, Statistician, of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU). Kuliipa Koichumanova, Advisor to the Chairman, and Aigul Zharkynbaeva, Director of the Statistical Censuses Division, both of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, provided valuable organizational and logistical support, as well as important data and information, during this project.

This gender profile has also benefited from information contained in two reports written by Gulfia Abdullaeva, gender and socio-economic research consultant for FAO: (1) a national literature review of gender issues in the agricultural sector; and (2) a draft Country Gender Assessment for agriculture and rural development for the Kyrgyz Republic.

This National Gender Profile was prepared under the “Strengthening national capacities for production and analysis of sex-disaggregated data through the implementation of the FAO Gender and Agriculture Framework (GASF)” project, funded by the FAO/Turkey Partnership Programme (FTPP). The overall objectives of the project were to assist beneficiary countries in developing gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated datasets on the agricultural and rural sector, to assess the current status of the rural population – both women and men – and to ensure evidence-based and informed policy-making processes.

Within the scope of this project, expert meetings and a workshop organized jointly by FAO and the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, were conducted in Bishkek in 2014 and 2016. The meetings included discussions on existing indicators and data sources that could be used to generate gender statistics, as well as critical data gaps relevant to gender and agriculture.

Special thanks are extended to participants of a validation workshop held in Bishkek on 18-19 February 2016, who provided feedback on an earlier draft of this report. The recommendations made by the group of experts, both data producers and data users, were addressed as comprehensively as possible in the final draft. The contributions made by personnel of the National Statistical Committee, particularly from the Departments of Socio-Demographic and Labour Market Statistics and Real Sector Statistics, are especially appreciated.



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Currency equivalents

As of 1 April 2016

Currency Unit:		Som (KGS)
KGS 1.00	=	\$0.0141
\$1.00	=	KGS 70.83

Acronyms

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EPMS	monthly allowance to low-income families with children
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FHH	female-headed household
FTTP	FAO/Turkey Partnership Programme
GASF	Gender and Agricultural Statistics Framework
GBV	gender-based violence
GII	Gender Inequality Index
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MFI	microfinance institution
MHH	male-headed household
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSO	National Statistical Office
PMC	pasture management committee
REU	FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
TVET	technical vocational education and training
WUA	water users association

I. Introduction

The Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan) is a landlocked country with a land area of 199 951 square kilometres and a population of over 5.8 million people, two-thirds of whom live in rural areas (about 3.9 million people).¹ Because the Kyrgyz Republic is characterized by mountainous terrain (over 90 percent of the territory is located 1 500 metres above sea level), glaciers and high-altitude steppe, much of the land is not habitable. Almost a third of Kyrgyz territory is agricultural land (32.8 percent), and 13 percent are forests.² Of agricultural lands, only a small proportion is arable or devoted to permanent crops. A reflection of the Kyrgyz people's historical way of life as nomadic herders, the largest share of agricultural land is still permanent meadows and pastureland (85 percent of agricultural land, or 48 percent of the total territory).³ Agriculture remains an important sector of the economy, one of the few means of employment in rural areas, and is critical for the food security of the large rural population.

During the Soviet period, two forms of agriculture were prioritized: livestock rearing (small ruminants and cattle) – an occupation that drew upon the Kyrgyz people's traditional skills and knowledge – and some crop production, especially in the Fergana Valley, an area that had long been farmed by settled Uzbek communities. Soviet livestock programmes introduced fine-wool sheep in place of hardy local breeds, and new practices, such as the use of imported feed to support large herds on collective farms. Such practices have arguably led to the degradation and over-grazing of the more easily accessible pasturelands and the loss of traditional livestock breeds.⁴ Under the Soviet government, increasing numbers of livestock also led to the prioritization of agricultural lands for forage crops and the decreased use of areas for cereal and cotton crops.⁵ Even today, the top three crops are mixed grasses and legumes, potatoes, and wheat, with the first category totalling more than the second and third categories combined.⁶

After independence in 1991, the agricultural landscape changed dramatically: a large number of former state and collective farms were dissolved and land holdings were transferred to individual private ownership. Livestock ownership also shifted from state farms to small individual farms. During the early transition years (early 1990s), agricultural production declined steeply, but continuing reforms and the increased productivity of family farms have led to a considerable recovery of the agricultural sector.⁷ More recently (2011-2013), the agriculture sector continues to experience some growth, but much less than other sectors, such as construction, information and communications, and trade. In 2013, agriculture accounted for 14.6 percent of GDP, a drop of almost three percent from 2010.⁸ National policy on the development of agriculture focuses on improving the quality and efficiency of agricultural production, developing cooperative farming, improving the management of natural resources, developing markets and trade in agricultural products, and improving rural financial systems. Other strategic policy documents similarly highlight the need to enhance agricultural production and raise the living standards of the rural population.

Gender policy is comprehensive in the Kyrgyz Republic, and the government takes a mainstreaming approach that addresses the intersections of gender equality and socio-economic development. At the same time, in the specific context of agriculture, there are several areas in which the goals of national policy on rural livelihoods and gender equality are not harmonized. Women's contributions to agricultural production are not clearly defined in state policy, nor are gender disparities in access to and control over productive resources fully articulated. One of the reasons for these gaps is a lack of clear data. If such data were available, they could aid in the more precise identification of barriers to gender equality, and in turn, state policy could become more focused and effective.

A. Gender statistics in the Kyrgyz Republic

Gender statistics are unique among data collections because they reflect differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men in all areas of life. The term "gender statistics" refers to data with several important characteristics: (1) they are collected and presented disaggregated by sex; (2) the data reflect particular gender issues; (3) the data are based on concepts and definitions that reflect the diversity of women and men and capture all aspects of their lives; and (4) data collection tools and methods are used that take into account stereotypes

1 National Statistical Committee. 2015c. Kyrgyzstan in Figures. Bishkek. p. 36, p. 45. [in Russian].

2 National Statistical Committee. 2015b. Environment in the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek. p. 10. [in Russian].

3 Ibid. p. 35; FAOSTAT. Land use data. (Available at <http://faostat3.fao.org/browse/area/113/E>). [accessed December 2015].

4 Fitzherbert, A. 2000. Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles. Kyrgyzstan. FAO. (Available at <http://www.fao.org/ag/agp/agpc/doc/counprof/kyrgi.htm>). [accessed January 2016].

5 Lerman, A. & Sedik, D. 2009. Agrarian Reform in Kyrgyzstan: Achievements and the Unfinished Agenda. Budapest, FAO REU. p. 13.

6 FAOSTAT. Production top three crops data. (available at <http://faostat3.fao.org/browse/area/113/E>). [accessed December 2015].

7 Lerman & Sedik, 2009, p. 10.

8 National Statistical Committee. 2015d. National Accounts of the Kyrgyz Republic 2010-2013. Bishkek. pp. 13-14. [in Russian].

and social and cultural factors that may introduce gender bias.⁹ Gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data are the foundation of inclusive policy-making on rural development and agriculture, because these types of data reveal critical disparities that would otherwise be overlooked.

Since the Kyrgyz Republic declared independence from the Soviet Union, important developments have been made in the production and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. The 2008 law “On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women” requires the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (the country’s national statistics office, the NSO) to collect and analyse gender relevant data. State agencies, local self-governing bodies and the heads of legal entities have to submit relevant information on gender issues to the NSO.¹⁰ Funding for producing gender statistics is provided from the state budget.

In fact, the production of gender statistics as a means of providing information to policy-makers began in the late 1990s. The systemized collection of data against specific indicators was initiated after the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. The NSO published the first *Women of the Kyrgyz Republic* compilation in 1996, in response to a growing demand for data on a number of gender issues. Since 1998, when the publication was re-organized as *Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic*, the NSO has released a dedicated publication on basic gender statistics every two years. In 1999, the National Statistical Committee published a separate analysis entitled, *Gender Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic*, based on data from the first national census, and introduced a new chapter in the *Women and Men* publication about performance indicators towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women. Periodically, the NSO has used sample population surveys to gain further information about differences in the lives of women and men, such as time use surveys (2005, 2010, 2015) and a public opinion survey about domestic violence (2006).

The NSO follows UN guidance on the recommended minimum set of gender indicators and currently collects and produces data for 33 of the 52 indicators.¹¹ Data relevant to six thematic areas (demographics, education, living standards, labour market, health care, crime and disability) are published online and updated regularly by NSO specialists.¹² Statistics are not produced for indicators relating mainly to the topics of human rights for women and girls, and public life and participation in decision-making.¹³ Statistics on rural women are compiled from a range of indicators in which the data are disaggregated by both sex and location. The country’s first agricultural census, conducted between 2002 and 2003, produced important data on rural employment by sex, the number of men and women managing farms, and women’s access to credit and productive assets.¹⁴ According to the Program on the Improvement and Development of State Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015-2019, the database of sex-disaggregated indicators is to be further expanded in line with international good practices, and the dissemination of data on gender issues in agricultural development is highlighted as a special task.¹⁵

The NSO produces thematic statistical publications, for example on small and medium-sized business, that include some data disaggregated by sex, but the data are not necessarily also published in compilations of gender statistics. In addition, for sectors that are generally perceived as gender-neutral (for example, infrastructure improvement, transport and energy) sex-disaggregated data are lacking. No statistics are available on particular emerging issues, such the impact of climate change on rural women.¹⁶

The capacity of the NSO to generate gender statistics is limited by the fact that it does not operate an independent gender statistics unit that could play a coordinating role in the agency. Instead, gender-relevant data are managed by the division responsible for social statistics. The current law “On State Statistics” does not include a definition of gender statistics, which complicates the process of identifying expert statisticians and integrating gender statistics throughout the work of the NSO.

Although most of the NSO database is sex-disaggregated, an important weakness in other state institutions responsible for gender equality policy is the “lack of coordination and harmonization of the exchange of information”, including, but not limited to, statistical data.¹⁷ In consequence, “... many complex issues, such as

9 FAO. 2014. E-learning course: Gender in Food and Nutrition Security and Policy and Legislation. Gender Statistics for Informing Policy and Legislation.

10 Article 8, Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women”.

11 Note that the NSO considers one indicator from the recommended set, on female genital mutilation, to not be relevant for Kyrgyzstan and thus does not use it.

12 See <http://www.stat.kg/en/statistics/gendernaya-statistika/> for more information.

13 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2014. National Review of the Kyrgyz Republic in the framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Bishkek. p. 39.

14 Ibid. p. 41.

15 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2015b. Program on the Improvement and Development of State Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015-2019, adopted by Government Resolution No. 144, 24 March 2015.

16 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 56.

17 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2012b. National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Achievement of Gender Equality to 2020. Adopted by Government Resolution No. 442 of 27 June 2012. [In Russian].

migration, informal employment, the links between education and the labor market etc., cannot be analyzed in terms of their gender dimension, and [therefore] are not being adequately addressed.”¹⁸ As was demonstrated at an expert workshop held in Bishkek (February 2016) to review a draft of the present report, not only is data sharing across agencies limited, but different government bodies do not necessarily have a common understanding of key definitions (for example, household head or holder of agrarian land), or they may interpret the same data differently in terms of gender disparities.

Existing gender statistics can provide considerable information about the status of rural women and men, but there are also critical gaps that could be addressed with additional data.

B. Scope and methodology of the gender profile

This national gender profile has been developed under a regional project to improve the production and analysis of sex-disaggregated data relevant to gender and agriculture. Therefore, the main task of this report is to compile quantitative data in order to shed light on gender disparities in rural settings and the status of rural women across a number of dimensions, with a focus on inequalities in agricultural employment. This report does not cover the breadth of issues that impact on the lives of rural women, but it focuses on the topics that are most relevant to the FAO mandate. For example, the profile only provides limited information on important topics such as infrastructure deficiencies in rural areas, labour migration, access to education and gender-based violence.¹⁹ Nevertheless, this national gender profile is a collection of data and information from diverse sources, with the aim of providing policy-makers, researchers and activists working with rural communities with a clearer picture of the types and degree of gender inequalities in rural Kyrgyzstan.

The starting point for this profile was a review of the core set of 18 gender indicators pertaining to agriculture and rural areas that was developed by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in order to standardize data collection and comparison in the region.²⁰ Initial analysis revealed that in Kyrgyzstan, there are only partial data available for the core indicators. Partial data refers to data that are not disaggregated by sex, are disaggregated only by sex of the household head, or not cross-tabulated (for example, by both sex and another variable). In drafting this report, therefore, the most recent and relevant official data sources were given priority, and the data were analysed as thoroughly as possible to shed light on the main gender inequalities in agriculture and concerning rural livelihoods. This gender profile relies on the most recently available quantitative information and survey data compiled by the NSO.

Where relevant, qualitative studies and data collected by international development organizations or NGOs, through small-scale surveys, are used to supplement official statistics. Note that due to variations in methodology, sample size, locations and the years when surveys were conducted, most of the data are not directly comparable. When information is combined in this gender profile, it is for the purposes of drawing general conclusions. Reports from household surveys contain limited data disaggregated both by sex and by residence. Some proxy information can be used to shed light on the particular circumstances of women (for example, data about female-headed households), but it is not as definitive as data collected about women as individuals (for example, women farmers and business owners).

The methodology adopted for this research project also included a validation workshop, conducted in Bishkek on 18-19 February 2016, during which experts commented on a draft version of the present report. The group of reviewers consisted of both data producers and data user stakeholders, such as statisticians from the NSO, representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration, the Ministry of Social Development, the State Agency on Local Self Government, the national parliament, agriculture experts, gender experts from the civil society sector, and representatives of international development organizations that support projects dedicated to rural women. In addition to providing recommendations on the scope of the national gender profile, the participants offered a number of specific suggestions and insights. The information has been incorporated into the final version of the national gender profile.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Both comprehensive gender assessments for Kyrgyzstan, such as those conducted by the World Bank and UNDP, and sector-specific gender analysis, conducted by development organizations and Kyrgyz gender experts, are useful resources.

²⁰ The Core Set of Gender Indicators in Agriculture can be accessed from the FAO website: <http://www.fao.org/europe/resources/e> [English] and <http://www.fao.org/europe/resources/ru/> [Russian].

C. Overview of data sources

Producing gender statistics relevant to agriculture and rural livelihoods in Kyrgyzstan is made more 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, and all three factors are rarely cross-tabulated. While the NSO produces gender statistics for a number of indicators, only a few are directly relevant to agriculture. Household surveys conducted by the NSO and international organizations, such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, proved to be useful data sources for compiling a picture of rural life in Kyrgyzstan.

Participants in the validation workshop drew attention to several other data sources that could potentially be used to generate gender statistics relevant to agriculture in the future. However, such data sources are currently in the process of development, may contain inaccuracies at present, have not been fully analysed, or are not accessible to those outside of the agency that produces them.

Potentially, the most useful of these data sources are the agricultural census and rural household books.²¹ The country's second agricultural census²² was piloted in three rural communities in 2013, but it has not yet been conducted for the country as a whole. Pilot testing was undertaken to evaluate new indicators and data-collection methods. Some of the new indicators refer to rural infrastructure and sex-disaggregated data on employment in agriculture.²³ The sex-disaggregated data generated from the pilots is not complete, and because testing was conducted with around 7 000 farms, they may not be representative of the country as a whole. At the time of completing this gender profile, there was no clear schedule for conducting the full census. However, rural household books (described below) are an important data source that will complement the findings of the agricultural census.

The NSO is currently conducting a project to modernize the rural household book system.²⁴ Household books are a registry maintained by local authorities. They have been used since 1935 to collect detailed data about rural households. The modernization project aims to incorporate the data-collection task within the work of local self government (*aiyl okmotu*) and to upgrade record-keeping from a paper format to an electronic database. This will ensure improvements in the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information entered by municipal employees. The data collected for each rural household is extensive (consisting of 200 indicators), including the sex of the household head, the marital status of family members, education level, employment, entrepreneurial activities, land size and use, types and number of livestock, agricultural equipment and machinery, and any small-scale workshops or processing plants on the holding. The NSO has been working with preliminary data collected from household books, but the data have not yet been fully processed or checked for accuracy. Therefore, these data are not included in this publication. When the project has been completed, the database generated by the household books will be a very important source of gender statistics that should provide up-to-date information about women and men in rural communities, and also allow for analysis of trends by village and by region.

The data sources that were consulted for this gender profile, as well as other potential sources, are listed below along with a brief summary of their limitations.

Table 1. Data Sources

Data source	Description
Databases of the NSO	<i>Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic</i> publications, as well as statistics on: population, living standards, time use, agriculture and small and medium entrepreneurship.
Kyrgyz Republic Demographic and Health Survey (2012)	Household survey for monitoring the population and health situation (including household characteristics, maternal health and women's empowerment), disaggregated by rural/urban residence.
Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in the Kyrgyz Republic (2014)	Household survey data for indicators tied to the MDGs (for example, nutrition, health, water and sanitation), disaggregated by rural/urban residence.
Food Security Assessment. Kyrgyz Republic (2012)	Survey of rural and urban households conducted by the World Food Program, with some data disaggregated by sex of the household head.
Unified State Register of Statistical Units ²⁵	An automated database of all economic entities in the country, including legal entities, individual entrepreneurs and peasant farmers, with a unified classification and coding system.
Agriculture Census	Piloted in 2013. A full census is planned but has not yet been conducted.
Household books	Administrative records on rural households kept by <i>aiyl okmotu</i> . There is an ongoing project to digitize the household books and to develop software to enable the retrieval of sex-disaggregated data from the database.

21 In Russian: похозяйственная книга.

22 The first census of the agricultural sector of the Kyrgyz Republic was conducted in 2002.

23 National Statistical Committee. 2014c. Results of the Pilot (test) of the Agricultural Census 2013. Bishkek. p. 50. [in Russian].

24 This project is a joint effort between Statistics Norway and the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.

25 In Russian: единый государственный регистр статических единиц (ЕГРСЕ).

II. Country overview

Kyrgyzstan has nine administrative divisions: seven provinces (*oblast*) - Batken, Jalal-Abad, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, Osh, Talas and Chui; and two cities of national importance, meaning they have the status of a province - the capital, Bishkek, and Osh. The country's urban population lives in 31 cities and nine towns (settlements having urban status); the majority of urban residents (98 percent) live in cities. The rural population lives in 453 *aiyl aimak* (the smallest type of administrative unit that unites groups of villages and settlements, equivalent to a rural municipality) that are comprised of 1 884 villages.²⁶

There are three levels of governance in the Kyrgyz Republic: national, provincial and local self government. Rural communities, are governed by the elected head (roughly equivalent to mayor) based in the executive office of local government (*the aiyl okmotu*) and local councils (*kenesh*).

Map. Administrative Divisions of the Kyrgyz Republic



Source: United Nations Geospatial Information Section (available at: <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/kyrgysta.pdf>)

In order to better assess gender differences in agriculture and rural development, it is useful to consider how Kyrgyzstan fares generally in terms of gender equality and human development. The Gender Inequality Index (GII), a measure used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), indicates that Kyrgyzstan experiences a loss in potential human development equivalent to 35 percent, due to disparities between female and male achievements, empowerment and economic status (calculated as a GI value of 0.353, where zero indicates full equality and a value of 1.00 represents the highest level of inequalities).²⁷ The GI is based on indicators in reproductive health, literacy, political representation and labour market participation, but it does not take into account other important dimensions, such as the tendency for women to work in informal and unpaid labour, including agricultural work. Still, the most recent GI values indicate that Kyrgyzstan has more

²⁶ National Statistical Committee. 2015g. Social Trends of the Kyrgyz Republic 2010-2014. Second Edition. Bishkek. p. 20. [in Russian]

²⁷ UNDP. 2015. Human Development Report 2015, Work for Human Development. Statistical Annex, Table 5: Gender Inequality Index. New York. p. 225.

positive outcomes in some dimensions (notably women's political participation and education levels) than the average for the European and Central Asian region combined, as well as for Tajikistan and Turkey specifically (the two other countries included in this FAO/Turkey partnership project). In contrast, the maternal mortality rate in Kyrgyzstan is considerably higher than it is for the region as a whole. While the national female labour force participation rate is greater than the average for the European and Central Asian region, the gap between female and male participation is also significant (see Table 2, below).

Table 2. Gender Inequality Index Values for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkey (2014)

	2014 GII Value	Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100 000 live births)	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1 000 women ages 15-19)	Share of seats in parliament (% held by women)	Population with some secondary education (% ages 25 and over)		Labour force participation rate (% ages 15 and over)	
					F	M	F	M
					Kyrgyzstan	0.353	75	29.3
Tajikistan	0.357	44	42.8	15.2	95.1	91.2	58.9	77.1
Turkey	0.359	20	30.9	14.4	39.0	60.0	29.4	70.8
Europe and Central Asia	0.300	28	30.8	19.0	70.8	80.6	45.6	70.0

Source: UNDP, 2015, Statistical Annex, Table 5: Gender Inequality Index. pp. 224-227.

The UNDP Human Development Report for 2015 is devoted to the theme of how work can enhance human development and it notes that there are critical connections between education levels and employment in agriculture (globally, workers who lack technical skills are pushed into agricultural work).²⁸ UNDP also points out that while agriculture has declined in importance within economies around the world, the importance of agriculture to individual workers in terms of employment opportunities remains high. In all regions, the female share of the agricultural labour force has remained static or increased over the last 20 years due to a range of factors, including male migration to seek better employment.²⁹ Of significance for Kyrgyzstan, addressing gender imbalances in paid and unpaid work, and women's exposure to vulnerable employment in agriculture, are critical for sustainable development.

A. Historical context

A detailed overview of Kyrgyzstan's recent history is beyond the scope of this national gender profile, but a review of events that have had especially deep impacts on the country's rural population, on agriculture and on gender roles is included here.

Since independence, the transition period has seen the transfer of both land and livestock from state-owned enterprises to individual ownership, a process that has been complex. At the end of the Soviet era, 500 agricultural enterprises controlled 98 percent of arable land (over 1.3 million hectares), and the remaining two percent of the arable land was divided among hundreds of thousands of small household plots.³⁰ As of 2013, state and collective farms contributed only 2.2 percent of the total share of agricultural outputs. More than 380 000 registered peasant and individual farms were responsible for the remainder of the agricultural outputs, and they also controlled most of the 1 170 000 hectares dedicated to crop production.³¹

Politically, the country has experienced instability and regime change that has highlighted the need for reform and meant that long-term planning and economic development strategies have at times been halting. Most recently, in 2010, anti-government protests that began as criticism of rising energy prices and perceptions about the unfair distribution of land, wealth and political power, spread from the north of the country to Bishkek; several months later, conflict – further fuelled by long-standing social tensions – erupted in the south of the country. The 2010 events resulted in significant loss of life and injury, the destruction of public and private property (including housing), a large increase in the number of internally displaced persons and instability in the region. The gendered impacts of the 2010 violent events have yet to be explored in-depth. One of the most immediate and devastating impacts was loss of life and personal injury. The official report on the events, a result of an independent and international investigation, confirmed that women were the targets of gender-based

²⁸ Ibid. p. 64.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 113.

³⁰ Lerman & Sendik, 2009, p. 7.

³¹ National Statistical Committee. 2014a. Agriculture in the Kyrgyz Republic 2009-2013. Bishkek. p. 11. [in Russian].

violence (GBV).³² The events also led to economic losses, with entrepreneurs, especially those engaged in petty trade and farming, among the hardest hit groups. Lack of security meant that farmers had difficulties cultivating their land, harvesting crops and taking livestock to pasture, especially because women and children perform important field work, and there were fears for their safety.³³ Border closures complicated the process of buying seeds and fertilizers. Men engaged in agricultural production reported that looting had led to the closure of local harvest collection centres, and at the time, farmers did not know where to deliver harvests or whether they would even be paid for their crops.³⁴ Moreover, women from rural areas did not travel to conflict-affected areas to sell agricultural products, losing one of their main sources of income.

The government notes that during the conflict and in the post-conflict period, women, both in their official capacities and as members of the general public, “displayed considerable initiative” and cooperated effectively to assist victims of violence.³⁵ Women’s formal political leadership also came to the fore after the 2010 events. A number of women were appointed to key leadership posts, including several ministers, the chair of the Supreme Court, the head of the National Bank, and the appointment of the interim President of the Kyrgyz Republic – the first female president of any country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Labour migration, especially from Kyrgyzstan to neighbouring countries, is also a significant feature of the country’s recent history. Fuelled by periods of instability, structural changes to the economy, job losses in rural areas and the global economic downturn, a significant proportion of the population migrates for the purpose of employment. By World Bank estimates, remittances account for 31 percent of the country’s GDP,³⁶ which places Kyrgyzstan second after Tajikistan as one of the most remittance dependant countries in the European and Central Asian region. Labour migration, both internally from rural areas to cities and externally (primarily to the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan), is not an exclusively male phenomenon, and women are also highly mobile. For example, according to the Russian Federal Migration Service as of April 2016, out of the 574 194 Kyrgyz citizens among official migrants, 351 121 (61.2 percent) were men.³⁷ Notably, comparing the patterns of female and male labour migration from Central Asia to Russia, Kyrgyzstan has the highest proportion of women among migrants from the five countries.³⁸ Internal migration in Kyrgyzstan exhibits the opposite trend: out of 22 600 inter-regional migrants in 2014, 14 600 were women (65 percent), mainly rural women migrating to urban areas.³⁹ While migration patterns change over time, and seasonally, some research has suggested that the number of Kyrgyz women migrating alone exceeds the number joining husbands or families abroad.⁴⁰ Even when women migrate alone, this does not mean they are without dependents. According to one survey, more than a quarter of female migrants are the primary breadwinner (27 percent of women migrants from Kyrgyzstan) and support their children and other family members at home.⁴¹ While women, and men, may migrate independently, the choice to migrate is generally taken through careful family negotiations. In the case of female migrants, families also consider who will fulfill the woman’s responsibilities in her absence, particularly those of a young wife.⁴²

The impacts of labour migration on men, women and their families is a nuanced and complex issue. Many people migrate “successfully” and contribute significantly to the well-being of their households. But labour migration itself can also have an informal and unregulated character that offers little social protection to the migrant worker. A large number of migrants undertake unskilled work in construction, trade, the service industry and seasonal agricultural work, often performing jobs that are not attractive to the local population due to low wages and poor working conditions. Many male migrants work in unsafe conditions and are at risk of workplace injuries and even death. A study of Kyrgyz migrants to Kazakhstan noted that women who move with their families and young children for seasonal agricultural work face especially difficult conditions since, “no particular account is taken of their needs: for example, there are no separate facilities for women to stay in and no provision is made to accommodate small children, including those who are being breastfed.”⁴³ Within Kyrgyz society, female labour migration has a more negative character than male migration. The former is often associated with issues

32 See, generally, Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC). 2010. Report of the Independent and International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in the Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.

33 Salmorbekova, Z. 2010. Post-Conflict Women’s Needs Assessment in Southern Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek, UN Women. p. 16.

34 Ibid. p. 26.

35 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2013. Fourth Periodic Report of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. para. 77.

36 World Bank. 2013. Migration and Remittance Flows in Europe and Central Asia: Recent Trends and Outlook, 2013-2016. (available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/02/migration-and-remittance-flows-in-europe-and-central-asia-recent-trends-and-outlook-2013-2016>). [accessed February 2016].

37 Migrant. Ferghana.ru. The number of labor migrants from Central Asia in Russia has declined slightly. 07 April 2016. (available at <http://migrant.ferghana.ru/tag/statistika>). [accessed April 2016]. [In Russian].

38 Ibid. Among official migrants to Russia, for example, women represent less than 20 percent of labour migrants from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and more than 35 percent of official migrants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.

39 National Statistical Committee, Department of Social Statistics. 2015. About the situation of rural women in the Kyrgyz Republic. p. 11. (available at <http://new.stat.kg/media/files/af3cde42-5f4a-40f8-81fb-802d8fcfaf5.pdf>). [In Russian].

40 International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). 2009. Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan: Exploitation of Migrant Workers, Protection Denied to Asylum Seekers and Refugees. Paris. p. 31.

41 UN Women. 2009. A Needs Assessment of Women Migrant Workers: Central Asia and Russia. Almaty. p. 28.

42 Reeves, M. 2009. Beyond economic determinism: microdynamics of migration from rural Kyrgyzstan. *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*. [Online] 4(66). (available at <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/4/ri24-pr.html> [in Russian] and https://www.academia.edu/204451/Beyond_economic_determinism_the_micro-dynamics_of_migration_from_rural_Kyrgyzstan [in English]).

43 FIDH, 2009, p. 32.

such as the dissolution of families, the destruction of family values, increased crime rates among children and the deterioration of women's health, especially maternal health. Participants of workshops on the draft national strategy on gender equality (held in 2011) noted that these negative phenomena are not usually associated with male migration, because women are perceived to be "homemakers by nature" and labour migration is viewed as an interruption to the "traditional process" of having children and raising them in a family.⁴⁴ Experts pointed out, however, that female migration also has positive effects in Kyrgyzstan, for instance, giving women economic independence, increasing their status in the family, promoting new and more egalitarian cultural models and decreasing divisions in traditional gender roles.

Migration has a deep impact on the family members who stay behind, especially in rural communities. Wives of migrants who remain behind, "carry a heavy burden of work within the household after their husbands leave", especially as children and elderly family members are more likely to be excused from household work due to age, health issues or needing to concentrate on studies.⁴⁵ Women are generally fulfilling their traditional role as carers for family members and the household, while also taking on roles usually undertaken by men, such as tending livestock and carrying out physically heavy agricultural work. Children in migrant families also work alongside the adults. One study indicates that the children of migrants who stay behind spend more time in agricultural work and animal husbandry (and have less free time) than children in non-migrant families; however, all children spend around an equal amount of time on housework.⁴⁶

Because a large number of Kyrgyz women migrate with their spouses, the older generation, especially elderly women, also play an important role in raising their grandchildren. The strain of caring for grandchildren, sometimes termed an "abandoned generation", is considerable. In addition to health complications and the physical burdens of caring for children and the household, elderly parents of labour migrants may struggle financially. According to research carried out among elderly people in several villages in the Chui, Naryn and Batken provinces, little more than a third received support (mainly food, but also money, clothes and medicine) from their migrant children (of these, 48 percent were receiving support from sons and 30 percent from daughters).⁴⁷ For most of the respondents (83 percent), pensions were their main source of income, followed by remittances (24 percent) and then livestock or animal husbandry.⁴⁸ In households where migrants do not send remittance income, pensioners supply a significant proportion of the family budget. It is also noteworthy that in Kyrgyzstan traditionally, sons support their parents in old age, especially the youngest son in the family. However, widespread labour migration means that there may be no adult sons at home, which increases the burden on daughters, daughters-in-law, the elderly and children. Additionally, the fact that a considerable number of daughters are supporting their families means that, "more and more women take on the role of income earners as migrants and contribute to the well-being of their parents."⁴⁹

B. National policy context

Since independence, the Kyrgyz Republic has initiated several phases of policy and structural reforms to improve the status of women and promote gender equality. Throughout this time, important legislation has been adopted, national programmes and plans have been defined, and the institutional machinery for gender equality has been strengthened. Significantly, since the first national programme for the advancement of women, *Ayalzat* (1996-2000), was adopted, the concept of gender equality has been broadened from a focus primarily on women to a recognition of the importance of equality in rights and opportunities between women and men. In addition, mainstreaming gender into national development programmes and policies has become an institutional practice.

Since the *Ayalzat* programme was completed, a succession of national plans on gender equality have been adopted in parallel with the inclusion of gender considerations in national development strategies. Gender experts lobbied to be included in the drafting process of the Country Development Strategy for 2007-2010, and thus for the first time, the measures in the resulting national plans (on the country's development and on gender equality) were "synchronized and mutually reinforcing"⁵⁰

44 Material provided by Anara Moldosheva, gender expert, and facilitator of the 2011 workshops to discuss the draft Gender Equality Strategy to 2020.

45 Nasritdinov, E. & Schenkkan, N. 2012. A Portrayal of Absence: Households of Migrants in Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek, SIAR Research and Consulting/HelpAge International. p. 19.

46 Ibid. p. 15.

47 Ablezova, M., Nasritdinov, E. & Rahimov, R. 2008. The Impact of Migration on Elderly People: Grandparent-Headed Households in Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek, Help Age International Central Asia and Social Research Center of the American University of Central Asia. p. 15.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid. p. 21.

50 Karybaeva, M., Koichumanov, T. & Divinskaya, A. 2008. A Mapping Study of Gender Issues in the Implementation of the Paris Declaration in the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek, United Nations Development Fund for Women. p. 38.

The current policy on gender equality is articulated in three core documents: the National Strategy on Gender Equality to 2020 (adopted in 2012, the country's first long-term gender strategy); a National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2015-2017; and the National Strategy on Sustainable Development for the Kyrgyz Republic for 2013-2017. The national strategy and national plan on gender equality are structured around four core priorities: (1) women's economic empowerment; (2) developing a system of functional education⁵¹; (3) eliminating gender discrimination and improving access to justice; and (4) gender parity in decision-making and expanding women's political participation. Both documents recognize the needs of specific social groups, which includes rural women as well as young people, the elderly and people with disabilities. Special attention is devoted to strategies for improving rural women's non-formal education, especially building information technology (IT) skills and the use of information and communications technologies (for example, the Internet), in order to prepare them to take advantage of new employment and business opportunities, especially those that are compatible with domestic responsibilities.⁵²

The National Gender Equality Strategy foresees that improving skills in this area will positively impact on societal perceptions about the professional career opportunities available to rural women, but that such changes also depend on increased dialogue with employers in technology-based businesses. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality includes objectives to improve functional education in reproductive health among rural men, with activities in two pilot regions.⁵³ The National Strategy on Sustainable Development contains a dedicated chapter on gender equality with a focus on strengthening the institution of the family. While the intersections of rural development and gender equality are not addressed explicitly, the strategy does draw attention to issues which have particular relevance for rural women, such as the link between women's economic empowerment and investment in families, developing non-traditional fields of employment for women, and reducing early marriage and gender-based violence.⁵⁴

One of the most significant developments in gender policy in the Kyrgyz Republic is the requirement that gender issues and a women's rights agenda be considered by all state institutions and that they share responsibility for implementing and monitoring the policy itself. Thus, the national institution for gender equality – the National Council on Gender and Development under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic – chaired by the Vice-Prime Minister, is supported by a Gender Unit within the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (which serves as the executive office) and also by a system of gender focal points in line ministries, state agencies and offices of local authorities.

Of particular relevance to this national gender profile, several regulatory, legal and policy developments have had a particularly positive impact on improving the status of rural women. For example, the law "On Agricultural Land Management" (2006) enabled women to obtain and register individual rights to land shares by dividing land plots into individual parcels for independent management and transactions. Furthermore, the law recognizes the equal rights of female and male family members to inherit land.⁵⁵ Several amendments to the Criminal Code increased the sentences for crimes that, while not restricted to rural areas, are statistically committed more frequently within rural communities, such as polygamy, under age marriage and forced marriage (as well as kidnapping and coercion to marriage). National healthcare reform has included measures to improve the coverage of basic services in remote areas, through government resolutions on encouraging physicians to work in rural locations and a national mobile medical programme that covers 1 400 villages (representing more than 2.7 million people or 80 percent of the rural population).⁵⁶

Box 1. Day of Rural Women

The government has supported several republic-wide conferences dedicated to rural women. The first conference was held in 2013 with the participation of women from every province, and members of the national parliament, government offices and international organizations. Conference participants resolved to establish an annual meeting on topics of concern for rural women. In 2014, the second conference was dedicated to increasing rural women's entrepreneurship potential. Among the participants were women representing a diverse range of rural businesses, including artisans, producers of agricultural products, and representatives of the tourist industry, as well as credit organizations, and representatives of national and local government.

The 2015 conference focused on the role of rural women in promoting family values. One of the conference's aims was to discuss and develop recommendations to the state and the public on strengthening the institution of the family through promoting gender equality and empowering rural women. The 2015 conference was also a forum to discuss the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee on the Kyrgyz Republic's fourth periodic report. On the eve of the conference, the government declared June 18 the official "Day of Rural Women". While the annual conference attracts high-level participation, it also provides rural women with an opportunity to network at national level. The dedicated day will increase public recognition of the need to support rural women so that they can realize their potential.⁵⁷

51 "Functional education" refers to a system of adult life-long education that supports the creation and strengthening of the life skills that are needed to improve women's and men's quality of life, including health, education and professional development opportunities.

52 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2012b.

53 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2015a. National Action Plan on the Achievement of Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015-2017. Adopted by Government Resolution No. 786 of 20 November 2015. Objective 2.2.3.

54 National Council for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic. National Strategy on Sustainable Development for the Kyrgyz Republic for 2013-2017. Chapter 4, section 4.5.

55 Law No. 129 of the Kyrgyz Republic, amended on 25 July 2006.

56 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 22; Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2013, para. 200.

57 Background material provided Nazgul Beysheeva, gender expert, Kyrgyz Republic, 2015.

Despite the existence of official policy on gender mainstreaming in national strategies, as well as recognition of the major role that women play in agricultural production, a brief review conducted for this gender profile found that key documents concerning agricultural reform are gender blind, meaning they make no reference to differences in the roles of, or possible impacts on, women and men. For instance, the Strategy on Agricultural Development of the Kyrgyz Republic to 2017, the Program on the Development of Pasture Management of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2012-2015, and the (draft) State Program on the Development of the Cooperative Movement in the Kyrgyz Republic all describe the kinds of difficulties that farmers face and which reduce agricultural production. These particular documents, however, neglect to identify any gender-based obstacles to farming or differences in the degree to which women and men farmers experience such difficulties.

C. Demographic context

Kyrgyzstan has a population of close to six million people (5 895 062), around two-thirds of whom live in rural areas. Some provinces, however, are characterized by much larger rural populations, as illustrated below in Table 3.

Table 3. Rural Population by Region, in Figures and Distribution (2015)

	Total rural population	Distribution of rural population (% of total)
Kyrgyzstan	3 908 322	66.3
Batken	367 300	76.4
Jalal-Abad	879 300	78.3
Issyk-Kul	333 100	71.8
Naryn	236 800	86.3
Osh	1 134 600	92.4
Talas	212 000	85.8
Chui	714 100	82.1
Bishkek (city)	4 200	0.4
Osh (city)	27 000	10.0

Source: National Statistical Committee, Population statistics (available at <http://www.stat.kg/en/statistics/naselenie/>) and Socio-economic situation of the regions (available at <http://www.stat.kg/ru/socialno-ekonomicheskoe-polozhenie-regionov/>).

Kyrgyzstan is currently experiencing urbanization, with annual urban population growth (in both 2013 and 2014) at a slightly higher rate than that of rural areas. This trend is opposite to that observed in 2010 and 2011.⁵⁸ Internal migration and the growth of urban populations puts pressure on limited housing and leads to overcrowding. Another problem related to rural-to-urban migration is the growth of informal and semi-formal settlements around major cities, primarily Bishkek and Osh. Such settlements are established when migrants occupy former agricultural lands, and the houses they build generally lack access to even basic infrastructure such as water and electricity.⁵⁹ Migrants living in these settlements usually lack registration documents for the neighbouring city and, therefore, they face difficulties accessing social services, such as healthcare and education. These peri-urban residents are often engaged in agriculture, both crop and livestock production, although this is generally in addition to other forms of employment.

The distribution of women and men differs slightly by location. In urban areas, women account for 52.7 percent of the population, but in rural areas, where the birth rate is higher, men are marginally better represented, at 50.5 percent of the total population.⁶⁰ The ratio of women in the population also increases with age, and by the age of 65, women outnumber men in both rural and urban areas. The disparity between the number of women and men reaching pension age is related to women's earlier retirement age (five years before men), and also men's shorter life expectancy. These gender differences have important implications for the rate of poverty among women, who live longer at pension age, as well as men's ability to enjoy a healthy life after retirement.

⁵⁸ Note that in 2012, 13 urban settlements were reclassified as rural settlements. National Statistical Committee, 2015c, p. 45.

⁵⁹ UNECE. 2010. Country Profiles on the Housing Sector: Kyrgyzstan. Geneva. p. 5.

⁶⁰ National Statistical Committee. 2015h. Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2010-2014. Bishkek. p. 13. [in Russian].

Table 4. Distribution of Urban and Rural Population, by Sex and Age Group (2015)

	Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total population (number)	1 932 873	1 975 449	1 045 218	941 522
Total below working age	658 490	688 820	294 768	307 126
Total of working age ⁶¹	1 099 851	1 203 595	640 869	593 163
Total above working age	174 532	83 034	109 581	41 233

Source: National Statistical Committee, Population statistics (available at <http://www.stat.kg/en/statistics/naselenie/>).

The population of Kyrgyzstan is diverse and comprises more than one hundred nationalities. Approximately 72 percent of the total population is of Kyrgyz nationality, followed by Uzbek (14.5 percent) and Russian (6.2 percent) nationalities. There are small populations of Dungans, Uygurs, Tajiks and other national groups.⁶² Although many households are of mixed nationality, census figures for households in which all members share the same nationality show that the distribution of Kyrgyz and Uzbek households between rural and urban areas is close to the national average (64 percent of solely Kyrgyz households and 62 percent of solely Uzbek households are based in rural areas), while most solely Russian households are based in urban areas (67 percent) and solely Dungan households are located in rural areas (70 percent of Dungan households).⁶³ The representation of national minority populations also has a regional character. For instance, the largest Uzbek and Tajik populations are in the southern part of the country, mainly in the regions of the Ferghana Valley, which is an area that has historically been devoted to settled agriculture.

Box 2. Definition: Rural Population

The population and housing census defines urban areas according to classifications determined by the Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) that defines all residential areas as either cities, urban-type settlements and settlements. All other types of residence are considered "rural."

<http://www.stat.kg/en/klassifikatory/>

The most recent population and housing census conducted in Kyrgyzstan (2009) indicates that the average family size in urban areas was 3.8 members and 5.2 members in rural areas.⁶⁴ Most households are nuclear families (almost 640 000 households), followed by extended families (defined as several nuclear families living together, and accounting for over 380 000 households).⁶⁵ Nuclear families are slightly more common in urban areas, but extended families are still quite typical. Within the category of nuclear families, the large majority consist of a married couple with children, followed by families consisting of a mother and her children. In 2009, over 52 000 urban and almost 43 000 rural households were classified as single mothers with children (which represented 11 percent of all urban families and 6.4 percent of all rural families, or 8.3 percent of households overall).⁶⁶ In contrast, single fathers accounted for almost 6 000 of urban households and almost 7 000 of rural households. Over 9 000 Kyrgyz nuclear families consisted of grandparents raising grandchildren. The most common form of extended family is a married couple, with or without children, living with the parent or other relative of one of the spouses. It is of note that when single parents are raising children, they are more likely to do so alone (in a nuclear family), rather than living with one of their parents or another family member. This pattern is consistent for both single mothers and single fathers. While there were 42 997 rural households consisting of single mothers and children, there were only 20 311 households of single mothers, children and another adult family member.⁶⁷

Box 3. Definition: Female-Headed Household

FAO makes a distinction between two types of female-headed households: de facto FHH 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; de jure FHH are those which have no male partner, and include women who are widowed, divorced or have never been married.⁶⁸

The Kyrgyz population and housing census does not define FHH, but as noted in the text above, it distinguishes between households of single mothers and children (with no other adults) and households in which a mother and children live with another registered adult (usually her parent). In the first case, this is considered a FHH. In the second case, this could be a FHH, but it is not necessarily one.

In Kyrgyzstan, the head of the household is traditionally male. However, even though precise data about female-headed households (FHH) are lacking, the high level of male labour migration has left a large number of households that are *de facto* headed by women. There are 95 111 households consisting of single mothers and children that could be considered female-headed households, but this definition does not take into account other family arrangements in which the household head is female. As noted above, when households consisting of mothers and children, with or without other adult member/s, are combined, there are

61 Working age for women is age 16-57 and for men it is age 16-62.

62 National Statistical Committee, 2015g, p. 22.

63 National Statistical Committee. 2011a. Population and Housing Census of the Kyrgyz Republic. Book V. Households and Families of Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek. pp. 89-97. [in Russian].

64 Ibid. p. 9.

65 Ibid. p. 19.

66 Ibid. p. 23.

67 Ibid.

68 FAO. 2011. The State of Food and Agriculture, Women in Agriculture, closing the gender gap for development. Rome. p. 23.

136 434 such households in Kyrgyzstan. Within the 2012 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 27 percent of surveyed households were classified as female-headed, a figure that had not changed since the survey was administered in 1997.⁶⁹ The proportion of FHH in rural areas had increased, however, from 18 percent to 21 percent, but it decreased in the same period in urban areas, from 39 percent to 36 percent. Other studies have found a higher overall proportion of female-headed households, and, likewise, they estimated that FHH are more common in urban areas and, therefore, concluded that the number of FHH in the country is increasing. For instance, a survey of 2 000 households (more than two-thirds of which were rural households) for an emergency food security assessment, found that 34 percent of the households could be classified as FHH (40 percent in urban areas and 27 percent in rural areas, and reaching as high as 48 percent in Bishkek and 58 percent in Naryn province).⁷⁰

D. Human development context

Although not the focus of this national profile, women's and men's human capital, particularly health and educational attainment, plays a central role in their ability to access employment opportunities and higher paid work, and is ultimately the means of escaping poverty. The Kyrgyz Republic exhibits some distinct gender patterns in terms of health and education indicators, but very few such indicators are also disaggregated by rural location. While these gender disparities should be given consideration in relation to rural development, greater research is needed to build up a more complete picture of the well-being of the rural population.

Health

Data on average **life expectancy** at birth indicates that there is a gender gap of more than eight years between males and females. On average, male life expectancy at birth is 65.3 years compared with female life expectancy of 73.5 years.⁷¹ It should be noted that life expectancy for both sexes has been increasing steadily, but also that data disaggregated for rural and urban populations are not available. The main causes of death for women and men are similar and include diseases of the circulatory or respiratory systems, cancers and heart disease. Men, however, are more likely to die from infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, and diseases of the digestive system. Men are also far more likely to be involved in life-threatening external events, such as traffic accidents, accidental alcohol poisoning and suicide (in 2014, there were 2 399 male mortalities due to external causes, compared with 708 female mortalities).⁷²

Sex-disaggregated data on life expectancy is important for identifying the causes of male poor health, risk-taking behaviours and mortality and should also be considered in the context of elderly women's well-being. The fact that elderly women outnumber elderly men puts them at greater risk of poverty and social isolation in old age.

Within general investments to improve the health of the population, **maternal health** has been a special priority area for the government. Over the last few years, the maternal mortality rate has fluctuated but remains high on average. In 2014, there were 50.1 deaths per 100 000 live births for the country as whole, but rural areas exhibit higher levels of maternal mortality than urban areas (57.4 deaths per 100 000 live births in rural areas, compared with 37.9 deaths in urban areas).⁷³ Some regions exhibit very high maternal mortality rates, namely Batken (108.7 deaths per 100 000 live births) and Naryn (135.7 deaths).⁷⁴ Kyrgyzstan has also improved its registration system for child and maternal mortality, bringing it in line with international standards. These changes make it difficult to compare official data for past years and to evaluate progress on maternal mortality in Kyrgyzstan with that of neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, the World Health Organization calculates that the average maternal mortality rate for the European region is 16 deaths per 100 000 live births.

While the country has introduced improved **perinatal care** practices in almost half of all maternity hospitals, and the majority of births are attended by skilled healthcare personnel⁷⁵, a number of factors that are characteristic of rural areas persist. The high maternal mortality rate is attributed to problems with maternity hospitals (a lack of technical equipment, irregular supply of water, electricity and heat, and insufficient emergency care), a shortage

69 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & ICF International. 2013. Kyrgyz Republic Demographic and Health Survey 2012. Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic and Calverton, Maryland, USA. p. 23

70 World Food Programme. 2012a. Follow-up Emergency Food Security Assessment. Kyrgyz Republic. Rome. p. 9.

71 National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 1.5. p. 20.

72 Ibid. Table 1.16. pp. 27-28.

73 Ibid. Table 5.1. p. 133.

74 Ibid. Table 1.13. p. 26.

75 UNDP Kyrgyzstan. 2010. The Kyrgyz Republic. The Second Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals. Bishkek. pp. 40-41.

of skilled obstetricians, gynaecologists, neonatologists and anaesthetists at the provincial and district levels, and women's own socio-economic situation and cultural factors.⁷⁶ Many women are not aware of the signs of risky pregnancy, and there are taboos, especially in rural communities, around discussing reproductive health, family planning and safe contraception.⁷⁷ Rural women also tend to have poorer nutrition than urban women, and they must manage heavy workloads even when pregnant. Poor birth outcomes are also associated with domestic migration, both internally and abroad. An increasing number of women do not register with local antenatal services; they may change residences frequently, and, therefore, they often have no health care while pregnant. Typically, such women return home very close to delivery. Indeed, official analysis indicates that almost every third woman who died in childbirth was not registered during her pregnancy.⁷⁸

The Ministry of Health in the Kyrgyz Republic has adopted the World Health Organization recommendation that pregnant women have at least four **antenatal visits** during pregnancy. The DHS found that while 93 percent of urban women have received this standard of care, only 79.3 percent of rural women have four or more antenatal visits.⁷⁹ Women in rural areas were also more likely than women in urban locations to have received no antenatal care during pregnancy (3.5 percent compared with 1.5 percent). Nevertheless, of those who did receive care, there is little difference in type of services they received.⁸⁰ The large majority of women, in both urban and rural areas, delivered their babies in public sector medical facilities (home births are generally infrequent), and were assisted by a skilled provider (for around a quarter of women this was a nurse or midwife, and for close to three-quarters it was a doctor).⁸¹ Steps have been taken to ensure that at-risk populations, including pregnant women, are registered with a healthcare provider regardless of residence, and safe motherhood campaigns are also used to raise awareness among women themselves.

Gender experts point out that girls' **underage marriage** (defined as marriage in which at least one of the spouses is under the age of 18), and the early onset of child-bearing, is more characteristic of rural communities than urban ones. This topic is discussed in more detail below, but it is noted here that the fertility rate among young women is another indicator of the prevalence of early marriage. The birth rate among women aged 15-17 has increased from 4.4 children per 1 000 women in 2006 to 7.7 children in 2012.⁸² The 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey found that rural women aged 15-19 were more likely to be pregnant or to have children than urban women of the same age. Notably, from 2012 (when the DHS was conducted) to 2014, there was an increase in the percentage of both rural and urban women in this age group who had begun child-bearing (for rural areas: from 7.7 percent in 2012 to 11.1 percent in 2014).⁸³

Table 5. Early Childbearing in Rural and Urban Locations (2014)

% of women aged 15-19 who:	Rural	Urban
Have begun child-bearing, including:	11.1	8.8
Have had a live birth	7.1	5.5
Are pregnant with first child	4.0	3.4
Have had a live birth before age 15	0.1	0.0

Source: National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 100.

Early pregnancy is not only associated with a risk of poor birth outcomes; it also adversely affects girls' ability to continue their education.

Education

There is gender parity in enrolment and completion rates in primary and lower secondary education, and completion rates for both female and male primary school students are high in the Kyrgyz Republic. Literacy is almost universal, and there is no difference between female and male literacy rates, or between the literacy rates of urban and rural populations.⁸⁴ There are also no clear gender gaps in enrolment either by province or comparing rural and urban areas. However, school attendance and completion rates do differ by location, and students from rural and remote regions are more likely to be out-of-school. In rural secondary schools (grades 5-11), boys are much more likely than girls to be out-of-school, and **non-attendance** increases with age. As a comparison, in urban areas, girls account for more than half of the out-of-school population (57.3 percent) at secondary level, but in rural areas, boys comprise almost three-quarters of out-of-school children (71 percent).⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 21.

⁷⁷ UNDP Kyrgyzstan, 2010, p. 41.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 151.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 152.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 155.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 94; National Statistical Committee & UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2015. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in the Kyrgyz Republic 2014. Final Report. Bishkek. p. 100.

⁸⁴ UNDP, 2015, Statistical Annex, table 10: Educational Achievements. p. 244; National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 142.

⁸⁵ National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 157.

Studies of non-attendance rates by gender indicate that school attendance also varies by season, and absenteeism is highest in rural areas during the autumn and spring farming seasons. Many of the factors that contribute to absenteeism are common for both boys and girls and include: household poverty (the need for child labour, both housework and agricultural labour; a lack of clothes, shoes, textbooks and other school supplies; and a lack of money to pay for schooling); school-related reasons (the psychological climate in the school, the curriculum, teaching and discipline methods, cold classrooms and bullying) and health-related reasons (illness or disability).⁸⁶ At the same time, close analysis of families with out-of-school children found that boys are more often required to undertake farm work (12 percent of boys and 7 percent of girls) or other work at home (11 percent of boys and 5 percent of girls), while girls are more likely to be absent due to a lack of clothes or shoes (23 percent of girls and only 17 percent of boys).⁸⁷ Research carried out in several southern provinces found that boys more often miss school due to paid work, while girls tend to be out-of-school because they are performing unpaid household chores (in some cases, after they have married).⁸⁸

Poor infrastructure in rural schools may also contribute to absenteeism. Even though attention has been devoted to improving the water supply and sanitation systems in public buildings, very few rural schools in the Kyrgyz Republic have improved sanitation facilities. Almost all use latrines, located outside of the school buildings, and even in urban areas, there are inside toilet facilities in only 14.3 percent of schools.⁸⁹ There is no indication that school sanitation facilities for boys and girls, and teachers and pupils, differ in quality or maintenance, but it has been suggested that unheated toilets and children's practice of using the toilet as infrequently as possible at school could lead to genital-urinary diseases, particularly in girls.⁹⁰ Poor sanitary conditions may also lead to greater absenteeism among girls once they reach puberty and begin menstruation.

After compulsory education (up to Grade 9), most rural youth either continue their studies in vocational education or move into work, as exhibited by the higher economic activity rate for young people (ages 15-19 years) in rural areas compared with urban locations.⁹¹

Table 6. Level of Economic Activity in the Population Aged 15-19 (%), by Location and Sex (2013)

Rural		Urban	
Female	Male	Female	Male
25.9	42.8	10.2	21.4

Source: National Statistical Committee, 2014b, Table 1.3. p. 35.

Both the government and donor organizations have focused on modernizing the system of **technical vocational education and training** (TVET) in order to improve the relationship between preparation for employment and labour market demands. However, vocational training has generally not been popular since the collapse of the Soviet system of production, because the population does not consider it prestigious and has little trust in the quality of the education. Nevertheless, secondary vocational schools remain an important source of occupational training in rural areas, because TVET institutions are more accessible and affordable in comparison with higher (university) education.

The TVET system also exhibits distinct gender patterns. In the 2014-2015 academic year, girls represented just under a third (29.4 percent) of all students enrolled in primary vocational education, compared with more than half (54.7 percent) of the students enrolled in either secondary vocational or tertiary (higher professional) education.⁹² Gender-based stereotypes persist in both the TVET system and in post-compulsory education generally, especially in the choice of academic subjects. The large majority of female students enrol in courses to study education, health and economics and management (these three subjects accounted for almost 80 percent of female students in secondary vocational education). Male students are also represented in health and economics and management in secondary vocational education, but they study a greater range of specialized technical subjects, including agriculture.⁹³ (Agricultural education and training is further discussed in a later section of this report). Girls are socialized, at home and in the educational system, to pursue specializations related to their care-giving roles and duties, and so they are then restricted to low-paid jobs. Gender analysis of the TVET system indicates that in some years, certain courses are not offered. For example, in 2006 there was no recruitment for the following professions: weaver, carpet maker, food seller and secretary-typist, all of

⁸⁶ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2008. Out-of-School Children in the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek. p. 27.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 29.

⁸⁸ Five Business Group & Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan. 2011. Report on a Needs Assessment in Education in the Southern Regions of the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek. p. 11. [in Russian].

⁸⁹ Korotenko, V.A., Kirilenko, A.V. & Prigoda, N.P. 2013. Gender, Environment and Climate Change. Bishkek, UNDP/UN WOMEN/BIOM.p. 36. [in Russian].

⁹⁰ Domashov, I., Korotenko, V., Gorborkova, G., Ablezova, M. & Kirilenko, A. 2011. Baseline Assessment of Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools and Hospitals in the Northern Oblasts of Kyrgyzstan (Issyk Kul, Naryn and Talas). Bishkek, Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNICEF.p. 30.

⁹¹ National Statistical Committee. 2014b. Employment and Unemployment. Bishkek. Table 1.3. p. 35.[in Russian].

⁹² National Statistical Committee, 2015, Table 3.5. p. 43.

⁹³ Ibid. Table 3.9. p. 46.

which are traditionally seen as “women’s professions”⁹⁴ Vocational training that is funded by employers also exhibits some preference for traditionally “male” professions. Researchers analysed the course subjects of professional training programmes in 2008 (records indicated that close to 300 people were trained, but this data was not broken down by sex), and out of courses on farming, welding, carpentry, joinery, fitting, car repair, driving, credit union management, hospitality and poultry farming, they determined that women would only have been enrolled on courses for the latter three professions. Most of the courses would be considered relevant to “men’s professions.”⁹⁵ The same study found that the proportion of young women enrolled in TVET institutions differed significantly by province. Female enrolment in rural areas was lower than the national average (with the exception of Talas oblast), suggesting that vocational training is less available to women in rural areas than in the larger cities.

The Kyrgyz educational system also includes non-compulsory **preschool education**. Beginning in the late 1990’s, preschool coverage was dramatically reduced, and this situation has had a particularly negative effect on low-income and rural families. At present, the situation is improving and there are 1 062 preschool institutions (which can include either public or privately-run kindergartens, nurseries or day-care centres), an increase from 448 preschools in 2005. However, only 18 percent of children under the age of seven are covered by preschool education.⁹⁶ Coverage varies considerably by location, and according to national estimates, 32.2 percent of urban children aged one to six years and 13.2 percent of rural children attend preschools.⁹⁷ Note that the MICS for 2014 found that 40.5 percent and 16.0 percent of children aged three to five years attended early childhood education in urban and rural areas, respectively.⁹⁸ Even in areas in which preschool facilities exist, access may be limited for other reasons. For example, some preschools are intended only for children with special needs, public preschools can often be overcrowded, private facilities may be too expensive for parents to afford and some facilities have opening hours that are not compatible with the working day.⁹⁹ A survey conducted among residents of 30 *aiyl okmotu* (two villages in each) in all of the provinces found that even when preschool facilities exist, there can be long waiting lists for places. Thus, of the respondents, 12.5 percent said that preschools were inaccessible in their villages, 6.5 percent said they were accessible but with specific difficulties, and 45 percent said that they had not tried to access preschools because there were none available locally.¹⁰⁰ It was determined that among those who took part in the survey, every fifth parent was waiting for a preschool place for her / his child. It is also notable that the study found considerable variation in the number of preschools by location, and the responses of local authorities during focus group discussions suggested that preschool education was not always viewed as a priority. Many former preschool buildings were wrongfully privatized for commercial and other purposes, and some local authorities have made efforts to reclaim the former schools. But other local government leaders expressed the opinion that because there were few jobs for rural women, there was no need to develop preschool education, making statements such as, “You women will be staying home in any case. Why do you need a kindergarten?”¹⁰¹ The absence of preschool educational facilities has important implications for child development and their future success in education. It is also a primary factor in preventing women from working outside of the home, especially rural women who already have considerably more household chores than urban women, in addition to childcare.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most critical barriers to gender equality in the Kyrgyz Republic, but it is also an issue that has received considerable attention from the public and civil society sector. In the context of gender equity and access to justice, the Gender Equality Strategy to 2020 draws attention to several forms of GBV: domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual harassment in the workplace and trafficking in women for sexual and labour exploitation. Progress towards combating gender-based violence, particularly **domestic violence**, has been greatly facilitated by the work of the NSO, including the development of indicators on the subject, the regular collection and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data about individuals who approach crisis centres for assistance (also disaggregated by education level, age, employment status, marital status and type of violence), and data collection on the legal response (protective orders, administrative and criminal cases, and forensic examinations) and the medical response.

Improved data collection on GBV was a critical element in the official recognition of the issue, and the regular publication of statistics allows for analysis and a better understanding of the problem, including the development

94 State Agency for Vocational Education. 2009. Gender Audit of the State Agency for Vocational Education under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic: Final Report. Bishkek. p. 24. [in Russian]

95 Ibid.

96 National Statistical Committee, 2015, Table 4.3. p. 132; National Statistical Committee. 2011b. Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2006-2010. Table 4.3. p. 33.

97 National Statistical Committee, 2015. p. 132.

98 National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 130

99 International Labor Organization (ILO). 2008. Work and Family: The Republic of Kyrgyzstan. Moscow. p. 4.

100 UNDP. 2012. Report on the Results of Sociological Research on Access to Services. Bishkek. p. 23.

101 Ibid.

of state policy.¹⁰² Other key areas of progress include the adoption of the law “On Social and Legal Protection from Domestic Violence” (2003), a subsequent government decree to increase inter-agency cooperation on implementing the law, the inclusion of GBV in national policy on gender equality, the strengthening of (and some municipal support to) a network of 13 crisis centres located throughout the country, and organizing regular public awareness events, such as the international “16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women” campaign. Nevertheless, GBV remains widespread and has a profound impact on the lives of many women.

Official statistics on domestic violence are not disaggregated by residence, but the 2012 DHS, which sampled more than 6 000 ever married women aged 15-49, found little variation between the experiences of rural and urban women concerning physical violence (overall, 24.1 percent of rural women and 21.6 percent of urban women reported that they had experienced physical violence since the age of 15).¹⁰³ However, a greater percentage of rural women reported that they had experienced sexual violence, and a larger percentage of urban women reported having experienced violence during pregnancy.¹⁰⁴ Some types of controlling behaviour by husbands (for example, jealousy or anger if his wife speaks to other men, limiting his wife's contact with female friends, and insisting on knowing where his wife is at all times) were also reported quite frequently, but again, the patterns scarcely differ between rural and urban areas.¹⁰⁵

There are some differences in help-seeking behaviour, with urban women being more likely to have sought help to stop the violence (45.5 percent of urban women, compared with 36.1 percent of rural women), while nearly half of rural women (44.7 percent) stated that they never sought help or told anyone about the violence.¹⁰⁶ Differences in help-seeking behaviour could be a reflection of more conservative attitudes in rural areas that cause victims of violence to feel greater shame, stigma or fear about reporting or to accept violence as a “normal” part of family life. However, according to the findings of the 2014 MICS, there is little variation in the percentage of rural and urban female respondents who think that a husband is justified in beating his wife in several situations (28.6 percent of urban women agreed with any of the six proposed justifications, while the figure was 37.2 percent of rural women), for example, neglecting the children, going out without telling her husband and neglecting housework.¹⁰⁷ The variation in help-seeking behaviour is, therefore, more likely to be related to the fact that support services for people experiencing violence are very limited outside of urban centres, and this in turn means that victims have less access to information and professional assistance. As a state report points out, “the low number of requests of women for help in cases of violence is an indicator of the lack of access to justice. Young women and girls living in rural areas are one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of access to justice.”¹⁰⁸

Rural women are also vulnerable to specific types of violence, specifically **underage / child marriage**, **polygamy**¹⁰⁹ and **bride kidnapping**, all of which are illegal in the Kyrgyz Republic. It is difficult to determine the prevalence of these forms of GBV because underage and polygamous marriages take place through unregistered and purely religious ceremonies (*nikah*) and so are hidden from national statistics. While official figures for the country as a whole indicate that the average age at the time of the first marriage is 23 years for women and 27 years for men,¹¹⁰ the MICS suggests that for the country as a whole, 13.9 percent of women aged 15-19 are currently married and 0.9 percent of this age group are in a polygamous marriage. Of note, early marriage is more prevalent in rural areas, while polygamous marriage is more common in urban locations (see Table 7, below). This finding may be explained by the fact that early marriages are also more prevalent in poor households, while a certain level of wealth is required to support more than one wife and multiple children.

Table 7. Underage Marriage and Polygamy, by Residence (2014)

	Rural	Urban
Of women age 15-49 years:		
% married before age 15	0.6	0.3
% in a polygamous marriage/ union	0.5	1.6
Of women age 20-49 years:		
% married before age 18	14.6	9.2
Of women age 15-19 years:		
% currently married/ in a union	15.3	11.1

Source: National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 170.

Bride kidnapping and forced marriage are also associated with underage marriages. Despite Criminal Code amendments to increase sanctions for bride kidnapping, and public information campaigns conducted jointly by

102 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 5.

103 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 247.

104 Ibid. p. 250, p. 252.

105 Ibid. p. 253.

106 Ibid. p. 264.

107 National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 176.

108 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 27.

109 Note that while data about marriages between a man and more than one wife (polygyny) are very limited in Kyrgyzstan, there are no data about marriages between women with more than one husband (polyandry). However, the more common term “polygamy” is used in this report.

110 National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 1.12. p. 25.

the Office of the Ombudsman, various line ministries, local authorities and NGOs to combat polygamy and bride kidnapping, only a small number of cases have been prosecuted.¹¹¹ Research indicates that 60 percent of rural marriages in mono-ethnic areas are the result of kidnapping, of which two-thirds are undertaken without the consent of the bride.¹¹² The CEDAW Committee has expressed concern over the “persistent abduction of women and girls for forced marriages, [and] the high prevalence of marriages ... that result from bride kidnapping, especially in rural and remote areas.”¹¹³ Like other forms of GBV, bride kidnapping “appears to be socially legitimized and surrounded by a culture of silence and impunity”, which results in the under reporting of cases.¹¹⁴ Several theories have been put forward to explain the apparent rise in illegal marriages (both child marriage and polygamy) as well as bride kidnapping, ranging from a strengthening of traditions during the post-Soviet period, the increasing influence of Islam, and the consequences of the 2010 events (specifically when rape was committed).¹¹⁵

The consequences of early and forced marriage are far-ranging and serious. As noted above, early marriage is closely associated with early child-bearing and very often results in girls leaving school before completion of their studies. Research also suggests that many cases of child marriage are associated with compulsion (arrangements by parents or kidnapping) and are also “accompanied by not just psychological abuse and financial control, but also physical and sexual abuse.”¹¹⁶ Finally, because underage and polygamous unions are performed through a religious ceremony only, they are not recognized under the law and there is no official registry of either the marriage or any subsequent divorces. Such unions do not confer rights to property to either spouse, but the impact of 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 and will face significant difficulties claiming alimony for any children.

Access to justice

Access to justice refers to the ability to access fair and effective remedies for human rights violations. Access to justice is an important topic in its own right and one that is best addressed through dedicated analysis. The topic is included here because the Kyrgyz constitution provides for the creation of a unique informal justice mechanism, known as *aksakal* courts. These are community-based courts, mainly located in rural and remote areas, that resolve small-scale legal matters, particularly family law disputes over property and livestock. The *aksakal* system was revived in the 1990s and, in theory, is an important mechanism to assist villagers who would otherwise lack access to courts and legal representation. For rural residents, the average distance from an *aksakal* court is generally a few kilometres, which is considerably closer than to formal justice institutions.¹¹⁷ *Aksakal* courts are made up of between three and nine respected community elders, traditionally men (the word “*aksakal*” literally means “white beard”) who are elected to three or four year terms and are unpaid. All-male courts are the norm, although there are examples of women serving as *aksakals*. There is also evidence that rural people are not opposed to having female members or they believe that even if women are not members, they can still exert influence over *aksakal* decisions.¹¹⁸

The types of disputes most commonly heard by *aksakal* courts include land boundary disputes, livestock stealing and water disputes, divorce and property division. Increasingly, *aksakal* courts also deal with domestic violence and issues resulting from bride kidnapping and unregistered marriages. The positive aspects of the *aksakal* system are: that it provides a mechanism to resolve disputes locally through mediation; it does not require payment of court fees (*aksakal* courts are free); and it alleviates the backlog of cases in the formal justice system. The problematic aspects of the system include: that *aksakals* are not necessarily trained in the law¹¹⁹ and, in fact, apply a combination of customary and formal law; and that the courts have no enforcement mechanisms, and limited jurisdiction and authority. Particular concern has also been expressed over whether the predominance of men in *aksakal* courts leads to bias and the perpetuation of conservative and traditional notions about women’s roles and family structure, especially in cases of domestic violence, property division and land rights. The decisions of *aksakal* courts may discriminate against women. It has also been noted that law enforcement officers can refer victims of domestic violence to *aksakal* courts as a way to avoid responding

111 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2013, paras. 56-58.

112 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 31.

113 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. 2015. Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Kyrgyzstan. para. 19.

114 Ibid.

115 See generally, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Regional Office. 2014. Child Marriage in Kyrgyzstan (Overview). Istanbul.

116 Ibid. p. 9.

117 Langford, L. & Elemanov, E. 2014. Access to Justice for Vulnerable Groups in the Kyrgyz Republic: Findings from Baseline Assessments in Bishkek, Chuy Province, Osh City, and Osh Province. Bishkek, UNDP. p. 75.

118 Eurasianet.org. 2012. Kyrgyzstan: Village Courts Have Mixed Record Report. (available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65419>); University College London Development Unit. 2010. Gender Analysis of the KyrgyzSwissSwedish Health Project (KSSHP) Phase V. London. p. 28.

119 It should be noted that Kyrgyz NGOs and development organizations, primarily UN Women, carry out training for *aksakal* members specifically on the topic of women’s rights.

to crimes they consider less important.¹²⁰ Enforcement of aksakal decisions depends on the level of respect that the court has in the local community and the relative power of the parties to the dispute; for women who do not usually hold positions of power (especially if they are not originally from the village where the conflict arises), there is a risk that they will not even be able to enforce a favourable decision.¹²¹

In cases of domestic violence, specifically, official figures indicate that aksakal courts are approached less often than crisis centres (in 2014, 825 people went to aksakal courts for domestic violence, compared with over 7 000 who turned to crisis centres, both women and men) and deal with fewer cases than are registered with the formal legal system (more than 3 100 incidents of domestic violence).¹²² There is also no clear pattern that would suggest that men, more than women, approach aksakal courts. However, a considerably larger share of women applies to crisis centres for assistance in domestic violence cases. Analysis of the experience of rural women using aksakal courts to protect their rights and resolve disputes in their favour, especially concerning land or agricultural practices, would be useful to broaden the understanding of women's access to justice in Kyrgyzstan.

The government and civil society organizations have made efforts to raise awareness of women's land rights in particular, but many rural women are still unable to access formal justice to protect their rights. Firstly, the legal process of determining the division of land is significantly complex that women are often deterred. Furthermore, women's lower economic status means that they are generally unable to hire an attorney or pay the state fees assessed against the property value when land is divided.

120 See for example: Eurasia Foundation and Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2011. *Equal Before the Law? A Study of How Citizens Experience Access to Justice in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*. Washington, DC.

121 Langford & Elemanov, 2014, p. 84.

122 Note that the data are not mutually exclusive. In a case of domestic violence, the same individual could seek assistance from a crisis centre, turn to an aksakal court for mediation, and later, file a complaint with the formal legal system. National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Tables 8.6 and 8.14, p. 97, p. 103.

III. Profile of rural households, infrastructure and gender impacts

Information comparing rural and urban households has most recently been collected in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014) and the Demographic and Health Survey (2012). These surveys, however, do not distinguish between male- and female-headed households, so they present only partial information about gender-based variations in housing conditions, household goods, access to safe drinking water, sanitation services and sources of energy. Nevertheless, the data can be reviewed to form a picture of the lives of the rural population.

A. Housing conditions

Much of Kyrgyzstan's housing stock is in a poor condition due to deterioration in Soviet-era construction, combined with a lack of maintenance, very limited new construction and the conversion of some housing into commercial spaces.¹²³ Most of Kyrgyzstan's residential buildings were built during the Soviet era, many as multi-apartment units. Private ownership and occupancy is the norm, and this situation has contributed to problems in organizing the management and maintenance of multi-family buildings.

Both rural and urban areas have characteristic housing issues. For example, rural homes are less likely to have access to communal services and amenities, such as water piped into the dwelling, gas and sewage system connections or central heating, due in part to difficulties in providing services to mountainous and remote areas (see Table 8). Note that domestic energy sources and access to drinking water in rural and urban settings are explored in more detail below. Almost an equal proportion of the urban and rural populations live in houses made of brick (around a third), but rural dwellings are more likely to be made of locally-sourced materials (primarily adobe, straw with mud bricks, or dirt) compared with about a quarter of urban housing which is concrete.¹²⁴ Most houses in rural and urban areas have some form of wood or linoleum flooring, but more rural homes have earth or sand flooring (five percent). With the exception of cement/concrete buildings that are typical in urban areas, most Kyrgyz homes have roofs made of calamine/cement fibre.¹²⁵

Table 8. Housing Amenities, by Rural and Urban Locations (2014)

Description	Rural households (%)	Urban households (%)
Piped water (into the home)	15.1	73.9
Connection to sewer system	6.9	62.4
Central heating	3.3	30.2
Indoor bath/shower	3.6	40.0
Piped gas	14.9	45.1

Source: National Statistical Committee, Living standards statistics (available at <http://www.stat.kg/en/statistics/uroven-zhizni-naseleniya/>).

According to the 2012 Demographic and Health Survey, on average rural homes had more rooms used for sleeping than urban residences; more than a third of urban homes had only one such room, while around a third of rural homes had three or more rooms for sleeping.¹²⁶

¹²³ UNECE, 2010, p. 1.

¹²⁴ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

B. Energy sources

Access to electricity through the national grid is nearly universal in Kyrgyzstan, covering 99.8 percent of rural and urban households. However, data about connection rates are not particularly useful as a large proportion of low-income and rural populations experience frequent interruptions in service. Rural areas account for only around ten percent of the country's electricity consumption. In 2008, 78 percent of low-income households reported that they experienced interruptions in electricity service on a weekly basis at minimum (the figure was 72 percent for the country as a whole).¹²⁷ Because poverty rates are higher in rural areas, rural households, especially in mountainous areas, experience particular hardships when they have no electricity. Most rural households rely on electricity for cooking during specific times of the year (from summer to autumn) and, as noted above, they rarely have central heating or hot water piped into the home. Electricity cut-offs also mean that water may be unavailable to rural residents if water pumps are powered by electricity.

Rural households use a variety of methods to cope with power interruptions and inconsistent energy supply. For heating, most rural families prefer to use coal or wood and, less frequently, animal dung. While inexpensive, dried animal dung (*kyzyak*) is not very effective for heating, so it is more often used for cooking. Coal is expensive, especially in winter, and many villagers cannot afford to purchase it. It is estimated that during the cold months, the average rural family would need to purchase one of the following amounts of fuels: two to five tons of coal annually (costing around €100-€325); one half to seven cubic metres of firewood (costing on average €15-€115); or one to five freight loads of dried dung (costing on average €15-€60).¹²⁸ Therefore, it is typical for rural households to combine fuel sources. Moreover, rural households can spend up to half of their income on heating. Consequently, they try to collect or purchase and store fuel in advance and heat only part of their homes in winter. Typically, rural families heat only one room, which reduces their living space considerably, and they also limit the use of hot water.¹²⁹

A sizeable proportion of rural households burns solid fuels for cooking (most commonly wood, followed by animal dung briquettes, remains from agricultural crops, straw and grass), although the use of solid fuels has declined in rural areas (from 56 percent in 2006 to 33 percent in 2012).¹³⁰

Table 9. Energy Sources for Cooking in Rural and Urban Locations (2012)

Description	Rural households (%)	Urban households (%)
Electricity	60.4	41.3
Liquid petroleum gas/natural gas/biogas	6.1	54.2
Coal	0.3	0.4
Charcoal	0.9	0.0
Wood	12.0	2.0
Straw/shrubs/grass	4.2	11
Remains from agricultural crops	6.3	0.3
Dried animal dung	9.6	0.7

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p.17.

Energy deficiencies affect the entire rural population, but women, children and the elderly, who spend the most time at home, are impacted to a greater extent. For rural women, housekeeping tasks are much more time-consuming during the cold season than in warm weather, because they must spend time tending stoves to heat the house and for cooking, in addition to boiling water for the household.¹³¹ Collecting and preparing solid fuel (for example, collecting wood or making dung briquettes) are tasks primarily carried out by women and girls, therefore energy shortages also limit the time they have for other productive activities or for rest. (Note that gender differences in time use are discussed in more detail below). The use of unclean solid fuel sources for cooking is correlated with indoor air pollution and respiratory illnesses. More than half of rural households

127 Bravi, A. & Slay, B. 2011. Household Energy Access and Affordability in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS. pp. 4-5.

128 Bakashova, A., Jorritsma, F., Choitonbaeva, A. & Wendland, C. 2013. Opportunities to Stimulate Local Economies through Sustainable Innovations for Home Comfort. Gender-sensitive feasibility study for rural areas in Issyk Kul and Naryn. Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF). p.9.

129 See for example, Bakashova et al., 2013, p.8.

130 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 17.

131 Bakashova et al., 2013, p. 8.

have a separate building for cooking, so this practice is likely to reduce exposure to harmful pollutants, but rural women still face the greater burden of preparing food for the family when there is no electricity supply.

There have been a number of small scale and NGO-led initiatives in rural Kyrgyzstan to introduce alternative and clean forms of energy, such as solar power, but no large-scale investment in this type of project.¹³² NGO projects to promote sustainable energy at the local level have included gender components. These projects have found that women are especially interested in energy efficiency in the home, and the use of domestic solar power to heat water, to dry fruits and to sterilize milk they sell locally, but that greater efforts are needed to ensure that women have a voice in decision-making on energy at the local level. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be engaged in installation and construction projects and tend to be more interested in reducing household fuel costs.

C. Safe drinking water and sanitation

While most of the population has access to improved (safe) drinking water sources, this is the case for only 81.8 percent of rural households. Data from the Department of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation of the State Agency for Architecture, Construction and Housing and Communal Services, indicate that 1 272 villages do not have adequate access to a centralized drinking water system and 396 villages have no access at all (they use unprotected water sources).¹³³ While more than two-thirds of urban households have access to water piped into the home, most rural households rely on outside taps, standpipes or wells for their water. Eighteen percent of rural households use non-improved sources of drinking water, mainly surface water (15.3 percent) and water from unprotected springs (2.2 percent) or irrigation canals (*aryks*).¹³⁴ As noted above, electricity shortages can render water pumps inoperable, and in this situation, rural residents collect water from neighbouring villages or from *aryks*.¹³⁵

Table 10. Access to Improved Water Supply in Rural and Urban Locations (2014)

Description	Rural households (%)	Urban households (%)
Improved source of drinking water	81.8	98.2
Piped into dwelling	10.9	67.0
Piped into yard	30.9	24.2
Piped to neighbours	1.8	0.7
Public tap/standpipe	29.6	5.3
Protected well, tube well or borehole	6.6	0.7
Protected spring	2.1	0.2
Non-improved source of drinking water	18.2	1.8

Source: National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 79.

Rural households spend more time obtaining drinking water than urban households. According to the 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, among rural households with improved water sources that are not piped into the home, 28.7 percent spent less than 30 minutes travelling to a water source (compared with 4.9 percent of urban households); and for 4.4 percent of rural households, obtaining water takes more than 30 minutes per trip.¹³⁶

Women and children are the family members who are most likely to collect water when it is not piped into the home, with girls and boys having almost equal responsibility for this chore. Moreover, this pattern holds true for urban households as well and is typical for all regions. The only exception is Naryn oblast, in which

¹³² For example, the EU-funded Home Comforts project, implemented by Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) and several local NGOs, promotes a participatory approach to resolving local energy issues and works with the population to install energy efficient stoves, solar collectors and solar fruit dryers.

¹³³ Note that the Ministry of Health estimates that 497 villages have no access to a centralized water supply. Vashneva, N.S., Kirilenko, A., Prigoda, N., Kochorbaeva, Z., Choytonbaeva, A. & Grechko, E. 2014. Gender Aspects of Access to Clean Drinking Water and Sanitation. Assessment and Concept. Bishkek, Social Technologies Agency. p. 9.

¹³⁴ National Statistical Committee&UNICEF, 2015, p. 79.

¹³⁵ WECF. 2014. Kyrgyzstan. Gender Livelihood and Socio Economic Study. p. 16.

¹³⁶ National Statistical Committee&UNICEF, 2015, p. 82.

children, both boys and girls, play a greater role in fetching household water, which reduces the burden on adult women.¹³⁷ The rationale for designating a particular person in the household to collect water is dependent on factors such as, distance to the water source (the closer the water source is to the home, the more likely it is that a female will be responsible for water collection), ethnic and cultural differences (the division of housework by gender) and the economic situation of the family.

Table 11. Person in Rural Households Who Usually Collects Drinking Water, by Sex and Age (2014)

Females	
Adult woman	56.2
Girl up to age 15	6.5
Males	
Adult man	29.8
Boy up to age 15	7.0

Source: National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 83.

Rural households are also more likely to spend time treating the water before using it for cooking or drinking. Of surveyed rural households, 56.3 percent reported that they boiled water before use, but 41.3 percent reported that they did not use any water treatment method,¹³⁸ perhaps because they are using improved sources of drinking water or, if they are not, due to electricity and fuel shortages or a lack of knowledge. Rural water supply systems in several areas of Kyrgyzstan (in the Jalal-Abad, Issyk-Kul and Chui provinces) show high levels of contamination when water is collected from surface sources.¹³⁹ Even when water is piped into the home in rural areas, it may only be available for several hours during the day, or low pressure means that the water supply is insufficient for households needs.¹⁴⁰

Limitations on water in the home are burdensome for the whole family, but women are affected more acutely because they are the family members who use the most domestic water (for cooking, cleaning, laundry and bathing children). In rural areas where the water supply is not continuous, women must organize their time to take advantage of water when it is available, so that they can carry out specific chores (such as laundering) and put aside enough water for later use. Men's use of domestic water is more limited to personal hygiene and chores near the house, such as washing cars and other vehicles. Even though cleanliness and hygiene are the cultural norm for rural residents, households must often prioritize using water and fuel for drinking, cooking or agriculture and not for bathing. Research conducted among village residents in the Issyk-Kul and Naryn provinces found that in the winter months, women bathed less than men due to limited hot water and fuel (heating water on open fires for bathing is usually a male responsibility), and in summer, more than half of the women reported that they used garden showers less often due to the lack of privacy.¹⁴¹ Rural women also described having psychological and health discomforts during menstruation days due to the lack of privacy, poor sanitation facilities and a cultural taboo around speaking openly about menstrual hygiene management.¹⁴²

In terms of sanitation facilities, virtually all rural and urban households have access to improved toilet facilities. For rural households, pit latrines with a slab are the norm, while urban households are as likely to have pit latrines as they are to have some type of flush toilet. Such facilities, however, are rare in rural areas.¹⁴³

Table 12. Household Sanitation Facilities in Rural and Urban Locations (2014)

Description	Rural households (%)	Urban households (%)
Improved toilet/latrine facility (not shared)	99.8	99.7
Flush/pour toilet, piped to sewer system /septic tank/pit latrine	2.7	47.2
Ventilated improved pit latrine	0.6	4.0
Pit latrine with slab	96.5	48.5
Non-improved facility	0.2	0.3

Source: National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 86.

In rural households, most pit latrines are not located close to the home, and it is reported that they are usually "constructed from poor quality materials by men and are not emptied when they are full but rather relocated."¹⁴⁴ Women and girls are responsible for the routine cleaning of latrines. Women report that they experience health problems, such as urinary tract infections, due to the difficulties of using pit latrines at night and during winter, and such toilets are also uncomfortable for children.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 83

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 81.

¹³⁹ Vashneva et al., 2014, p. 13

¹⁴⁰ WECF, 2014, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴¹ Bakashova et al., 2013, p. 10.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁴³ National Statistics Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 86.

¹⁴⁴ Bakashova et al., 2013, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

A lack of clean water resources, combined with a lack of hygienic sanitation facilities (latrines that are in poor condition and the absence of clean water for hand washing), are associated with a risk of diarrhoeal illnesses and transmission of other diseases within rural households. Any family member can be affected by diarrhoeal illness, but children and the elderly are especially at risk. Given their traditional responsibility for treating family members who are ill, substandard sanitation facilities also increase women's care work. According to one estimate, a woman could miss as many as five working days for the care of a child with diarrhoea, which would considerably reduce her monthly salary. When children or other family members are ill, it also impacts the household budget because it must absorb the costs of treatment and absence from work.¹⁴⁶

C. Household goods

The prevalence of durable consumer goods is an indicator of socio-economic status and, in Kyrgyzstan, it also demonstrates the availability of remittances. Data on specific household goods, particularly labour-saving domestic appliances, can also be used to assess the intensity of women's household chores. Rural households are less likely than urban households to own electrical appliances that are of particular benefit to women, for instance freezers, vacuum cleaners or automatic washing machines, in part due to unreliable energy supply (see Table 13, below). Additionally, the time that women must spend on household tasks limits the time that they have for productive activities, such as formal employment, and personal activities, such as education or professional training.

Table 13. Selected Goods Owned, by Urban and Rural Households (%)

Goods	Rural Households (%)	Urban Households (%)
Refrigerator	75.8	85.4
Freezer	3.8	3.2
Washing machine	61.9	72.8
Vacuum cleaner	37.2	63.9
Sewing machine	63.3	38.1
Television	98.2	99.1
DVD player	82.2	79.5
Computer	11.7	26.9
Internet connection	5.4	10.0
Car	47.5	44.1
Truck	6.2	2.1
Animal-drawn cart	13.3	1.9
Ownership of agricultural lands	78.4	22.1

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 18.

Even when the household has some home appliances, power outages and fluctuations in electrical supply mean that women are often not able to use them, or can only use them for limited periods of the day. Frequent fluctuations in voltage also causes refrigerators and other electrical appliances to break, and while television repair is considered less burdensome on the family budget, rural families often cannot afford to repair or replace other appliances, especially refrigerators.¹⁴⁷ Many electrical appliances are considered luxuries for rural households. However, the fact that a large majority of rural households have televisions and DVD players suggests that they prioritize the purchase of electrical goods that are used by all family members for entertainment, over those that are used for domestic chores. Likewise, a lack of access to water piped into the house may dissuade rural families from purchasing washing machines.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 15.

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Energy of the Kyrgyz Republic & UNDP. 2011. Study of Potential Social and Gender Impacts of Small and Micro HPP [hydropower plants] on Local Communities of the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek. p. 17.

D. Rural transport

Improving rural transport is a priority area for the country, especially because poor road infrastructure (the result of deterioration over time, limited investment in repair, the harsh climate and difficult geography in mountainous regions) makes movement from rural areas to urban centres difficult. Geographical isolation contributes to poverty and is also a factor that impedes progress toward specific development goals, such as the reduction of maternal mortality and improving access to education. Enhancing the rural population's access to transport can also have distinctly gendered impacts, for instance, it can potentially contribute to a rise in rates of male migration and can also lead to an increased workload for women on farms and in the household.¹⁴⁸ According to the Rural Access Index, 76 percent of rural residents in Kyrgyzstan live within two kilometres of the nearest all-season road, a figure that translates to 0.8 million people without access to rural transport.¹⁴⁹ As noted above, less than half of rural households own cars. Women's mobility in particular is limited, due to the lower likelihood that they drive private vehicles or can afford the cost of private transport.

Due to transport problems, rural populations are isolated from healthcare facilities, including maternity hospitals, which is especially problematic for women with high-risk pregnancies or birth complications.

A lack of mobility and the inability to reach markets in larger towns and cities means that rural residents who are involved in agricultural production must sell their products to intermediaries rather than to end users directly. Research in the Issyk-Kul oblast and Chui oblast found that local apricot farmers do not have the resources to reach local markets, and there is little competition among resellers or the companies that purchase farmers' harvests. Additionally, farmers are paid fixed market prices, which limits the amount they can earn.¹⁵⁰ Further study is required to determine more precisely how a lack of transport options limits women's ability to take part in agricultural production at various levels of the value chain.

148 Roberts, P., Shyam, K.C. & Rastogi, C. 2006. Rural Access Indicator: A Key Development Indicator. Washington DC, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. p. 2.

149 World Bank. Access to Rural Transport database (available at http://www.worldbank.org/transport/transport_results/headline/rural-access). [accessed January 2016].

150 WECF, 2014, p. 12.

IV. Gender and poverty

Poverty is one of the most acute issues facing the country today, and the state has enacted many measures to improve the living standards of the population. The NSO has assessed the standard of living and poverty rates since 1996, using direct sample surveys of households and a methodology that is based on World Bank indicators on consumer expenditures. The threshold poverty level is adjusted to the average consumer price index (in 2014, the poverty line was assessed as 29 825 som per year and per capita, and the extreme poverty level was 17 588 som). Consumer spending data takes into consideration expenditure on food, the valuation of food produced in the household, the cost of non-food goods and services, and the value of durable goods.¹⁵¹

A. Poverty rates

Although poverty rates in rural areas remain higher than in urban areas, from 2013 to 2014, the level of rural poverty decreased from 41.4 percent to 32.6 percent. In urban areas, poverty fell from 28.5 percent to 26.9 percent. Nonetheless, in 2014, 1.8 million people were considered to be in the category of “poor”, more than two-thirds (68.2 percent) of whom were rural residents.¹⁵² Poverty rates are more closely connected to area of residence, whether rural or urban, and the specific province, than they are to gender (see Table 14, below). The poverty rate for rural children is 37.9 percent, which is 4.5 percent higher than for urban children.¹⁵³

Table 14. Poverty Rates, by Rural and Urban Location, Sex and Region (2014)

	Rural Poverty Rate (%)		Urban Poverty Rate (%)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Kyrgyzstan	32.3	33.0	25.3	28.7
Batken	46.5	48.5	22.8	26.7
Jalal-Abad	43.7	42.9	55.0	53.2
Issyk-Kul	30.8	29.2	16.1	15.7
Naryn	33.4	28.9	26.1	26.8
Osh	29.0	32.3	47.6	43.7
Talas	21.4	19.5	10.3	11.1
Chui	22.0	22.5	15.7	22.3
Bishkek (city)	--	--	15.8	19.9
Osh (city)	--	--	32.0	35.0

Source: National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 6.1. p. 77.

Poverty data disaggregated by sex of the household head indicate a slightly different picture in terms of gender differences. When comparing the poverty levels of female- and male-headed households, both those with single parents and two parents, the data show that two-parent families are more likely to experience poverty, regardless of the sex of the household head. In single-parent families, households headed by men experience higher poverty levels than those headed by women. Extreme poverty rates, however, are slightly higher in two-parent families headed by women than those headed by men, but the reverse is true for single-parent families (see Table 15, below). Such differences may be partly explained by the fact that two-parent families are larger on average. Additionally, while the status of head of household is usually conferred on those who make the largest contribution to the family budget, individual families may not follow this tradition and may consider other another member to be the household head.

Experts suggest that because they are socialized differently, men have less experience in “routine, day-to-day family budgeting”, while women “learn better how to make rational and effective decisions on feeding the family or satisfaction of other pressing needs” when resources are scarce.¹⁵⁴ Female-headed households have fewer expenditures per household member than male-headed households, due to the fact that women managing households reduce consumption patterns more dramatically.¹⁵⁵ It is also significant that of all low-income families receiving state support (specifically, the monthly allowance for low-income families with children -EPMS¹⁵⁶),

¹⁵¹ National Statistical Committee, 2015h, p. 75.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Data provided by the National Statistical Committee.

¹⁵⁴ UNDP. 2006. Gender Aspects of Poverty in Kyrgyzstan. Mini-survey. Bishkek. p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ In Russian: ежемесячное пособие малообеспеченным семьям, имеющим детей (ЕПМС)

women are the applicants for the family allowance in 98.2 percent of recipient families.¹⁵⁷ In 2014, of all individual EPMS recipients (over 310 000 people), 53.1 percent were women. There were also more women than men among those who received other social benefits.¹⁵⁸ All of these factors may explain why some FHH appear to be faring better economically.

Table 15. Poverty Rates (%), by Sex of Household Head (2014)

	FHH		MHH	
	Two-parent family	One-parent family	Two-parent family	One-parent family
Not poor	64.4	91.4	70.0	81.4
Poor	35.6	8.6	30.0	18.6
Including extremely poor	1.3	0.5	1.0	0.6

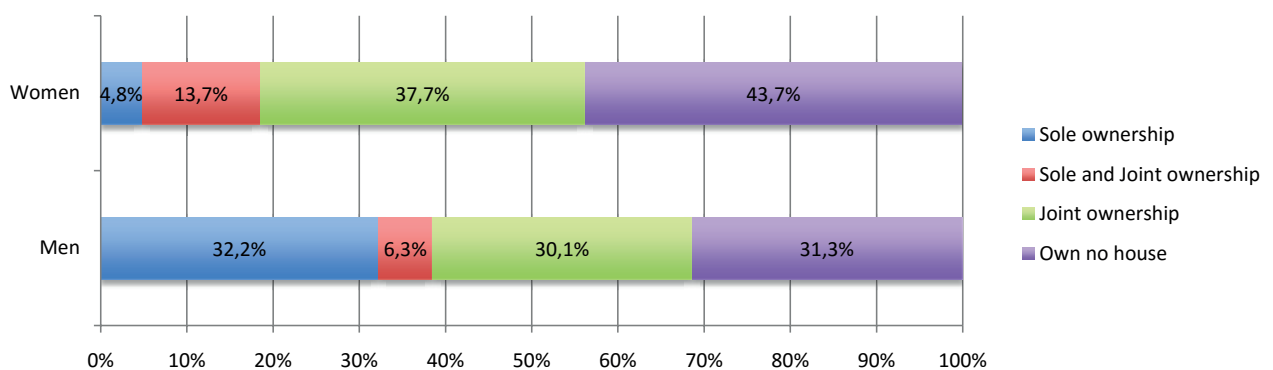
Source: National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 1.3. p.113.

In 2014, female pensioners outnumbered male pensioners by almost two to one (403 000 women compared with 215 000 men were registered with the state Social Fund), but women's pensions were on average less than men's (4 222 som per month for women and 4 553 som for men).¹⁵⁹ The gap between female and male pensions can be explained by women's shorter work history (especially time out of work to raise children) and lower salaries when employed. The pension gap between women and men has been narrowing in recent years, yet in 2014, the average monthly pension (4 710 som, including compensatory payments) was the equivalent of 106 percent of the subsistence level.¹⁶⁰

Information on patterns of key asset ownership offers another means of understanding relative poverty rates. Under Kyrgyz law, women and men have equal ownership rights to property, regardless of their marital status. In marriage, the rights of each spouse are protected in respect to the common property, and one spouse cannot make real/moveable property transactions without the formal consent of the other. In the case of divorce and separation of property, spouses are equally entitled to ownership of any property acquired during the course of the marriage. Female and male family members also have equal inheritance rights.

While there are no formal or legal barriers to women's property ownership, culturally and traditionally, men are the favoured inheritors and owners of real property and land. As a result, most women are "asset poor", meaning that they either have no ownership rights or hold property jointly. Figures 1 and 2, below, illustrate that close to half of rural women (aged 15-49) do not own housing at all, and less than five percent own housing independently. Likewise, while almost a third of rural men (aged 15-49) do not own housing, approximately another third have sole ownership rights. Compared with urban residents, both women and men in rural areas are more likely to own housing, but women are still disadvantaged in terms of property ownership.

Figure 1. Rural Housing Ownership, by Sex (%)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 274.

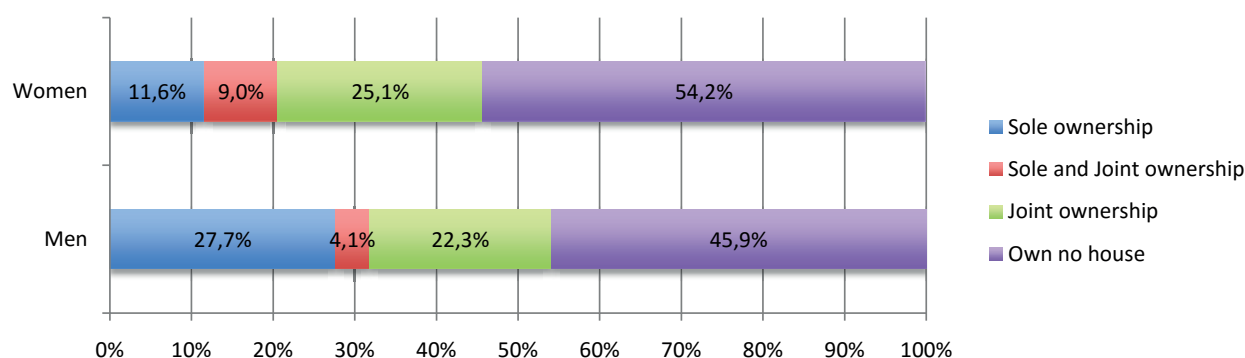
157 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 10.

158 National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 6.8. p. 84.

159 Ibid. Tables 6.6 and 6.7. p. 83.

160 Ibid. p. 114.

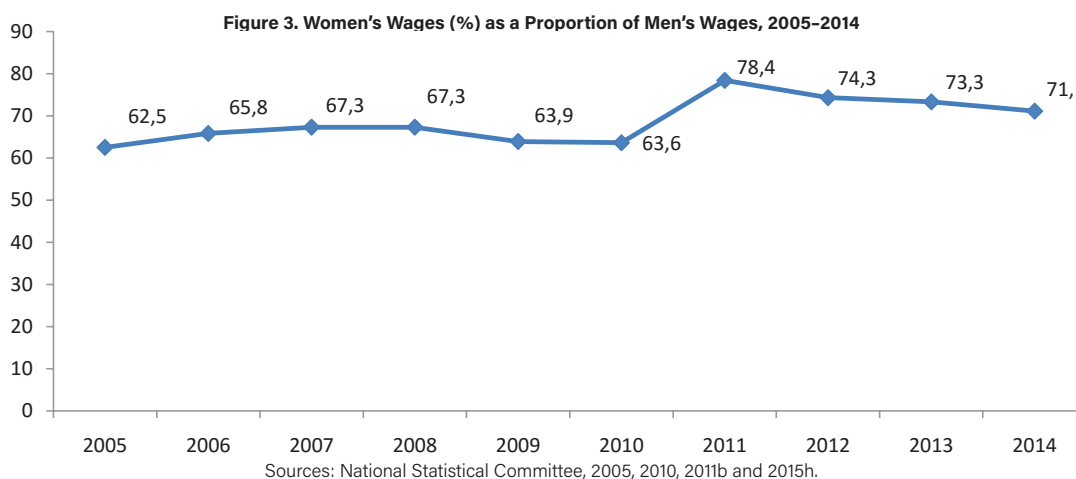
Figure 2. Urban Housing Ownership, by Sex (%)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 274.

Without full ownership, women's ability to use property (for example to sell, rent out or to 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 where they are not supported by a male property owner. Gender-based patterns of land and livestock ownership are discussed in the following section of this gender profile, in the context of agricultural assets and rural livelihoods.

Women also experience income poverty due to the significant gender wage gap. In 2014, women's average wages (across all sectors of the economy) were equivalent to 71 percent of men's wages.¹⁶¹ The wage gap is partially explained by a number of factors, including the predominance of women in low paid public sectors of the economy (for example, education and health care), where they experience chronic debt and living from paycheck to paycheck.¹⁶² Women are more likely than men to work part-time and to leave the job market for periods of time due to childcare responsibilities. Despite government efforts to increase wages in "feminized" sectors of the economy, the wage gap has not closed significantly. Wage reforms are, in fact, thought to have contributed to a widening of the gap between the wages of upper-level management and ordinary staff, the latter of which is comprised mainly of female employees.¹⁶³



Official salary data for women and men are not further disaggregated by location, but survey data about the kinds of earnings women and men received in a 12-month period show that a high, and almost equal, proportion of women and men in non-agricultural labour received payment in cash only (89 percent).¹⁶⁴ Men more often receive a combination of cash and in-kind payments than women, but more women are not paid for their work. Notably, employees in non-agricultural labour are more likely to work all year (as opposed to seasonal work), but women are also considerably more likely than men to be employed all year, perhaps a reflection of male migration to other countries for work. Gender differences in wages for agricultural labour are discussed in a later section of this gender profile, but it should be noted that more than double the number of women report that their work in agriculture is unpaid, compared with the number of men.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Table 6.5. p. 81.

¹⁶² Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 13.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 51

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

B. Women's economic empowerment

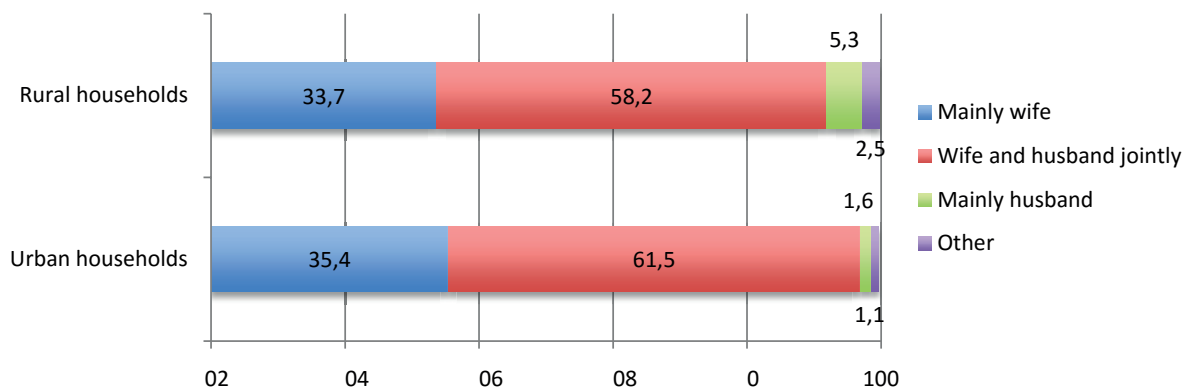
Economic empowerment refers to agency or the ability to make decisions about, and use, economic resources.

Even though a woman has waged employment, this does not necessarily mean that she can independently make decisions about how her earnings will be used. The DHS included questions about women's control over their own earnings and the data revealed that more than a third of women "mainly" make decisions independently about how their earnings will be used, with a slightly greater likelihood that women in urban households will make such decisions. Women in rural households (more often than urban women), reported that it was mainly their husbands who made such decisions (5.3 percent of rural women compared with 1.6 percent of urban women) or the decisions were made by other family members.¹⁶⁸ Joint decision-making between spouses is common in both rural and urban households.

Box 4. Definition: Women's Empowerment

The UN defines "women's empowerment" as consisting of five components: (1) women's sense of self-worth; (2) their right to have and to determine choices; (3) their right to have access to opportunities and resources; (4) their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and (5) their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.¹⁶⁶ Economic empowerment refers more narrowly to the capacity to exercise control over one's livelihood through the ability to make choices on what productive activities to engage and invest in, to decide how and when to engage in markets and to influence the terms on which to do so.¹⁶⁷

Figure 4. Person Who Decides How the Wife's Cash Earnings Are Used (% distribution)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 270.

It is notable that a comparison of data from the DHS conducted in 1997 and in 2012 suggests that the proportion of married women who mainly decide how their cash earnings are used has doubled during this period, although some caution should be exercised due to differences in the wording of the survey questions. Nevertheless, it is likely that women are exercising greater control today than in the past in terms of how they spend their earnings.

Respondents' subjectivity may also play a role. When both women and men were asked to identify the person who mainly makes decisions about the husband's cash earnings, there was a wide gap in the proportion of people who said such decisions were made jointly (71 percent of women gave this response, compared with 41 percent of men).¹⁶⁹ However, women and men were generally in agreement about the unlikelihood of women having the primary role in making decisions about their husband's earnings, and rural men were the least likely to agree that their wives "mainly" make these decisions. Rural households were also more likely than urban households to report that other family members, excluding the wife, made decisions about the husband's earnings. 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, and decisions about how the funds are used are made by the husbands' parents. This finding could also be attributed to the fact that young married couples are, "... more likely to live with their parents, who may exert influence over decisions about spending."¹⁷⁰

166 United Nations Population Information Network. Guidelines on Women's Empowerment. (See FAO Term Portal, available at <http://www.fao.org/faoterm/en/>).

167 OECD. 2012. Poverty reduction and pro-poor growth: The role of empowerment. p. 22.

168 Ibid. p. 270.

169 Ibid. p. 272.

170 Ibid.

C. Nutrition and food security

Poverty and nutrition are linked, and food insecurity can result from a lack of access to sufficient and nutritious food due to the unavailability of such foods, limited purchasing power, macro-level distribution problems and choices about food use at the household level. Kyrgyzstan both met and exceeded its MDG target to halve the level of extreme poverty by 2014, but it has been slower to reduce the number of people who experience undernourishment. From 2010 to 2012, the country faced undernourishment levels above five percent (defined as the percentage of the population with a caloric intake below the minimum dietary energy requirement).¹⁷¹ Undernourishment rates are higher in urban areas than in rural locations; in 2014, 45.1 percent of the rural population consumed less than 2 100 calories per day, compared with 53 percent of the urban population.¹⁷² While rates remain high, they do represent a reduction from the levels in 2000.

In Kyrgyzstan, some indicators of poor nutritional status do not show clear gender patterns. Both women and men exhibit similar risk factors for diet-related, non-communicable diseases, such as raised blood pressure, raised blood glucose and raised cholesterol.¹⁷³ The prevalence of overweight adults is almost the same for males and females, but women are more than twice as likely than men to be obese (22 percent of women and 12 percent of men). A high body mass index can be an indicator of food insecurity in the form of lack of access to nutritious foods.

Children's nutritional status is closely correlated with their mother's level of education and breastfeeding practices. Unlike the situation for adults, rural children are more likely to experience nutritional problems than urban children.¹⁷⁴ Indicators on child nutrition show that there are small gender differences in the levels of malnourishment among children under age five (boys are slightly more likely to be stunted than girls; stunting is a measure of height-for-age and is associated with chronic malnutrition). Other research, however, found that girls in remittance-receiving households have statistically significantly lower heights and weights than girls in households without remittance income, suggesting that girls may be taking on more domestic work in the absence of other family members, or that there is a "cultural bias toward male children" and therefore less investment in girl's health.¹⁷⁵

Micronutrient deficiency among women (as well as children) remains a particular public health concern because a lack of dietary diversity is associated with household food insecurity. At the national level, the anaemia rate in children under age five is 35.8 percent and, although the rate has been decreasing, it also remains high for pregnant women at 29.9 percent.¹⁷⁶ Rural women experience anaemia less often than urban women, but rates vary widely by province (as high as 57.4 percent in Batken province and as low as 20.5 percent in Osh province).¹⁷⁷ Increasing food prices, as well as climate change, have contributed to more limited food options and to anaemia among women.¹⁷⁸

The risk of food insecurity is variable and is dependent on factors such as the season, size of harvest, amount of remittance income, increase in food costs and even intra-household decision-making. Assessments have found that female-headed households in Kyrgyzstan are not more likely to be food insecure than male-headed households. Although FHH are slightly more likely to be severely insecure (ten percent of FHH and seven percent of MHH), the reverse is true for moderately food insecure households (16 percent of MHH and 12 percent of FHH).¹⁷⁹ Typical coping strategies for households that are experiencing food shortages include: relying on cheaper and less preferred foods; borrowing food from friends or relatives; increasing the number of household members who migrate for work; and reducing healthcare expenditures.¹⁸⁰ The decision to consume poorer quality foods could have a greater impact on the micronutrient status of women of reproductive age and children. Vulnerable farming households, which include FHH, that are already dependent on home grown products for their own consumption, may also have specific difficulties coping with climate risks that affect crop yields.

171 FAO. 2015b. Regional Overview of Food Security Europe and Central Asia. Focus on healthy and balanced nutrition. Rome. p. 7.

172 National Statistical Committee. no date. Data on Millennium Development Goals. Goal 1, Task 1C. From 1990-2015, halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. (available at <http://www.stat.kg/en/cehi-razvitiya-tvsyacheletiya/>). [accessed February 2016].

173 Global Nutrition Report. 2014 Nutrition Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan. Available at http://globalnutritionreport.org/files/2014/12/gnr14_cp_kyrgyzstan.pdf

174 National Statistical Committee & UNICEF, 2015, p. 31, p. 33.

175 Nasritdinov & Schenkan, 2012, p.4.

176 FAO, 2015b, p. 8.

177 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 152.

178 UNDP Kyrgyzstan, 2010, p. 125.

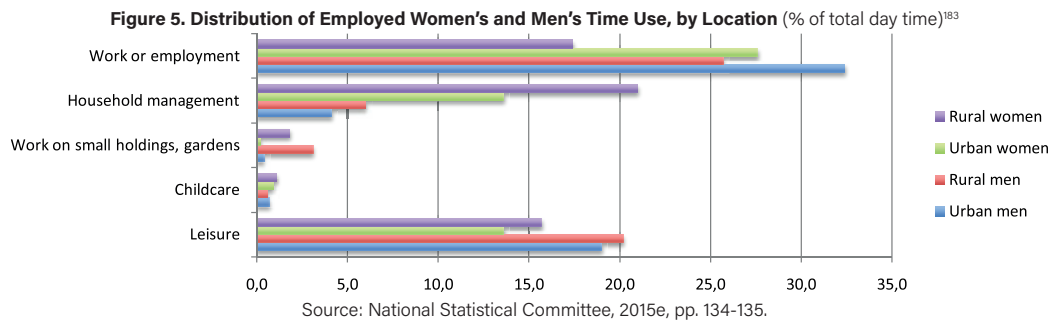
179 World Food Program. 2012b. Food Security Assessment. Kyrgyz Republic. Rome. p. 6

180 World Food Program. 2014. Kyrgyz Republic. An Overview of Climate Trends and the Impact on Food Security. Rome. p.45.

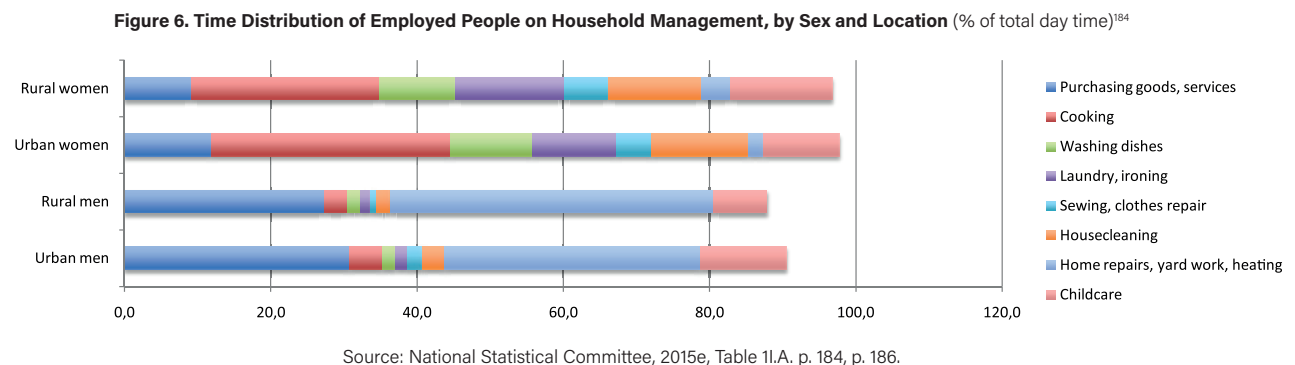
D. Time poverty

The National Gender Equality Strategy to 2020 identifies the uneven distribution of reproductive and family responsibilities as a contributing factor to women's economic dependence and vulnerability.¹⁸¹ In addition to asset and income poverty, women face constraints on the time that they can devote to formal employment, because they spend considerably more time than men in unpaid domestic labour. The most recent time use study, conducted in 2015, indicates that women and men generally conform to traditional gender roles, with women taking on much greater responsibility for unpaid domestic work and men spending more time in paid employment. On average, women spend four hours and 30 minutes per day on household chores, which accounts for 18.8 percent of their daily time, compared with 6.5 percent of men's time or about one hour and 20 minutes.¹⁸² Women spend double the amount of time per day on childcare compared with men.

Residents of rural areas spend on average one and half times more time on domestic chores than urban residents. Rural women have the least amount of free time, due to the fact that they often have additional responsibilities for farming and care of livestock, and they also lack labour-saving appliances and services that reduce the workload for women in urban areas (for instance, laundries). Considering the time use of employed women and men specifically, Figure 5. indicates that rural women spend a greater proportion of their time on unpaid domestic work than in employment, but rural men spend considerably more of their time undertaking agricultural work on family holdings. Rural men also have the most leisure time of any group.



Women undertake a more diverse number of household chores. On average, women spend 88 percent of the time that they devote to household management on tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundering and childcare, while men spend only 72.5 percent of their time on these tasks. Men are more often engaged in purchasing food and home repair work. Rural women spend considerably less time than urban women on purchasing food but, as a group, their time burden on other household tasks (such as cleaning the area around the house and collecting materials for heating) is greater. Overall, however, both rural and urban women face considerable time constraints based on the number of domestic tasks for which they are responsible. Figure 6 illustrates the differences in time distribution between women and men on household tasks.



Women's time poverty has significant 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 for their overall health.

¹⁸¹ Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2012b. Part 2, situational analysis.

¹⁸² Note that the figures refer to females and males age 12 and older. National Statistical Committee. 2015e. Results of Sample Time Use Surveys. Part 1. Bishkek. Table 1.A. p. 11. [in Russian].

¹⁸³ Note that time spent on physiological needs (sleeping, personal care) is omitted, as is time spent helping family members and on education. The percentage of time spent on employment during work hours and outside of working hours is aggregated in Figure 5.

¹⁸⁴ Note that time spent on "other unspecified domestic labour" and care for other family members (which accounted for two percent or less of rural and urban men's time, and one percent or less of rural and urban women's time) has been omitted.

V. Gender issues in agriculture and rural livelihoods

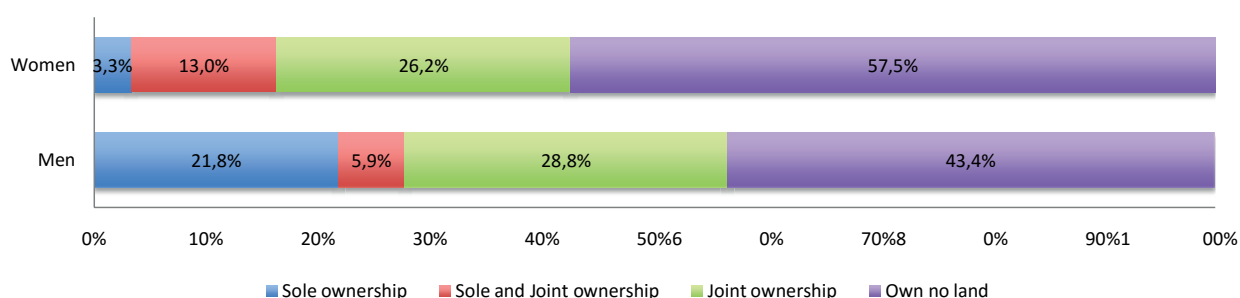
The core set of gender indicators in agriculture recommended by FAO REU serves as a framework for basic gender analysis of the sector. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, gender statistics about agriculture and rural livelihoods are limited, and data are not collected against all 18 gender indicators.

A. Land ownership

Access to and control over land is critical not only to an individual farmer's productivity but also to her or his economic well-being, as land is an economic resource that can be sold, leased or used as collateral for loans. The Kyrgyz Republic was one of the first of the CIS countries to introduce the concept of private land ownership and to embark on the redistribution of agricultural lands. Initiated by presidential decrees in the 1990s, state and collective farms were dissolved and land shares were redistributed to each member of farm workers' families, to medical workers and to teachers living in specific areas.¹⁸⁵ Three-quarters of land (excluding pasture land) was distributed to individuals as agricultural land shares, and the remainder was reserved in the State Land Redistribution Fund, "to be managed by local governments and used for either the expansion of human settlements, for experimental selection and seed-producing farms or for selling land use rights through auctions and leasing to agricultural producers."¹⁸⁶ Land shares were divided among approximately 2.6 million people, 50.6 percent of whom were women and girls.¹⁸⁷ Despite the fact that privatization placed half of land shares in female hands, meaning that women's names appeared on land titles, in the intervening decades, custom and tradition have "prevented many women from receiving the benefits of land distribution."¹⁸⁸

At the time of the previous agricultural census (2002), 12 percent of peasant farms were registered to women, but out of the total arable lands included in all such farming enterprises, women held only 9.2 percent and, of these, they had 9.3 percent of crop lands.¹⁸⁹ Analogous data about agricultural lands are not available at present, but survey data from 2012 reveal that close to 60 percent of rural women report that they do not own any land. Notably, over 40 percent of rural men do not own land; however, men are significantly more likely to be sole land owners (22 percent of surveyed men) than women (three percent of surveyed women).¹⁹⁰ Individual land ownership is not common among the urban population, but even in this context, men are six times more likely to own land than women in urban settings.

Figure 7. Rural Land Ownership, by Sex (%)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 274.

¹⁸⁵ UNECE, 2010, p. 31.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

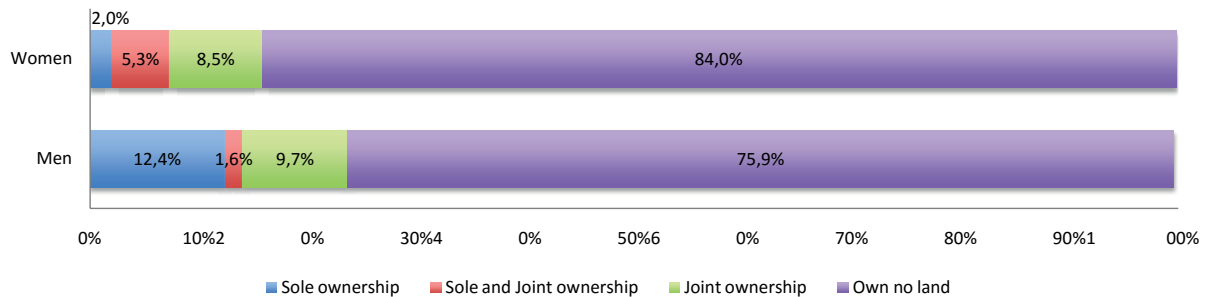
¹⁸⁷ Unpublished material, provided by the National Statistical Committee, and prepared for the Fourth Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Women's Land Rights. [in Russian].

¹⁸⁸ USAID. 2011. Kyrgyzstan- Property Rights and Resource Governance Profile. Washington, DC. p. 10.

¹⁸⁹ National Statistical Committee. 2005. Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2000-2004. Bishkek. Table 4.9. p. 81. [in Russian].

¹⁹⁰ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 274.

Figure 8. Urban Land Ownership, by Sex(%)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 274.

Formal land registries do not identify the sex of the land holder, but gender experts suggest that between 35 and 45 percent of land registered to physical persons is in women's names.¹⁹¹ Moreover, women's land ownership is more common in regions with active land markets than in remote rural areas, presumably because in rural areas the "registration of female rights may clash with customary norms that may preclude them from inheriting land or retaining it in case of divorce."¹⁹² This topic is explored in more detail, below.

In its most recent conclusions, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women identified rural women's lack of ownership and use of land as one facet of persistent discrimination, and called upon the state to take measures to combat poverty among rural women by, *inter alia*, ensuring land ownership.¹⁹³

The reasons behind women's limited access to land, as both owners and users, are varied and have much to do with culture and tradition. Under Kyrgyz law, women have equal rights to own, inherit and dispose of property, including land. However, experts maintain that regulations concerning agricultural land, specifically the law "On Management of Agricultural Lands" (2011), have a discriminatory impact on women, due to the fact that they are gender blind and do not take into account the strong traditions that place land in the hands of men.¹⁹⁴ During privatization, each family received certificates granting private property rights. Under the law, family land shares cannot be legally subdivided, but family members have the right to the monetary value of their portion of the family's land; in essence they can sell their share to the family. Agricultural land cannot be donated; and exchange of land plots is limited to those within the same village administration. Traditionally, when women marry, "they leave their birth family and the family land to live with their husbands", and although they have the legal right to sell their land share to their families and receive compensation, "women seldom do so because such a demand would be considered shameful."¹⁹⁵ According to one survey, the majority of female respondents reported that they had received their official share of land when state farms were privatized, but 25 percent of the women, "... had given their land away without compensation-often to their parents when [they] married."¹⁹⁶ Gender experts contend that when a woman leaves the family home to marry, she "does not even think of selling or leasing her share of the land. Her share by default goes to her parents and will become a part of their sons' and grandsons' inheritance."¹⁹⁷ As one rural woman herself stated, "no rural girl will ever say to her parents: 'Give me my land plot!'" when she marries.¹⁹⁸ A woman who is divorcing or leaving the family would also encounter restrictions if she wishes to divide and claim her portion of the land. Even when women are willing to assert their legal rights, if they do not have the means to cultivate the land (due to limited labour capacity or a lack of economic means to purchase agricultural inputs, for example), they may be forced to cede control and ownership to male relatives. Young brides, those who have married early, ex-wives, daughters-in-law and widows are the least likely to challenge patriarchal traditions about property rights. Additionally, religious second or third marriages do not confer any legal rights to marital property.

Agricultural lands owned by private citizens can only be bequeathed to a single heir, and there are strong traditions around male land ownership. Men are usually considered the heirs to family land (a brother, the youngest son or another male relative), and thus women may inherit no land or a smaller share of family land.¹⁹⁹ In this context, women may be reluctant to claim their land rights out of fear of going against common practice and rural customs.

191 Deininger, K., Selod, H. & Burns, A. 2012. The Land Governance Assessment Framework: Identifying and Monitoring Good Practice in the Land Sector. Washington, DC, World Bank. p. 69.

192 Ibid.

193 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 2015, pp. 31-32.

194 Unpublished material, provided by the National Statistical Committee, and prepared for the Fourth Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Women's Land Rights. [In Russian].

195 USAID, 2011, p. 10.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibraeva, G., Moldosheva, A. & Niyazova, N. 2011. Kyrgyz Country Case Study, Background paper to the World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. Washington, DC, World Bank. p. 32.

198 UN Women. 2013. Collection of Letters. The Voices of Rural Women. Bishkek. p. 33.

199 Ibraeva, Moldosheva & Niyazova, 2011, p. 32.

Land ownership is only one aspect of land rights. Formal registration confers the right to use and dispose of land, but in practice women may make use of agricultural lands that they do not own or may not use lands that they can access. According to an assessment related to food security, female-headed households are less likely to use their land for crops; only 58 percent of FHH cultivated their land, compared with 71 percent of MHH, and the average plot size was smaller for female-headed households who cultivate their land.²⁰⁰ These differences could be related to the fact that FHH are smaller on average than MHH, and so there may be less available labour to cultivate the land, or more restricted incomes could make it difficult for FHH to invest in seeds or other inputs, such as fertilizers. The study also found that FHH were less likely to be food insecure than MHH, and this finding suggests that the female-headed households have a family member working abroad (usually the husband) who sends remittances. The absence of male family members and remittance funds may mean that FHH choose not to cultivate their land. During a validation workshop for this national gender profile, stakeholders noted that specific gender sensitive indicators on uncultivated land and the reasons for non-use of land are needed.

B. Entrepreneurship and agricultural markets

Agricultural entities in Kyrgyzstan are divided into four categories: public sector or state farms (the property and income of such farms is state-owned); collective farms; household farms; and peasant farms. The term “peasant” farming (*dyikan* in Kyrgyz) refers to an independent entity, either an individual or a group, which conducts farming activities using the labour of family members, relatives or other hired persons, on land that is owned by members of the peasant farm or is rented.²⁰¹ The landscape of agricultural activity is dominated by small family-owned farming enterprises. In 2016, out of the 400 794 registered agricultural entities, 300 245 (75 percent) are “peasant” farms, and the remaining 100 549 are individual farmers.²⁰²

A large number of individual citizens are also engaged in farming as a subsidiary activity, more than 700 000 according to the most recent agricultural census. State-owned farms, collective farms, and forestry and fisheries activities account for only a small fraction of the entities that are engaged in agricultural production.

Table 16. Number and Type of Entities in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (2014)

Registered entities	Number
Total	384 955
State farms	40
Collective farms	513
(including: joint-stock companies	(38)
collective peasant farms	(102)
agricultural cooperatives)	(373)
Peasant farms and individual entrepreneurs	384 318
Forestry enterprises	71
Fishery enterprises	13
Other	
Household farms	726 632
Gardening and <i>dacha</i> cooperatives	405

Sources: National Statistical Committee, 2015a, p. 12; National Statistical Committee, 2015c, p. 93.

Entrepreneurship in the agriculture sector can take the form of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as large businesses. Under Kyrgyz law, small businesses in the sector that comprises agriculture, hunting, forestry and fisheries and aquaculture are those with 50 or fewer employees. Enterprises that employ between 51 and 200 people are categorized as medium-sized, and those with more than 200 employees are categorized as large.²⁰³ Peasant farms and individual entrepreneurs are also classified as types of enterprises.

Agricultural production is characterized by individual entrepreneurship. In 2015, 104 592 individual enterprises were registered in this sector, almost all of them (95.6 percent) operating without hired labour.²⁰⁴ While it is estimated that around 70 percent of all SMEs are located in rural areas,²⁰⁵ according to 2014 figures, small and medium-sized enterprises specifically engaged in agriculture make up just over three percent of the SMEs operating in Kyrgyzstan.²⁰⁶ Data about the number of large enterprises conducting business in the agricultural sector are not available, as noted in Table 16.

200 World Food Programme, 2012a, pp. 26-27.

201 National Statistical Committee. 2015a. Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic 2010-2014. Bishkek. p. 68. [in Russian].

202 Data for 2016 generated from the Unified State Register of Statistical Units (EГPCE) and provided by the National Statistical Committee.

203 National Statistical Committee. 2015f. Small and Medium Entrepreneurship in the Kyrgyz Republic 2010-2014. Bishkek. p. 202. [in Russian].

204 Ibid. p. 194.

205 Niyazova, A., Ibraeva, G. & Ibragimova, S. 2010. Situational Analysis: Opportunities and Barriers for Female Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas. Bishkek, UNDP and ADB. p. 21. [in Russian].

206 National Statistical Committee, 2015f, p. 35.

Data about how women and men are represented among entrepreneurs in farming are incomplete. In particular, there are insufficient sex-disaggregated data about individual entrepreneurs. Data about women's role in managing farms is often used as a proxy for their representation among entrepreneurs. It is clear that women are more likely to be engaged in the leadership and management of small-scale farms in the private sector than they are in other agricultural entities. But still, women are the heads of only 9.7 percent of the 518 collective farms and women lead only one of the 38 state farms (in Chui province) at present.²⁰⁷ Sex-disaggregated data about leadership and management of peasant farms indicate that women have more opportunities in this type of business. Yet, women form the minority among farming entrepreneurs. Out of the 384 318 combined registered peasant farms and individual entrepreneurs in 2014, women were the official heads of 74 531 of them (or 19.4 percent). The region in which these farms are located appears to play a role in whether they are women-led. For example, women account for only 9.5 percent and 17.4 percent of heads in Batken oblast and Talas oblast respectively, but 31.2 percent in the city of Bishkek.²⁰⁸

Women are similarly under represented as managers of peasant farms. In 2015, out of the 287 322 individuals who managed active peasant farms, 50 503 (or 17.6 percent) were women.²⁰⁹ The representation of female managers also varies considerably by region, from as low as 7.6 percent in Batken province to as high as 33.3 percent in the city of Bishkek.²¹⁰

Reliance on business registration records for understanding the ways in which women and men are engaged in entrepreneurship can be problematic, because many rural entrepreneurs operate without official legal status (meaning, they do not have full registration, either with justice or statistics agencies, with taxation services or with social funds).²¹¹ One survey found that rural businesses led by men are less likely to have official status (two-thirds of male entrepreneurs and one-third of female entrepreneurs). Furthermore, even when business owners have full legal status, women are almost equally likely to register the business in their name as in their husband's name (16 percent registered the enterprise in their name; ten percent in their husband's name). Men who register a business are far more likely to do so in their own names (42 percent), and less often in the names of their wives (17 percent).²¹²

It is also significant that while agricultural work is often undertaken by women, the sphere of agribusiness is not viewed as one in which women can be successful. According to a 2015 public opinion poll, 78 percent of the country's population is supportive of women's entrepreneurship.²¹³ When asked to rate the sectors where women can successfully run a business, the majority of respondents identified clothing manufacture, trade, education, beauty and health services. No respondents mentioned agriculture, and tourism was also not considered favourable for business women.

Analysing the role of female and male entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector is also made more complicated by the fact that a large segment of the rural population is engaged in farming, but not necessarily as a business. Many women work in agriculture with the status of individual entrepreneurs or as heads or members of peasant farms, but their main income is derived from agricultural products for household consumption. These women may, from time to time, also sell surplus agricultural products but, even then, the income they earn is used by the family and not reinvested in the business production. Such women could be more accurately termed "self-employed", rather than entrepreneurs. Gender experts maintain that when women are classified as entrepreneurs, their non-receipt of any social benefits, including leave for pregnancy, illness and time-off, or pensions for their labour, is obscured.²¹⁴

In addition to farming enterprises, rural women engage in other forms of entrepreneurial activities, such as producing and selling handicrafts and community-based tourism. Rural women are also well-placed to take advantage of business opportunities that are not connected to agriculture, in the service sphere (for instance, private day-care centres) and in hospitality (guest houses or tourist services, for example), and could benefit from additional business planning and management support in these sectors.

Women are somewhat more likely to be employed in agricultural enterprises than they are represented among entrepreneurs in farming. In 2014, out of the total number of workers in small enterprises in the agriculture sector (which also includes forestry and fisheries), men accounted for 77.3 percent of employees (1 973 male

207 Data for 2016 are generated from the Unified State Register of Statistical Units (EFPCE) and provided by the National Statistical Committee.

208 National Statistical Committee, 2015h, p. 66.

209 Ibid. Table 4.17. p. 65.

210 Ibid.

211 Niyazova, Ibraeva & Ibragimova, 2010, p. 56.

212 Ibid. p. 57.

213 The survey was conducted with 1 000 households. SIAR Research and Consulting. 2015. "More than half of the population believe that there are no conditions for the development of women's entrepreneurship in Kyrgyzstan." (available at <http://siar-consult.com/category/news/>). [accessed March 2016]. [in Russian].

214 Niyazova, Ibraeva & Ibragimova, 2010, p. 36.

employees, compared with 581 female employees).²¹⁵ The absolute number of both women and men employed in agricultural enterprises has been decreasing for several years, but the relative proportion of females and males has not changed; women have consistently represented around a quarter of such workers. Notably, large agricultural enterprises employ the largest proportion of female workers (39.3 percent), but only a small number of women and men work in enterprises of this scale.

Table 17. Number and Proportion of Employees in Agricultural Enterprises*, by Sex and Size of Enterprise (2014)

Size of enterprise	Number of enterprises	Number of employees/ entrepreneurs		Share of female employees (%)
		women	men	
Individual entrepreneurs	99 990	no data	no data	--
Small	443	581	1 973	22.8
Medium	25	553	2 083	21.0
Large	no data	469	725	39.3
Total	--	1 603	4 781	25.1

Source: National Statistical Committee, 2015f, p. 32, p. 194; National Statistical Committee, 2015h, pp. 60-61.

*Note here that agricultural enterprises refer to private sector businesses with activities in agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing.

C. Rural finance

The availability of finance is critical for starting and supporting small businesses. Most rural individuals and households do not have bank accounts (3.2 percent of rural households according to the DHS in 2012 and 15 percent of rural people in 2014),²¹⁶ and this means that few rural entrepreneurs have personal savings that they could invest in a business. A lack of start-up capital is a major obstacle for Kyrgyz entrepreneurs in general, and rural women are even less likely to access financial services. According to a study of rural entrepreneurs, 54.5 percent of women used family savings as start-up capital (compared with only 18.8 percent of men), while half of the men obtained start-up capital through loans from microcredit organizations (compared with 32.1 percent of women). A quarter of all men used sales revenues as start-up capital, but only 7.1 percent of women had access to such funds.²¹⁷

Considerable efforts have been undertaken in Kyrgyzstan to improve access to credit, with special attention to microcredit programmes for women. Borrowing patterns indicate that women tend to turn to microfinance institutions (MFIs), which offer less credit for shorter terms, rather than commercial banks. In 2014, 63.4 percent of microloan recipients were women, and there were more women than men taking microloans in every region of the country.²¹⁸ Current sex-disaggregated data on bank clients is not available, but in 2007, women represented only 20 percent of borrowers of "large" loans and 40 percent of "medium" loan clients.²¹⁹ MFI coverage of rural areas is extensive, and microfinance is used for agricultural businesses ventures. As of the end of 2015, more than a third (38.8 percent) of the total credit portfolio was microloans for agriculture, followed by trade and services (27 percent).²²⁰ Men and women take agriculture loans for similar purposes, mainly livestock breeding, followed by plant cultivation. However, based on data from five MFIs in Kyrgyzstan, it appears that women borrow smaller sums of money than men; 86 percent of female MFI clients borrow less than 1 000 USD and only two percent borrow over 2 000 USD. The larger the loan size, the smaller the share of female borrowers. Women are also more likely than men to borrow as a group (92 percent of female, compared with 33 percent of male clients).²²¹

Women and men face some common barriers to accessing credit, such as high interest rates. Yet at the same time, there are also some constraints that have a greater impact on rural women. For example, women's more limited ownership of key assets and property means that they cannot offer the collateral needed for large loans. In a study of rural entrepreneurs, men more often offered land, buildings, machinery and equipment as collateral, and women mainly used personal assets (the house, for example), which resulted in women receiving loans that were on average half the size of those given to the men in the study.²²² Women's businesses tend to be very small in scale, often operating in the informal sector, and may also encompass home-based and irregular

215 National Statistical Committee, 2015h, p. 60.

216 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 18; World Bank. Global Financial Inclusion (Global Findex) Database 2014 for the Kyrgyz Republic. (available at http://datatopics.worldbank.org/financial_inclusion/).

217 Niyazova, Ibraeva & Ibragimova, 2010, p. 58.

218 National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 6.10. p. 86.

219 The survey report did not specify the size of small, medium or large loans. Gender Theme Group of the United Nations Agencies/Kyrgyzstan. 2008. Country Gender Assessment 2007. Bishkek. p. 66.

220 National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2016. Annual Report for 2015. Bishkek. p. 22. [in Russian].

221 Homans, R. 2011. Women Entrepreneurship Development Project, Kyrgyz Republic, RSC-C20368 (KGZ). Asian Development Bank internal document (material provided by Gulfia Abdullaeva).

222 Niyazova, Ibraeva & Ibragimova, 2010, p. 60.

(seasonal) work. For rural women engaged in agriculture-based businesses that are dependent on a seasonal production cycle that generally lasts nine months, high interest rates combined with short repayment periods (from six months up to a year) make taking credit a considerable risk. Furthermore, women who are engaged in business on a part-time basis to accommodate domestic responsibilities may have particular difficulty predicting their income. Women's more limited access to agricultural markets also means that they have fewer options to respond to changes in demand for their products. Due to their more limited mobility and restrictions on their time, women in rural and remote locations can face obstacles simply accessing financial institutions and completing the required paperwork.

Women-owned farms and enterprises' lack of access to finance is compounded by the fact that the female owners tend to have fewer business skills and less experience and knowledge than their male counterparts. Research suggests that in addition to improving women's access to "longer and cheaper" loans, rural women would greatly benefit from business training, including financial literacy, technical and "how-to" training, and empowerment and self-esteem training. Increasing the range of financial products that meet the needs of women in agribusinesses would also lead to further growth in this sector.

D. Crop agriculture

The primary crops grown on peasant farms are grains (mainly wheat), raw cotton, tobacco, sugar beets, potatoes and other vegetables. No sex-disaggregated data are available about the cropping practices of female and male peasant farmers, but a study of entrepreneurship in rural areas found that women have significant involvement in crop production. Rural entrepreneurs were asked about their employment before starting their own businesses, and most had previously been engaged in crop production (more than 70 percent of women and 62 percent of men), followed by livestock production (54.7 percent of women and 62.5 percent of men).²²³ As expected, most respondents founded businesses related to agriculture in which they had experience, but a higher percentage of women's businesses were involved in plant, vegetable and tobacco cultivation (90 percent compared with 52 percent of men's businesses).²²⁴ Agricultural entrepreneurs grow haricot beans (especially in Talas oblast), potatoes, grains and other vegetables. Female entrepreneurs, in particular, are also involved in greenhouse cultivation of medicinal plants, vegetables, flowers and seedlings for sale to local households.

Organized farming, both agricultural enterprises and peasant farming, actually account for a small proportion of crop output in Kyrgyzstan. According to an assessment of the productivity of different types of farms, from 1999 to 2007 household plots exhibited more than double the efficiency in land usage (a measure of the value of agricultural output assessed against the amount of arable land), compared with enterprises and peasant farms.²²⁵ The finding that small household plots are outperforming larger and more organized farms has positive implications for encouraging growth in the agricultural sector as a whole. Conversely, because the labour needed to farm household plots is more likely to be provided by unpaid family members, often women, a considerable proportion of the work involved in making crop production efficient may be unacknowledged and not fully understood.

A large number of rural households grow crops primarily for household consumption and only sell a small proportion of the harvest. A 2012 survey on food security found that 80 percent of rural households cultivate their land or gardens (with an average of 1.4 hectares per household).²²⁶ Around two-thirds of rural households reported that they planned to plant potatoes, 46 percent planned to plant vegetables, and 24 percent intended to plant wheat. However, the proportion of the harvest that they planned to sell varied from 12 percent (vegetables) to around 20 percent for wheat and potatoes. As above, when crop production is undertaken mainly for subsistence, it cannot be considered a business or even self-employment, because the labour does not produce income that can be reinvested in improving or increasing production. Better analysis is needed of the potential differences between female- and male-headed households in terms of crop production for consumption and for sale. For example, a project conducted by the World Bank demonstrates that with a small amount of support (in the form of high-quality seeds, fertilizer and training in basic agriculture), women can increase their crop production and, consequently, the amount of harvest that they can sell.²²⁷

²²³ Niyazova, Ibraeva & Ibragimova, 2010, p. 55.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Lerman & Sedik, 2009, p. 9.

²²⁶ World Food Programme, 2012a, pp. 26-27.

²²⁷ Under the Agricultural Productivity and Assistance Project, women in self-help groups receive agricultural inputs and training worth between 20 and 25 USD which members then repay into a fund that can be used by new group members. See World Bank. 2015b. In the Kyrgyz Republic: Women Working Together to Grow Vegetables and Profits. 13 January 2015. (available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2015/01/13/in-the-kyrgyz-republic-women-working-together-to-grow-vegetables-and-profits>). [accessed February 2016].

Another facet of crop production that warrants further analysis is how men and women are represented along value chains for agricultural products. A rapid assessment of the fruits and vegetables market in Kyrgyzstan found that there are two main types of processing: (1) home-based canning, juicing and preserving, done primarily for home consumption with some sales to local markets through informal trading; and (2) processing for commercial markets.²²⁸ While there is potential for growth in the fruit and vegetable industry, women are nearly absent from ownership or management of commercially viable SMEs in expanding market channels. Instead, women mainly work in informal, home-based and micro-sized enterprises that are considered “stagnant” market channels with limited opportunities for growth.²²⁹ Despite the fact that crop production is a “feminine activity” (compared with livestock production), that women are active on family farms and in cooperatives, and that they also work as fruit and vegetable traders (mainly on an informal basis), they have had limited opportunities to enter formal business. One possible reason for women’s very low level of representation in fruit and vegetable processing enterprises is the fact that in the transition period, former processing plants were privatized by men, who were the former managers, and thus women missed out on the “valuable assets and advantageous networks on which to establish and grow a business.” Additionally, considerable management skills and financial investments are needed to enter this particular market (for example, for the purchase of processing equipment, factory space and sourcing raw material in sufficient volume to make a profit), but it remains to be determined, “why women are not taking these risks, while some men are.”²³⁰ It would also be useful to conduct gender assessments of other crop-related value chains.

E. Livestock

Livestock represents a large proportion of the total agriculture sector, and animal husbandry is critical for the economy as a whole and for a majority of Kyrgyz households. Livestock production has been increasing in recent years, but productivity is still far below its potential as a result of low levels of investment in livestock productivity, the degradation of pasturelands, the prevalence of major livestock diseases and parasites and reduced veterinary services.²³¹ While 71.8 percent of rural households own farm animals,²³² 14.8 percent of urban households also report that they keep animals.²³³ In 2015, the livestock industry consisted of 1.4 million head of cattle, 5.8 million sheep and goats, 5.4 million chickens, over 430 000 horses and 50 000 pigs.²³⁴ Close to 99 percent of cattle, sheep and horses combined, and 83 percent of all poultry, are owned by small-scale private farms and peasant or individual farmers.²³⁵ Households with livestock are mainly involved in subsistence farming, and wool, meat and dairy products are the main commodities. If there is a surplus, the products are sold at local markets or exported to neighbouring countries. The number of livestock owned by rural and urban households does not differ significantly: on average two head of cattle, eight to nine small ruminants (sheep and goats) and eight poultry per household.²³⁶ Many farmers who raise cattle and sheep also undertake related activities, such as processing wool and hides and drying meat, and they are very often also involved in crop production.

At present, official data on individual ownership of livestock are not available, and existing surveys aggregate data for the household. Nevertheless, such studies indicate that female-headed households are less likely to own livestock than male-headed households (41 percent of FHH and 56 percent of MHH), but the average number of livestock owned by each type of household does not differ significantly.²³⁷ In focus groups conducted throughout the country, however, when individuals were asked about access to specific resources, 82 percent of men, and only 18 percent of women, reported that they owned livestock.²³⁸ The government has announced an initiative to register all livestock, but it is not yet clear whether the information will be collected by households or individuals. If information is collected at the household level, this might lead to misinterpretations of the real distribution of wealth and property by sex within the household.

To better understand how women and men make use of livestock resources, it is important to consider ownership rights separately from access. While Kyrgyz women play a significant role in animal husbandry, customarily livestock is viewed as a valuable asset owned by men. Typically, the youngest son would inherit the animals from his parents’ farm, and in cases of divorce, livestock stays with the former husband and his family, and the

228 ACDI/VOCA Kyrgyzstan and ACDI/VOCA U.S. 2013. WLSME Rapid Market Assessment of Garments, Tourism, Fruit and Vegetables, and Dairy: Scanning Industry Competitiveness and Opportunities for Women-Owned SMEs in Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek and Washington, DC. p. 22.

229 Ibid. p. 24.

230 Ibid. p. 25.

231 International Fund for Agricultural Development. 2013. Kyrgyz Republic: Livestock and Market Development Programme II. Project Design Report. Rome.

232 “Farm animals” refers to livestock, herds, other farm animals, beehives and poultry.

233 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 18.

234 National Statistical Committee, 2015c, p. 109.

235 Ibid. p. 110.

236 World Food Programme, 2012a, p. 28.

237 Ibid. p. 29.

238 State Agency on Environment and Forestry of the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP, Center of Research of Public Opinion EI-Pikir. 2007. Gender Aspects of Access to Natural Resources. Bishkek p. 16. [in Russian].

wife would rarely be compensated or even assert her rights to the property.²³⁹ Women's lack of ownership of livestock has implications for their economic well-being, especially for FHH or households in which men have migrated for work. Additionally, without recognized ownership rights, women's ability to access pastureland or to use livestock as collateral for loans is also compromised.

Traditionally, livestock tending is considered a male occupation, with women making important contributions by processing livestock products. Men tend to carry out activities that require heavier physical labour, such as sheep shearing, lambing and cattle breeding. Women, in turn, undertake work that can be done nearer the home where they have domestic and childcare responsibilities, such as milking, milk processing and selling dairy products, preparing (cleaning, dyeing) wool and making handicrafts from wool.²⁴⁰ Both women and men are involved in collecting fodder and feeding livestock. Because of their role in managing livestock, men also generally control the income that results from the sale of animal products such as raw wool and dairy products. In fact, a market assessment conducted under a women's entrepreneurship project, determined that the dairy industry was not viable for this particular intervention despite the fact that a large proportion of women were involved. Among the reasons given was the fact that women in the dairy industry primarily work on small-scale family-owned and managed farms, and because these farms are traditionally led by men, "[the men] maintain control over the sales and investment," with women working in supportive roles such as milking or bookkeeping.²⁴¹ Further analysis of the participation of women and men along key livestock value chains would be useful to better identify the areas in which women could be supported to take on a greater role in animal husbandry.

Of note, a study of entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women highlighted beekeeping as an activity that could provide additional income, especially when pastures for livestock have been overgrazed or degraded.²⁴² Beekeeping is not developed or well-supported in Kyrgyzstan, but it is practised in villages of the Osh region. Other types of small scale animal husbandry, such as rabbit or poultry keeping, could be considered accessible income-generating opportunities for women, and they could offer elderly women in particular with a means to supplement their pensions.

F. Access to agricultural inputs

Agricultural inputs are resources that improve agricultural production and efficiency. Examples include farm equipment and machinery, seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, irrigation and veterinary services. There are no sex disaggregated data on the availability of key agricultural inputs to rural women and men, therefore conclusions can only be drawn from other available information.

The majority of small-scale farmers depend on traditional agricultural tools that are labour-intensive, time-consuming, heavy and inefficient. The Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration estimates that the deficit in agricultural machinery is 40 percent and that most machinery is outdated.²⁴³ The Kyrgyz Republic has fewer tractors per hectare than other comparable former Soviet countries. In 2012, farm enterprises used only 75 percent of the number of tractors that were available in 1988. Most tractors belong to the largest landholders, who are usually men.²⁴⁴ Considering the fact that women own and operate smaller land plots and have fewer livestock, it can be assumed that their access to farm equipment and machinery is even more limited than that of the average farmer. In fact, the majority of individual farmers, not only female farmers, have limited financial capacity to own and operate machinery. However, recent amendments to the Tax Code that removed impediments to leasing may help to improve the situation. In 2014, the Ministry of Economy launched awareness activities to encourage leasing as an option for women entrepreneurs who have good credit histories but cannot offer collateral. The government intends to track and report on the number of leasing transactions made by women.

A study of the situation in rural communities that used questionnaires and focus group discussions (more than 65 percent of respondents were women) found that female farmers tend to lack ownership and control over a variety of productive inputs. Some of the most common problems in agriculture that respondents identified were: a lack of machinery and technology; the poor quality and high cost of seeds; the high cost of fertilizers;

239 Undeland, A. 2007. Women and Pastures in Chong Alai Valley of the Kyrgyz Republic. Case Study. Bishkek, Rural Development Fund. p. 4.

240 Ibid. p. 29.

241 ACDI/VOCA Kyrgyzstan and ACDI/VOCA U.S., 2013, pp. 26-27.

242 Niyazova, Ibraeva & Ibragimova, 2010, p. 78.

243 Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2012a. Draft Strategy on Agriculture Development of the Kyrgyz Republic to 2020.

244 Alexander, P. 2010. Trying business: Rural enterprise and women's work in the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. UNDP working paper. (unpublished).

and a lack of water for irrigation.²⁴⁵ Women's lack of access stems from their more limited knowledge (for example, about companies that sell fertilizers, pesticides and seeds, about processing technologies and about any available subsidies) and the high cost of resources (for example, seeds, fertilizers and fuel).²⁴⁶

Like fertilizers, pesticides can be considered an agricultural input, and FAO includes an indicator on the "percentage of holdings using chemicals by type of chemicals and sex of the holder" in its core set of agricultural gender indicators. In preparing this gender profile, no data were found about how female and male farmers use pesticides or chemicals, but the regulation of safe pesticide handling and disposal practices is an important issue for the country. The Kyrgyz Republic has ratified the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, but experts note that the use of persistent organic pollutant pesticides in agriculture was prohibited more than two decades ago, and officially there are no imported or exported pesticides of this kind.²⁴⁷ However, unregulated and illegal use of persistent organic pollutant pesticides does take place, especially in border regions. An assessment of pesticide poisoning revealed that while pesticides are not produced in Kyrgyzstan, they are imported from neighbouring countries, and during the growing season they are sold in most village shops, where they are stored alongside food products.²⁴⁸ While men are at a high risk of pesticide poisoning because they are responsible for crop spraying and the disposal of empty pesticide containers, many women and children of farming families also risk exposure when they use open water sources near sprayed crops, as bystanders when crops are sprayed and due to the gendered division of labour. Under the country assessment, 46 percent of all respondents reported symptoms of pesticide poisoning; around a third of women reported that they wash contaminated clothes by hand, even though they do not handle pesticides.²⁴⁹ Significantly, children are involved in activities such as helping to mix and spray pesticides, cleaning equipment, handling produce, harvesting, dipping livestock, applying fertilizer, weeding and planting, and boys are more likely to take on these tasks than girls (especially tasks involving the direct handling of pesticides).²⁵⁰ Ecological NGOs in Kyrgyzstan have been active in both inventorying pesticides and also educating the public about their risks. Projects on introducing ecological pest management practices and technologies could also benefit from information about the specific practices of female and male farmers, as well as differences in their levels of knowledge about pesticides.

Access to water for irrigation is an acute concern for farmers in the Kyrgyz Republic, as it is elsewhere in Central Asia, and there is also a gender dimension to the issue. The country has abundant natural water resources, but the agricultural sector consumes around 90 percent of available water. The irrigation infrastructure is in poor condition and in need of capital repair. Surface irrigation is mainly used, rather than sprinkler or drip irrigation, but this method is inefficient and results in considerable water loss. During the growing season, water shortages occur and they are especially problematic in the southern region in the Batken, Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces. The limited water supply causes lost crops and small harvests, especially in kitchen gardens and household plots, and also leads to serious conflicts over water use. Rural women identify shortages of irrigation water as one of the most pressing problems in their villages. As one female villager in Jalal-Abad province explains, "problems with irrigation have been persistent in our area for more than ten years. All these years, we have not been able to obtain a good yield off our fields due to problems with irrigation. Some of our people are trying to grow crops that do not require as much water (corn, sunflower), but none of us risk planting vegetables, fruit or berries as it is a useless and futile effort."²⁵¹

Respondents in a study on access to natural resources indicate that men have better access to irrigation than women, and female heads of households more often report that they have inadequate access to irrigation compared with male household heads (20 percent of FHH and 13 percent of MHH).²⁵² Access to irrigation is linked to a commonly-held stereotype that irrigation is a "man's business". As land owners, men consider themselves responsible for making decisions about irrigation, while the women's sphere is seen as the management of water for domestic use. Focus group participants cited this traditional division of labour (boys often learn about irrigation practices from their fathers), in addition to the fact that agricultural water management requires manual labour and physical strength.²⁵³ Interestingly, men consider water an economic (strategic) resource, while women reportedly think of water as a household (practical) resource.

Since 1996, rural water resources have been managed by Water Users Associations (WUAs), but to date, women's representation in such organizations has been minimal. Note that the role of women and men in WUAs is discussed in a later section on governance and networks.

245 WECF, 2014, p. 11.

246 Ibid. p. 12.

247 Pecheniuk, O. Independent Ecological Expertise NGO. 2009. Public Participation of the Stockholm Convention Implementation in the Kyrgyz Republic. Presentation at the Regional Training Workshop on PCBs and POPs Wastes. Bratislava, Slovakia. 1-4 December 2009.

248 Willis, S. 2015. Final Report. Protecting Farmers and Vulnerable Groups from Pesticide Poisoning. PAN-UK / Rotterdam Convention for UN FAO. (Country assessment conducted by BIOM).

249 Ibid. p. 31, p. 45.

250 Ibid. p. 30, p. 45.

251 UN Women, 2013, p. 21.

252 State Agency on Environment and Forestry of the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP & Center of Research of Public Opinion EI-Pikir, 2007, p. 31.

253 Ibid. p. 32.

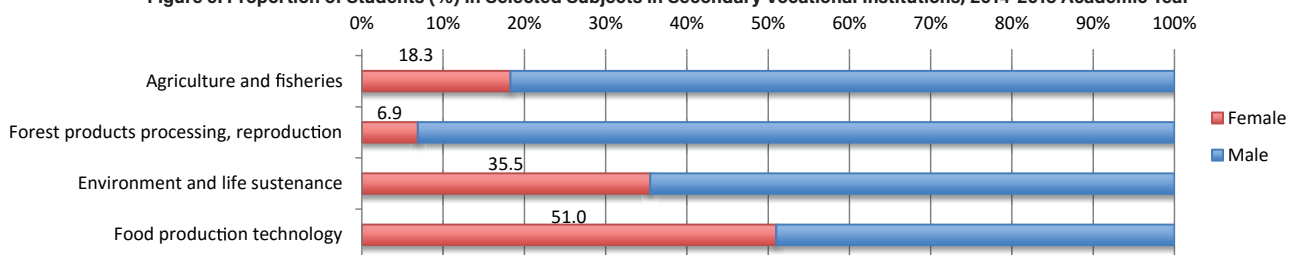
G. Agricultural extension services and training

Limited access to agricultural extension and advisory services is a problem faced by all smallholder farmers in the Kyrgyz Republic, and they need specialized knowledge on topics such as agricultural engineering, animal husbandry, accounting and business planning. The Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration supports the development and delivery of extension services and cooperates with agricultural research institutions. Nevertheless, the current system is inadequate to deliver extension services to the large number of smallholder farmers, in part due to the limited number of trained extension staff and the lack of funding. The provision of extension services is mainly funded by donor organizations. Coordination between service providing organizations is weak, and relationships between extension services and scientific-research institutes could also be improved.²⁵⁴ Farmers in Kyrgyzstan identify a number of critical knowledge needs, including: agro-technical measures, irrigation techniques, marketing services, basic economic knowledge (for example, creating a business plan) and regulations on land and water use.²⁵⁵

While women in Kyrgyzstan are generally well-educated, they lack access to timely information about new agricultural technologies and also about the marketing of agricultural products. Case studies of rural women's economic practices found that women generally have the necessary skills and knowledge to manage small-scale projects in agriculture, handicrafts and trade, but they mainly obtain these skills through their own family upbringing, trial and error and sometimes training provided by international organizations.²⁵⁶ There are a large number of projects, run by both Kyrgyz NGOs and international organizations, that provide training and technical assistance to female entrepreneurs in business management, to rural women on processing agricultural products for handicrafts (wool, for example), as well as direct training to farmers on agricultural practices.²⁵⁷ These projects are not necessarily coordinated and they tend to be of a short duration (during the project cycle), as opposed to the kind of advisory services that farmers could access on a regular basis under an agricultural extension programme or through local agronomists.

The representation of women in the country's agricultural education and training system is another measure of gender gaps in agricultural knowledge. As the number of smallholder farms expands, the demand for agriculture graduates and extension specialists will also increase. Although a large segment of the population engages in agricultural work, the study of agriculture attracts a relatively small proportion of students in either technical and vocational training institutions or in higher education. However, due to professional segregation and traditional and cultural practices, women are especially under represented among students and graduates in agriculture or agribusiness. Female students in technical and vocational instructions tend to be concentrated in humanitarian subjects (education, health, economics), and in the 2014-2015 academic year, women represented fewer than 20 percent of students specializing in agriculture or the processing of forest products (see Figure 9). Young women do, however, make up more than half of the students in courses on food processing, which reflects the fact that there are opportunities for female employment in this industry.

Figure 9. Proportion of Students (%) in Selected Subjects in Secondary Vocational Institutions, 2014-2015 Academic Year



Source: National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 3.9. p. 46.

The government has prioritized the development of the vocational educational system, in particular in the area of agriculture (especially the processing industry). A number of donor organizations have supported short-term vocational training in the areas of farm management, rural agribusinesses and processing of agricultural products (targeting women and girls), but important topics which are not covered by donors include cattle slaughter, meat processing, extension and rehabilitation of irrigation.²⁵⁸

254 Kazbekov, J. & Qureshi, A. S. 2011. Agricultural Extension in Central Asia: Existing Strategies and Future Needs. Working Paper 145. Colombo, Sri Lanka, International Water Management Institute. p. 26.

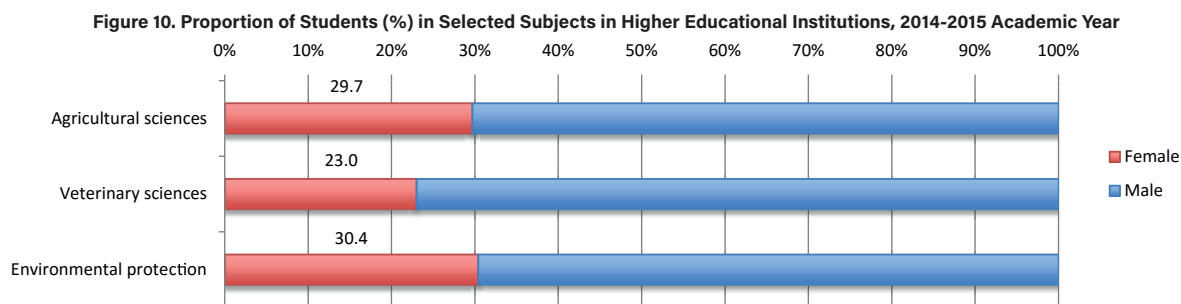
255 Ibid. p. 28.

256 Kim, E. 2014. Case-Based Analysis of Existing Economic and Environmental Practices of Rural Women in Suusamyr Ayil Okmotu, Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek, UNDP. p. 25.

257 For example, the World Bank notes that women make up 92 percent of rural self-help groups that receive training in sustainable agriculture practices, vegetable conservation and business skills. World Bank. 2015a. Help Women Farmers 'Get Equal'. (available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/women-farmers-getting-to-equal>).

258 Schwegler-Rohmeis, W., Mummert, A. & Jarck, K. 2013. Labour Market and Employment Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Study. Identifying Constraints and Options for Employment Development. Bishkek, GIZ. pp. 60-61.

The pattern of female enrolment in specialities related to agriculture in higher educational institutions differs somewhat from the pattern found in vocational education. Although there is a greater proportion of female students in these specialities, women still do not represent more than 30 percent of students in these subjects.



Source: National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 3.10, p. 47.

The fact that a large share of agricultural work is informal on small family farms may deter young people from considering professional training or careers in agriculture. For women, their limited presence in academic specialities on agriculture can also be explained by the fact that these fields are generally perceived as “male work”, and there has been little support for women to enter them.

H. Pasture management

Traditionally, Kyrgyzstan was a pastoralist society. The Kyrgyz were a nomadic people who practiced transhumance, the seasonal movement of livestock between pastures. This way of life is still integral to the culture, and although the Soviets introduced a sedentary lifestyle and collectivized livestock production, transhumance practices never completely vanished. Pasture resources became degraded during the Soviet period, but meadows and pasturelands still form the majority of all agricultural lands today. Although a large share of state and collective farmland were privatized, the law “On Pastures” (2009) designated all pastureland the property of the state with grazing rights granted annually to individuals and collectives (through the purchase of tickets based on the kind and number of livestock). Today, there are over nine million hectares of pastureland and, under the law, pasture management has shifted to local authorities, through Pasture Users Associations (PUAs) and Pasture Management Committees (PMCs) (community organizations of elected representatives from among pasture users). Pasture Management Committees are responsible for developing and implementing community plans for the use of pastures, monitoring the status of pastures, issuing documents and collecting fees, and resolving disputes.

Traditionally, nomadic women and men worked together herding livestock. In fact, in one part of the country (the Chong Alai valley bordering China and Tajikistan), women take on the primary responsibility for herding. With their children, women leave their winter homes in early May and take their flocks to spring pastures; in June, they move to higher summer pastures, later moving to autumn pastures and returning in October. Men stay behind in the valley to tend agricultural crops and collect hay.²⁵⁹

Women’s activities tending livestock do not necessarily equate to formal ownership and access rights. One study found that customary practices concerning pasture management remain influential and they usually confer property rights and land use rights to men as the household heads. Thus, when a woman divorces, the community would consider her rights to the land and pasture to remain with her former husband.²⁶⁰ Even though such a woman might technically have the protection of the law, she would in effect lose her rights over livestock and pasture land use.

Limited sex-disaggregated data on participation in formal structures for pasture management were found when producing this gender profile. According to information provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration at the validation workshop held in February 2016, there are 454 PMCs, approximately 11 of which are chaired by women (or 2.4 percent). However, this number may soon decrease as several women are reportedly preparing to leave their posts. Because women are under represented on PMCs, they have more limited information about, and access to, public decision-making concerning sustainable pasture management.²⁶¹ In one case study,

²⁵⁹ Undeland, 2007, pp. 5-6.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 8.

²⁶¹ UNDP, no date. A note on including gender issues in projects across sectors. A case of ‘Pasture management’ project: Kyrgyzstan. (available at <http://undpgendermadeeasy.org>). [accessed January 2016].

women expressed their willingness to participate in PMCs within a community development project, but they were not elected. The women were not well-informed about the work and objectives of the committees and they were, "... misled by men who told them that [it was a] pasture infrastructure focused project."²⁶² Women interviewees stated that because only men had been elected, the PMCs prioritized road infrastructure projects, "since men go to pastures only to take their families and come back – by car or truck." Conversely, the female pasture users had other interests, such as, "clean and safe water at the pastures for people and animal [sic], lack of fuel for cooking, problems with animal health, investments into small scale processing for additional income generation."²⁶³ Assessments of the regulation of community-based pasture management suggest that the approach has not been completely effective, due to issues such as power asymmetries between pasture users and the fact that Pasture Users Associations have not generally been egalitarian. Often, "the organizations and respective decision-making processes [are] dominated by older and wealthier male pasture users."²⁶⁴ Such findings suggest that women's access to pastures, as well as their ability to influence their management, are not being fully realized and should be addressed through other means.

I. Forestry

There are four forest types in the Kyrgyz Republic: spruce, walnut-fruit, juniper and floodplain/riverside forests. Forest land accounts for around 13 percent of the total territory of the country, and all forests are state owned. The State Forest Fund includes over 2.6 million hectares of land, consisting of natural and cultivated forests, pastureland, and other types of land such as hayfields, arable land and orchards.²⁶⁵ State forestry enterprises (*leskhoz*) manage forest land and lease land parcels to local residents. Out of a combined total of 384 942 registered agricultural and forestry enterprises, 71 are engaged in forestry.²⁶⁶

Although forests form a relatively small proportion of the country's total territory and agricultural enterprise, they are highly diverse and more than one million people live in or near forests. Residents rely on forest products, such as berries, fruits and nuts (raspberries, blackberries, apples, pears, plums, apricots, walnuts and pistachios), mushrooms, medicinal plants, timber and firewood, for food, for heating and cooking, as construction materials, and as sources of income. Forests are also critical in preventing soil erosion, landslides and avalanches and in regulating water flows. Forest lands, however, are threatened by logging, forest clearing to create pasture and crop land and intensive livestock grazing.²⁶⁷

In terms of how gender intersects with forestry, the picture is less clear, despite the fact that national policy on forestry has reflected gender issues. For instance, the National Action Plan on Forestry Development for 2006 to 2010 included a task to improve gender policy in the forestry sector, with the expected result that women would be employed in state forestry bodies, including in management. However, government commitment to implement the action plan was deemed to be weak overall, and gender-related goals meant to be achieved by 2007, were not met and were considered "not feasible" by experts.²⁶⁸ The extent to which other national long-term strategies, such as the Concept of Forestry Sector Development to 2025 and the National Forest Program to 2015, are gender sensitive could not be determined during the drafting of this national profile.

Sex-disaggregated data about forest leaseholders and employment in *leskhoz*, or in other enterprises that deal with forest products, are also not available but qualitative research offers some information about the differences in how women and men access and use forest resources and in their knowledge about biodiversity. According to focus group discussions held in two forest villages (older men, the heads of households) are the typical leaseholders of forest lands, and women and young men reported that they have very limited access to "high demand forest areas."²⁶⁹ Young women, in particular, find it difficult to access information and participate in meetings about the distribution of forest lands that are organized by the *leskhoz* or community authorities, due to their domestic responsibilities and also gender stereotypes about women's role in resource allocation and management. Women participating in focus groups conducted in other forest areas stated that they find it particularly difficult to enter negotiations with the *leskhoz* and they prefer male relatives to negotiate for them.²⁷⁰ In addition, women generally have less information about the rules and procedures of forest management.

²⁶²Undeland, 2007, p. 7.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Dörre, A. 2015. "Promises and realities of community-based pasture management approaches: Observations from Kyrgyzstan." *Pastoralism: Research, Policy and Practice*. 5(15). (available at <http://www.pastoralismjournal.com/content/5/1/15>). [accessed January 2016].

²⁶⁵ National Statistical Committee, 2015b, p. 28.

²⁶⁶ Data from 2014. National Statistical Committee, 2015c, p. 93.

²⁶⁷ FAO. 2015a. Improving forestry management in the Kyrgyz Republic. Success Story. (available at <http://www.fao.org/technical-cooperation-programme/success-stories/detail/en/c/357019/>). [accessed January 2016].

²⁶⁸ Undeland, A. 2012. The Development Potential of Forests in the Kyrgyz Republic. Washington, DC, Program on Forests (PROFOR)/ World Bank. p. 10, p. 99.

²⁶⁹ Biodiversity International. 2014. How gender-specific knowledge is inspiring change in Kyrgyzstan's walnut forests. (available at <http://www.biodiversityinternational.org/news/detail/how-gender-specific-knowledge-is-inspiring-change-in-kyrgyzstans-walnut-forests/>). [accessed January 2016].

²⁷⁰ State Agency on Environment and Forestry of the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP&Center of Research of Public Opinion EI-Pikir, 2007, p. 34.

In some parts of the country, collaborative forest management or community-based forest management arrangements have been introduced, as a means of empowering “a group of households or (ideally) a whole community to manage large patches of forest land to better preserve the forests while improving their livelihoods.”²⁷¹ These arrangements are intended to provide all community members/lessees with equal rights to use and manage the forests, while earning an income from forest products, and the *leskhoz* gives instructions on forest tending, planting, seeding and other work that the lessee is to undertake. However, studies indicate that this model has not been widely implemented in the country, the leased land plots are generally small in size, and the household must have sufficient labour resources to undertake the forestry work.²⁷² In practice, female-headed households and poor households have not been given opportunities to enter into collaborative forest management schemes, because *leskhoz* management often view these households as, “not being capable of handling some of the labour requirements”, or not having sufficient resources to undertake the forestry works under the lease.²⁷³

FHH, and poor households, primarily use forest resources for subsistence purposes. Women-led households undertake activities such as gathering firewood, making hay and picking fruit almost exclusively for their own consumption, and they collect nuts entirely for commercial purposes.²⁷⁴ Other activities, such as collecting berries and medicinal plants, bee-keeping and livestock grazing, are carried out for a mixture of household consumption and commercial purposes.²⁷⁵

The use of forest resources is regulated by felling permits. Timber-cutting is male-dominated, and women report they do not take part in felling trees because the lack of mechanization means that the work requires “male strength”, as well as specialized knowledge, a horse or a car, and a permit.²⁷⁶ In households without men, women ask relatives or neighbours to help with timber harvesting, and women themselves collect brushwood for fuel.

Women and men have equal access to non-timber forest products, but there are differences in the practice of collecting and using these natural resources. Many women are engaged in the use of forest land without any agreements (more than 35 percent of surveyed women) or with only informal agreements (20 percent of women).²⁷⁷ Under a system called *mashak*, lessees allow poor families and women who do not have other means of accessing forest resources to collect leftover nuts and fruits for free. While it is women, often accompanied by children, who are mainly engaged in collecting berries, mushrooms and medicinal plants from the forest, focus group participants noted that any income from the sale of non-timber products is added to the family budget, and in most cases the husband, the household head, makes decisions about how to spend the funds.²⁷⁸ Additionally, the income from commercial timber is much greater than that derived from the sale of other forest products, which also places women in a disadvantaged economic position. Women have a great deal of knowledge about traditional techniques for preserving forest trees, such as pruning, irrigation and treatment against pests and diseases; and in the collection, preservation, preparation and storage of fruits, berries, nuts and plants used for cooking and traditional medicine. This knowledge is especially important for conservation and sustaining the biodiversity of Kyrgyzstan’s forests.

The walnut and kernel market chain generates significant employment and has the potential to benefit women and poor households. There is very little capacity among the *leskhoz* for post-harvest cleaning, drying and storage of nuts, and so most farmers sell walnuts immediately after harvest to traders and crackers at lower prices. Poor households, including female-headed households, could earn higher incomes if they had more market information and could process or crack walnuts themselves during winter months.²⁷⁹ Processing businesses employ teams of women to crack, sort and grade walnuts, and women mainly work as small-scale traders in markets. Experts suggest that by increasing women’s access to microfinance and loans, women-led business along the walnut value chain could be expanded.²⁸⁰

J. Fisheries and aquaculture

The commercial fishery sector in the Kyrgyz Republic has all but collapsed since the Soviet period. FAO estimates that fish production in 1989 reached 1 447 tonnes per year, but by 2008, production had declined to 100 tonnes, merely seven percent of previous levels.²⁸¹ After independence, most state-owned fisheries were privatized,

271 Undeland, 2012, p. 32.

272 Ibid. pp. 34-35.

273 Ibid. p. 35.

274 Ibid. p. 28.

275 Ibid; State Agency on Environment and Forestry of the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP&Center of Research of Public Opinion El-Pikir, 2007, p. 36.

276 State Agency on Environment and Forestry of the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP&Center of Research of Public Opinion El-Pikir, 2007, p. 34.

277 Undeland, 2012, p. 36.

278 State Agency on Environment and Forestry of the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP&Center of Research of Public Opinion El-Pikir, 2007, p. 36.

279 Undeland, 2012, p. 75.

280 Bourne, W. 2011. Walnut Value Chain Study Findings. Forests and Rural Livelihoods in the Kyrgyz Republic-Development Potential. Bishkek, Rural Development Fund.

281 Thorpe, A., Whitmarsh, D., Drakeford, B., Reid, C., Karimov, B., Timirkhanov, S., Satybekov, K. & Van Anrooy, R. 2011. Feasibility of stocking and

and they were left with limited management capacity, inadequate budgets for research, gathering statistics or monitoring the activities of the fisheries, and shortages of hatchery equipment and fish feed that had previously been imported at low cost.²⁸² A number of aquaculture ponds that had low production levels were converted to crop lands.

There is not a strong tradition of capture fishing in Kyrgyzstan, due to climate specifics and local preferences for consuming lamb, beef and poultry. Commercial fishing only began in the late 19th century and was concentrated around lake Issyk-Kul, the country's largest body of water. During periods of economic crisis in the early 2000s, increased poaching (for subsistence and not commercial purposes) threatened fish stocks, and several moratoria on commercial fish capture on the Issyk-Kul and Son Kul lakes have been imposed since that time. Despite the moratoria, it is thought that illegal fishing continues at a greater rate than official records on arrests and net confiscation indicate.²⁸³

Within these conditions, the government of Kyrgyzstan recognizes that investment and improvements in local fisheries and aquaculture have the potential to enhance rural livelihoods, offer additional employment opportunities to rural people and increase the availability of an affordable and nutritious food source. In 2007, the government requested technical assistance from FAO on the development and management of the fishery sector. In 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration drafted a Concept on the Development of Fisheries in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015-2025 that focuses on strengthening the legislation that regulates fisheries, introducing new technologies to the sector and improving consumer awareness of fish and fish products. The concept paper does not outline a plan for employment or vocational training. Data about the current roles of women and men in fishing and aquaculture are very limited, and the lack of information complicates the process of developing strategies to effectively engage rural populations in this sector.

Data collected by FAO indicate that the fisheries sector is not a major employer compared with other industries. Men are, however, far better represented in the fisheries sector than women, and they also work in more diverse jobs. Women are best represented in fish production, on fish farms, and in the retail trade of fish and fish products (see Table 18, below). Most of the women and men who work in the fisheries-related sectors are employed on a full-time basis.

Table 18. Employment in Fisheries-Related Sectors, by Sex (2007)

Employment (full- and part-time combined)	Female employees (number)	Male employees (number)
Department of Fisheries ²⁸⁴	12	60
Research institutes, universities	3	9
Lake and pond reproduction and fishery	29	177
Lakes and reservoirs (commercial fishery)	0	43
Sport and recreational fishery	8	37
Marketing and distribution of fish	13	5
Total	65	331

Source: FAO, 2008, p. 42.

Looking more closely at commercial fisheries, between 80 percent and 90 percent of fish farm employees are male, and while most farms are small (from six to ten employees), they hire an equal number of seasonal workers when needed.²⁸⁵ Monthly wages for fish farm workers vary by region, type of employment (full time or temporary) and sex. On average, female employees are remunerated at a considerably lower rate than men. A survey conducted in seven regions of the country found that, with the exception of female fish farm workers in Chui oblast, women's average monthly salaries ranged from between 55 percent to 66 percent of men's salaries.²⁸⁶ According to national data from 2014, however, women's average salaries in the field of fish farming exceeded men's salaries (they were equivalent to 101.9 percent of men's salaries),²⁸⁷ but when fish capture and fish farming are combined, they were lower.²⁸⁸

Most fish farms are not engaged in fish processing, but it has been noted that women's role in post-harvest fish processing, such as drying and smoking, in household-based, small-scale businesses has increased. Such work

culture-based fisheries in Central Asia. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 565. Ankara, FAO. p. 1.

282 Sariyeva, M., Alpiev, M., Van Anrooy, R., Jørgensen, J., Thorpe, A. & Mena Millar, A. 2008. Capture fisheries and aquaculture in the Kyrgyz Republic: current status and planning. FAO Fisheries Circular, No. 1030. Rome, FAO. p. 3, p. 9.

283 Ibid. p. 20.

284 Within the former Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Processing Industry.

285 Ilibezova, E., Sharafutdinova, M., Kerimbekov, A., Invei, Y., Tenizbaeva, J., Ilibezova, L. & Siriwardena, S. 2013. Fish Marketing and Consumption Survey in the Kyrgyz Republic. Rome, FAO. p. 5.

286 Ibid. p. 6.

287 National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 6.5. p. 81.

288 In 2013, women's salaries were equivalent to 76.8 percent of men's salaries for fish capture and farming combined. National Statistical Committee. 2014d. Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2009-2013. Bishkek. Table 6.5. p. 116.

is usually additional to general household duties and reflects the fact that women are increasingly taking on the role of family providers.²⁸⁹

Employment in the sale and marketing of fish has a different pattern. According to the above-mentioned survey, the majority of sellers (67 percent) and managers of businesses in the fish trade (79 percent) are women.²⁹⁰ Most of the enterprises are small-scale retail businesses that employ between one and five people, but which increase their staff during peak seasons. In larger enterprises (those employing up to 30 full-time staff), women not only dominate as sellers, but their monthly salaries exceed men's by around six percent (there is, however, a great deal of variation by region).²⁹¹ Women's dominance in the retail sector, mainly selling processed fish products, is related to their lack of capital to invest in larger and more diverse fishing enterprises.

K. Governance and networks

Women's role in the country's governance may at first appear to have limited relevance to the everyday lives of female farmers and women in rural communities. However, the presence of women in government not only means that they will have a greater opportunity to set the agenda for agricultural reforms and rural development, but it also influences how society views women in leadership. Furthermore, the decentralized system of government means that local self government, at the *aiyl okmotu* level, has quite extensive functions that are important for rural populations, including, for example, drafting the local budget, formulating programmes for the economic and social development of the territory, providing public sector and municipal services, managing the use of agricultural lands and pastures, and offering some assistance in organizing veterinary services.

Women's representation in governance at national level is an area in which significant progress has been made in recent years. The adoption of the equal rights law in 2008 paved the way for more women to move into high-level political and strategic government positions. However, women in public service generally occupy administrative posts with lower responsibility, while men hold a larger number of political and senior administrative positions. In 2015, women represented 39.8 percent of all employees in public administration, but the majority were in administrative positions (40.7 percent of all administrative posts were held by women).²⁹² The number of women in 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 Ministry of Culture. Table 19 below illustrates female representation in specialist and administrative posts for several state bodies that could be considered relevant to agriculture and rural livelihoods.

Table 19. Proportion of Female Civil Servants in Selected Ministries, Committees and State Agencies (2015)

Office	Women in political and specialist posts (%)	Women in administrative posts (%)
Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration	0	27.9
Department of Water Resources	n/a ²⁹³	21.4
State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry	0	31.6
Ministry of Economics	20.0	51.3
National Statistical Committee	25.0	73.5

Source: National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 5.4. p. 73.

Women's representation in elected office, at the national and local levels, has improved due in large part to the adoption of mandatory quotas through amendments to the Election Code (in 2007 and 2011). Despite a considerable increase in the number of women in office, they have not yet reached the 30 percent threshold that is considered critical to having an effective voice in decision-making. Women currently constitute 19.2 percent of parliamentarians in the Jogorku Kenesh (Supreme Council) of the Kyrgyz Republic (there are 23 female deputies out of a total of 120).²⁹⁴ There is one woman on the parliamentary Committee on Agricultural Policy, Water Resources, Environment and Regional Development.²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, women's greater representation in parliament has favourably influenced the legislative agenda and increased the focus on social issues and gender equality. Female members of parliament have introduced amendments and laws on issues of education (for example, increased teachers' salaries and improvements to preschool education), family law (for example, early

²⁸⁹ Ilibezova et al., 2013, p. 61.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 27.

²⁹¹ Ibid. p. 29.

²⁹² National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 5.1 p. 71. Note that data from state institutions concerned with defence and security are excluded.

²⁹³ As of 1 January 2014 there were no staff, of either sex, in political or specialist posts in the Department of Water Resources.

²⁹⁴ Website of the Jogorku Kenesh, available at http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Folders/31642-Deputaty_ZHogorku_Kenesh_VI_sozvva.aspx. [accessed March 2016].

²⁹⁵ Website of the Jogorku Kenesh, available at http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/31814-Komitet_po_agrarnoj_politike_vodnym_resursam_ekologii_i_regionalnomu_razvitiyu.aspx. [accessed March 2016].

and forced marriage, polygamy and the regulation of religious marriages) and reproductive rights. These legal changes contribute to improving the economic and social status of women generally, but many have a particularly positive impact on the lives of rural women.

Women's presence in local government is a significant indicator of their ability to influence policy-making in their communities. In 2015, women represented 36.2 percent of all employees in local government and, within this number, 33.6 percent of municipal employees.²⁹⁶ Women's predominance in administrative positions at the municipal level echoes the pattern seen in national office, albeit with a greater gender imbalance. Women represent only 4.2 percent of employees in political offices and 35.4 percent of administrative employees in municipalities.²⁹⁷

Women have not yet reached 20 percent representation in decision-making bodies in local executive offices or elected posts. Civil society organizations have drawn attention to the fact that despite reform to the election law in 2011, that introduced a gender quota on party lists for district and city council elections (a minimum of 30 percent representation by either sex, plus a ranking system of candidates), there has been "a steady and significant decrease in the number of women elected to local councils through the majority system: 19 percent in 2004, 17 percent in 2007, and 13 percent in 2012."²⁹⁸ It is significant that the quota does not apply to *aiyl* or village level councils (keneshes).²⁹⁹

The most recent local council elections were held in 2012, at which time women represented 16 percent of candidates for city and *aiyl* councils combined, but won only 13 percent of council seats.³⁰⁰ Analysis of the 2012 elections indicated that female candidates faced a number of gender-specific obstacles, including violations of their rights. Many rural women lacked information about the pre-election process, including the possibility of registering for election funding, and local authorities refused to register some female candidates. Due to prevailing social norms, male candidates have greater opportunities to meet informally with potential voters in their homes (for instance, "over a bottle of vodka") and can rely on kinship ties with male relatives that are not available to women.³⁰¹ Observers also identified a phenomenon that occurred throughout the country, namely, after the elections, some successful female candidates reported that they were told they would have to choose between taking a seat on the council or retaining their jobs. This practice suggests that political parties were "misleading candidates" in order to use women's resources (financial and networks) during campaigns.³⁰²

The most recently available comparative data (from before the 2012 elections) of women at various levels of government (Table 20, below) indicate that women's representation remains very low. The 2012 elections resulted in women occupying 13 percent of local council seats. In most *aiyl okmotu* the election of new executive heads follows local council elections, meaning that there was also a significant change in leadership. Yet, women's representation did not improve significantly: of the 453 *aiyl okmotu*, 27 are headed by women (six percent of the total).³⁰³ The low representation of women at decision-making level in local government is attributed to the absence of clear mechanisms for ensuring their adequate representation. Local council elections will next take place in 2016.

Table 20. Number and Proportion of Women in Local Government Office (2011)

Office	Number of women	Proportion of women (%)
Non-Elected Office		
Government representatives (province/oblast level)	1	14.3
Akims ⁹ (district level)	1	2.3
Mayors (city level)	0	0
Heads of <i>aiyl okmotu</i>	22	4.8
Elected Office		
Oblast level keneshes	1 333	16.3
District level keneshes	2	5.0
City level keneshes	0	0
<i>Aiyl</i> level keneshes	37	8.1

Source: ADB, UNDP, World Bank & DFID. no date. *Country Gender Assessment. Kyrgyz Republic.* (unpublished).³⁰⁴

For rural women, other local decision-making bodies, such as Pasture Management Committees and Water Users Associations, may have more relevance to resolving issues concerning agriculture. Unfortunately, sex-

²⁹⁶ National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 5.3. p. 72.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Council of NGOs. 2014. Alternative Report to the Fourth Periodic Report of the Kyrgyz Republic to the CEDAW Committee. Bishkek. p. 21.

²⁹⁹ Article 49, Law No. 98 On Election of Deputies to Local Councils (Keneshes), adopted 14 July 2011.

³⁰⁰ Council of NGOs, 2014, p. 21.

³⁰¹ See generally, Women's Support Center. 2013. Violation of Women's Political Rights (WPR) During Election Processes in the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek. [in Russian].

³⁰² Council of NGOs, 2014, p. 22.

³⁰³ Ibid. p. 21.

³⁰⁴ Data compiled from materials presented by the National Agency of the Kyrgyz Republic on Local Self-Governance at a Parliamentary hearing on "Women in Modern Kyrgyz Society: Problems and Achievements", Bishkek, 18 October 2011.

disaggregated data about membership and leadership in organizations that regulate access to key resources is very limited, inaccessible or does not exist, but data about WUAs suggest that women have a limited role. In 2009, only 18 percent of all WUA members, and two percent of chairpersons, were women. Currently, there are 469 legally registered WUAs, covering 71 percent of the total irrigated area and consisting of 22 500 members. However, out of all of the associations, only nine (or two percent) are chaired by women.³⁰⁵ The under representation of women is partly a reflection of the fact that members of WUAs are also the heads of the household.

There are agricultural organizations and associations in the Kyrgyz Republic that serve as networks for farmers or which deliver extension services and training, but no information could be obtained specifically about women's and men's participation. Rural women tend to be more active in cooperatives and to network through self-help groups, some of which have been supported by development projects on women's empowerment. For example, under a joint programme by UN Women, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and World Food Program (WFP), self-help groups were a means of social mobilization, and rural women managed group savings, received training and acquired skills and information relevant to choice of seeds, fertilizer use, agricultural technology and business planning.³⁰⁶ The (Draft) Agricultural Strategy 2020 envisages the establishment of a unified registry of agricultural cooperatives. Disaggregation of membership data by sex would be useful for assessing the extent to which rural women are aware of, and benefit from, cooperative services.

Women are more likely to be engaged in civil society organizations, including those that represent the interests of rural women. Kyrgyzstan has well-developed women's non-governmental organizations, NGO networks and associations that are led by committed individuals. Such organizations have been key actors in advancing gender equality policy and in legal reform. Women's organizations are diverse and engage in advocacy, conduct research and provide services to other women. NGOs in rural areas, however, tend to be under-resourced (in terms of funding, office equipment, access to internet and so on) compared with those in Bishkek and other cities, which limits their capacity to work with other women.

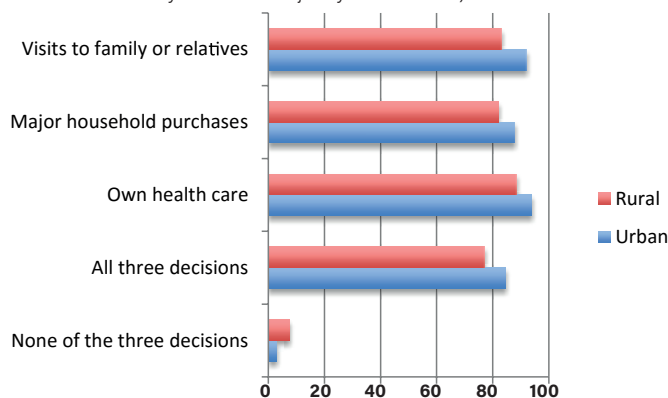
L. Rural women's agency

Women's agency refers to decision-making, not necessarily in formal leadership positions in business or the public sector, but to the process by which women solve problems and make choices in their personal lives, including about farming practices. Measuring rural women's agency, or indeed women's empowerment generally, is complex because multiple indicators must be used and the data can be subjective (for example, asking respondents to report on who makes specific decisions in the household).

Survey data about women's participation in specific household decisions provides some insight into their autonomy. Joint decision-making concerning major household purchases is the norm for most husbands and wives, but participation also increases with a woman's age, employment status and location.³⁰⁷ Women who are not employed are the least likely to take part in decision-making concerning their healthcare, major household purchases and visiting family or relatives. Urban women are more likely than rural women to participate in all three types of decisions (84 percent and 77 percent respectively), as shown in Figure 11.³⁰⁸

It is also notable that rural men are the most likely to report that they do not participate in decisions about their own health care or major household decisions (12 percent of male respondents).³⁰⁹ (See Figure 12, below).

Figure 11. Women's Participation in Decision-Making, by Rural and Urban Location
(% of women who usually make decisions by themselves or jointly with husband)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 275.

³⁰⁵ Korotenko, Kirilenko & Prigoda, 2013, p. 21.

³⁰⁶ UN Women, FAO, IFAD & WFP. 2014. Acceleration of Rural Women's Economic Empowerment in Kyrgyzstan. Annual Programme Narrative Progress Report Reporting Period: 1 October – 31 December 2014.

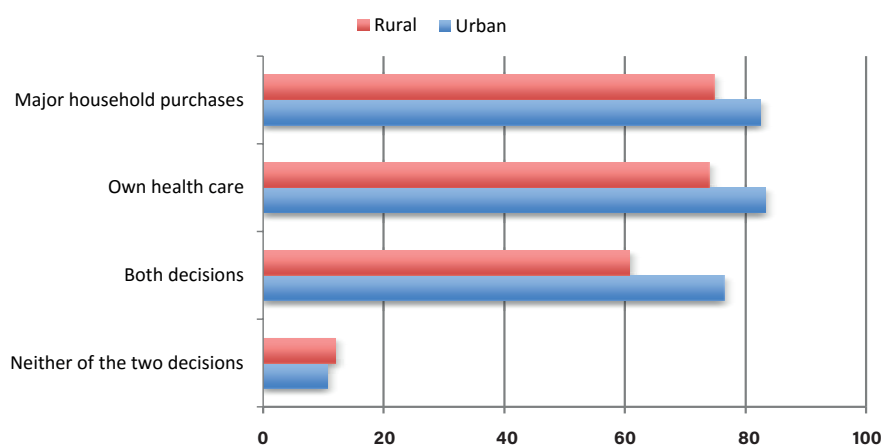
³⁰⁷ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 275.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 277.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 278.

Presumably, the survey designers assumed that men always make independent decisions about visiting family members, as this question was only asked of women in the DHS. The fact that more than ten percent of rural men do not make decisions about household goods could be a reflection of the high rate of male outmigration and the fact that they are not present when such purchases are made. Men's more limited decision-making around personal health care (compared with women's) may be related to gender norms around masculinity, health-seeking behaviour and the reluctance to appear "weak".

Figure 12. Men's Participation in Decision-Making, by Rural and Urban Location
(% of men who usually make decisions by themselves or jointly with wife)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 278.

The survey results above can also be explained by the fact that female and male involvement in decision-making varies depending on the type of household decisions that are being made. 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). Men, in contrast, are usually the primary decision-makers about savings and spending, taking loans, the choice of crops and the sale of agricultural products or livestock. Surveys and focus groups conducted among village residents in three provinces (Chui, Issyk-Kul and Osh) confirm that in the majority of households, women make decisions about household management, specifically about family medical care and food purchases; husbands and wives tend to make joint decisions about the purchase of household goods and children's education.³¹⁰ When the decisions relate to the division of labour or agricultural production (for example, which crops to grow and what cattle to breed), men tend to make such decisions independently.

Table 21. Gender and Patterns of Household Decisions (distribution of decision-making, % of respondents)

Types of decisions	Husband and wife jointly (%)	Husband alone (%)	Wife alone (%)	Parents (%)
About agricultural crop production	24	59	12	5
Person who sells surplus agricultural products	16	55	26	4
Purchasing food for the household	30	27	40	4
Purchasing furniture and tools for the house	48	26	29	3
Participation in public activities	27	41	31	1
Working outside the home	26	60	12	2

Source: WECF, 2014, p. 9.

VI. Gender inequalities in agricultural labour

For the rural population, agricultural work is a basic fact of life for both women and men. 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. More than half of all rural women aged 15 years and older are economically active, and 47 percent are employed.³¹¹ Rural women work in the agricultural sector in crop cultivation, livestock production and food processing, but rural women, like rural men, are also engaged in other sectors. Rural employment patterns mirror those for the country as a whole; women predominate in the public sector (health, education and social services) and in hospitality (hotels and restaurants), while men have more diverse employment opportunities in rural areas and form the majority of workers in more technical sectors, including industry, transport and storage of goods, construction, energy supply and mining.

In terms of formal labour, agriculture remains the largest sector of employment for both women and men. Around a third of all working women and men are employed in agriculture (34.5 percent of all employed women and 29.6 percent of all working men, the equivalent of 323 500 women and 403 800 men).³¹² Comparing the proportion of women and men working in this sector, the share of women employed in agriculture has increased considerably in recent years. While women have accounted for around 40 percent of all workers in the combined sectors of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in the last decade, from 2012 to 2014, the share of female workers rose from 40.2 to 44.5 percent.³¹³ This change may reflect the tendency of men to enter other sectors (for example, the proportion of men employed in the finance and insurance sector rose during the same period) or to migrate for work. It may also be due to the decrease in other employment opportunities for women in rural areas.

Although the balance of women and men is close to equal in agriculture, employment patterns differ by sex. Women who work in agriculture are more likely to be self-employed, while men are more often engaged as hired (contracted) workers, albeit at lower levels than they are contracted for work in other sectors. Of all self-employed women in 2014, 73.9 percent worked agriculture, compared with 58.4 percent of all self-employed men.³¹⁴ Note that in this instance, working under a contract refers to an explicit agreement, in written or oral form, in which the employee is guaranteed a base remuneration (in cash or in-kind). Self-employment refers to an individual who works in their own enterprise and their remuneration depends directly on the income generated from the production of goods and services by the enterprise.³¹⁵

A comparison of the proportion of women and men who are self-employed or contracted workers in agriculture, shows that women make up a smaller share of workers with contracts. However, it appears that an increasing proportion of women are being hired for contractual agricultural labour in recent years, which is encouraging. Nevertheless, almost 700 000 agricultural workers are considered self-employed. The income derived from self-employment is unstable and, furthermore, self-employed workers do not have access to the same social benefits (such as pension contributions, paid leave, sick leave and maternity leave) as other employees.

Table 22. Proportion of Contracted and Self-Employed Workers in Agriculture, by Sex (2010, 2014)

Year	Contracted workers (%)		Self-employed workers (%)	
	women	men	women	men
2010	22.2	77.8	40.3	59.7
2014	33.1	66.9	44.9	55.1

Sources: National Statistical Committee, 2011b, Table 4.7. p. 95[data for 2010];
National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 4.7. p. 58[data for 2014].

The increase in salaries in the agriculture sector for both women and men is another positive trend. In fact, while women's average wages across all sectors are equivalent to around 70 percent of men's wages, the wage gap is considerably smaller in the agriculture sector. Women's wages have been close to men's wages for several years, and in 2014, they marginally exceeded men's wages. Table 23 lists male and female monthly wages in agriculture over a five-year period.

³¹¹ National Statistical Committee Department of Social Statistics, 2015, p. 11.

³¹² National Statistical Committee, 2015h, Table 4.7. pp. 56-57.

³¹³ Ibid. Table 4.6. p. 56.

³¹⁴ Ibid. Table 4.7. p. 57.

³¹⁵ Ibid. p. 54.

Table 23. Women's and Men's Average Wages in Agriculture* (2010-2014)

Average monthly nominal wage (in som)									
2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
3 999	4 160	4 551	4 563	4 727	4 880	5 231	5 699	6 193	6 074

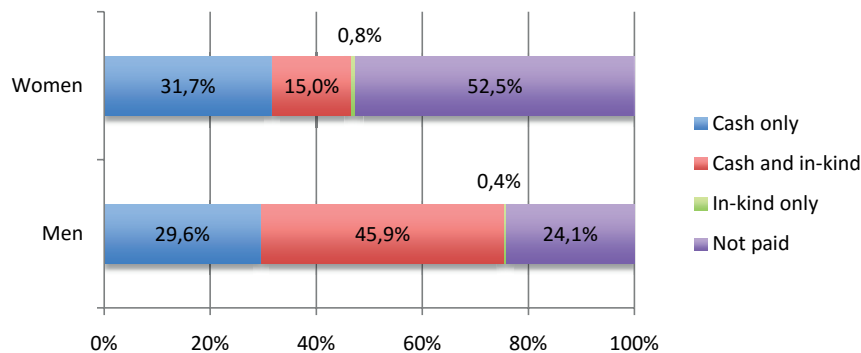
Source: Data supplied by the National Statistical Committee, Demographic Statistics Division.

*Note that for 2010-2012, salaries for agriculture, hunting and forestry are aggregated. Indicated salaries for 2013-2014 include all of these activities with the addition of fisheries and fish breeding.

Some caution should be exercised in the interpretation of the above data. The NSO compiles data about average salaries based on a survey of enterprises and institutions, and therefore wage information is relevant only to workers in the formal sector of the economy. Data about contracted and self-employed agricultural workers is assessed through labour force surveys. Because the data sources differ, it should not be concluded that the number of contracted female workers included in Table 22, above, are the same as those receiving the average salaries contained in Table 23.

It is clear that out of all people engaged in agricultural employment, only a small number work under a contract (9 100 women and 18 300 men in 2014).³¹⁶ A considerable number of women and men employed in agriculture work for cash and in-kind payments or receive no payment at all. In general, agricultural workers are less likely than workers in other sectors to be paid in cash only. However, while it is most common for men to be paid for agricultural work in a combination of cash and in-kind payments, women who undertake such work are most often unpaid. According to the DHS, more than half of female respondents who were employed in the preceding year in agriculture reported that they were not paid, compared with around a quarter of men.³¹⁷

Figure 13. Type of Earnings for Employment in Agriculture, by Sex (2012)



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 51.

Notably, women who work in agriculture are employed primarily by family members (77.4 percent), and, following this, are almost equally likely to work for non-family members or to be self-employed (11.7 percent and 10.9 percent, respectively).³¹⁸ In contrast, most women in non-agricultural jobs are employed by non-family members (77.1 percent). Equivalent data were not collected about men. The fact that more than three-quarters of women who are engaged in agricultural work do so for relatives and on family farms explains why there is such a high rate of non-payment. Thus, women's participation in agriculture is largely informal. In fact, formal agricultural employment represents a minimal share of the overall employment in this sector.

A more nuanced picture of women's employment in agriculture, both formal and informal, would include the women who work for employers without contracts, generally doing heavy, manual field work, such as tilling, weeding and harvesting, as well as those who, "work at home [to] produce vegetables, fruit and berries, and tend livestock for meat, milk and egg production", which they sell at low prices locally.³¹⁹ Given that rural men have a greater diversity of employment options, and migrate away from rural areas for work at a higher rate than women, there is a risk that women's agricultural labour will become increasingly exploitative.

³¹⁶ Ibid. p. 86.

³¹⁷ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & IFC International, 2013, p. 51.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2013, paras. 187-188.

VII. Conclusion

Since the transition period, in which the Kyrgyz Republic became a democracy with a market economy, the country has experienced significant changes in government administration and in the conceptualization of gender equality policy, arguably to a greater degree than any other country in Central Asia. From 1995 to the present, the development of the national framework to support gender equality, both designating responsible government institutions and the drafting of national action plans, has proceeded in six distinct phases.³²⁰ The fact that state programmes and institutions dedicated to gender issues have been created, dissolved and reformed every few years means that long-term objectives have been difficult to realize. Conversely, Kyrgyzstan can also be viewed as a testing ground for differing approaches to mainstreaming gender in state policy. The current national strategy and action plan on gender equality benefit from the experience, accumulated over a number of years, of a group of gender experts both within government and civil society, as well as a participatory approach to policy-making that included female and male stakeholders at the grassroots level.

Despite a solid framework to support government efforts on gender equality, and recognition of the need to improve the status of rural women, inadequate attention has been devoted to the specific conditions of women in agriculture. While agriculture is a challenging prospect for any smallholder farmer, women in Kyrgyzstan do not participate in agriculture on an equal footing with men. Women undertake agricultural labour in all sub-sectors, including greenhouse and crop farming, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and the processing of a variety of agricultural products, and yet their precise contributions along agricultural value chains remain obscured. They also experience substantial challenges, including the lack of protection of their rights to ownership of land and other resources, limited access to financial capital, a lower level of technical agricultural knowledge, and the constraints of tradition and culture that reinforce women's role as farm workers rather than as leaders of agribusiness. However, rural women themselves demonstrate that they are capable and active in resolving problems in their communities, concerning water supply and preschool education for example, in financially supporting their families through agricultural production, and in creating employment opportunities for themselves and other women, which can include non-agricultural work, such as making handicrafts. Experience shows that female farmers can thrive when their access to resources is improved, and that women are often quick to adapt to new practices. Developing the agricultural sector, and improving the livelihoods of the rural population, is dependent on supporting women to realize their full potential alongside men.

³²⁰ Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p. 6.

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The purpose of this national gender profile was to collect and compile available data and information from diverse sources in order to shed light on gender disparities in rural settings and the status of rural women across a number of dimensions, with a focus on inequalities in agricultural employment. This publication aims to provide policy-makers, gender activists and researchers with a clearer picture of the types and degree of the main gender inequalities in agriculture and concerning rural livelihoods in rural Kyrgyzstan. This national gender profile was discussed at the national workshop (Bishkek, 18-19 February 2016) in which experts commented on a draft version of the present report.

The group of reviewers consisted of both data producers and data user stakeholders, such as statisticians from the national statistical service, representatives of the key ministries, agriculture experts, gender experts, the civil society sector, and representatives of international development organizations and financial institutions that support projects dedicated to rural women. This publication incorporates their specific suggestions and insights.



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