

# Agrarian Reform, Gender and Land Rights in Uzbekistan

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## Glossary of Terms

<b>adyr arazi</b>	non-irrigated land
<b>agarot</b>	plot adjoining house (Russian)
<b>arenda</b>	lease (Russian)
<b>chek</b>	land plot for house
<b>dekhan</b>	smallholder
<b>dekret</b>	maternity benefit
<b>devzire</b>	variety of rice
<b>doppa</b>	traditional men's hats
<b>gap</b>	women's rotating get-together, which also acts as a savings club
<b>hokim</b>	governor of province
<b>hokimiyat</b>	governorate
<b>ish hakki</b>	remuneration for work
<b>kolkhoz, pl. kolkhozy</b>	collective farm (Russian)
<b>mahalla</b>	neighbourhood
<b>mardigor</b>	casual labourer ( <i>yallama</i> in Khorezm)
<b>mihnati shartnamesi</b>	labour contract
<b>nikoh</b>	Muslim marriage
<b>oblast</b>	province (Russian, <i>viloyat</i> in Uzbek)
<b>oila pudrati</b>	family leasehold ( <i>arenda</i> in Russian)
<b>oila pudratchisi</b>	family leaseholder
<b>orakchi</b>	labourer harvesting with scythe
<b>pudrat</b>	lease
<b>selsovyet</b>	rural administrative unit
<b>shalpaye</b>	paddy field
<b>shartname</b>	contract
<b>shirkat</b>	joint-stock company (former collective enterprise)
<b>shirkat uyushmasi</b>	association of shirkats
<b>sotik, pl. sotka</b>	one hundredth of a hectare
<b>sovkhoz, pl. sovkhozy</b>	state farm (Russian)
<b>sum</b>	Uzbek currency
<b>talaq</b>	Muslim divorce
<b>tamorka</b>	private subsidiary plot
<b>yagona</b>	weeding of cotton

## Acronyms

<b>EESU</b>	EUI/Essex survey in Uzbekistan
<b>EUI</b>	European University Institute
<b>FAP</b>	feldsher and midwife unit
<b>FSU</b>	former Soviet Union
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>JSC</b>	joint-stock company
<b>MTP</b>	machine-tractor park
<b>SVA</b>	rural ambulatory medical unit
<b>TACIS</b>	Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States, European Commission
<b>UNRISD</b>	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
<b>UPK</b>	Uchebnii Proevotsvini Kombinat (vocational school in Eski Kishlak)
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>ZAGs</b>	civil registry office

## Summary/Résumé/Resumen

### **Summary**

This monograph, based on fieldwork carried out in the provinces of Andijan and Khorezm between 2000–2001, analyses the gender-differentiated outcomes of post-Soviet agrarian reforms in Uzbekistan. The first section situates the agrarian reform process in the context of the political economy of Uzbekistan, a country where cotton production for export accounts for a substantial proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), foreign exchange receipts and employment. The crisis in public finance following the break-up of the Soviet Union prompted a dual process of demonetization and reagrarization in rural Uzbekistan, increasing reliance on household and subsidiary plots for self-subsistence and on off-farm and non-farm informal activities significantly. The simultaneous objectives of maintaining cotton export revenues and of providing a basic level of self-subsistence for rural workers acted to consolidate the division between a stagnating smallholder sector and the export sector, the two being mutually dependent upon one another. This study shows how a focus on gender can shed light on the nature and mechanisms of this mutual dependency.

The second section uses enterprise-level data to illustrate two pathways of farm restructuring. The shift from collective farms to joint-stock shareholding companies (*shirkats*) has resulted in a process of labour retrenchment that has affected women significantly. The liquidation of collective farms in favour of independent farms organized as Farmers' Associations has consolidated farm management as a male occupation. While the actual labour input of women into farming activities on household plots, private subsidiary plots and in cotton production has remained extremely high, they are increasingly incorporated into the workforce either as unpaid family labourers or as casual labourers earning piece-wage rates.

The final section analyses changing livelihood options for rural women. Non-agricultural occupations in health, education and rural industry were major casualties of the post-Soviet recession. Precarious forms of self-employment in informal trade and services remain the only avenues for alternative income-generation for many. However, there are increasing pressures on these occupational niches due to an oversupply of unemployed, low-skilled women, giving this type of diversification an involutory character. The decline in women's opportunities for gainful employment is accompanied by an "informalization" of the marriage contract. The official registration of marriage and divorce are seen as costly obligations that can easily be dispensed with in favour of the *nikoh* and *talaq* (Islamic marriage and divorce). Although there have been no legal changes sanctioning polygamy or unilateral divorce, these may become widespread in practice. At present, the representation of landless or poor rural women's organized interests seems a remote possibility in a context where neither civil society organizations, such as NGOs, nor professional associations or political parties have any significant presence.

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## **Résumé**

Deniz Kandiyoti analyse ici les résultats, différenciés par sexe, des réformes agraires post-soviétiques en Ouzbékistan. Son étude se fonde sur des travaux de terrain réalisés dans les provinces d'Andijan et du Khârezm entre 2000 et 2001.

Dans la première section, elle situe le processus de réforme agraire dans le contexte de l'économie politique de l'Ouzbékistan, où la production de coton destinée à l'exportation représente une part non négligeable du produit intérieur brut (PIB), des recettes en devises et des emplois. Suite à l'éclatement de l'Union soviétique, une crise des finances publiques provoqua dans les campagnes un double processus de démonétisation et de retour à l'agriculture. Ceci accrût sensiblement l'importance portée aux parcelles de terre familiales et aux terres subsidiaires pour l'autosubsistance, ainsi qu'aux activités informelles non agricoles ou extra-agricoles. En voulant à la fois maintenir les recettes d'exportation provenant de la culture du coton et garantir aux travailleurs ruraux un niveau minimal d'autosubsistance, les décideurs ont accentué la division entre le secteur des petits exploitants, en pleine stagnation, et le secteur des exportations; tous deux dépendant l'un de l'autre. Dans cette étude, Deniz Kandiyoti montre comment une approche différenciée selon le sexe peut éclairer la nature et les modes de fonctionnement de cette dépendance mutuelle.

Dans sa deuxième section, l'auteur se sert des données recueillies au niveau des entreprises pour illustrer le processus de restructuration des exploitations agricoles. La conversion des fermes collectives en sociétés par actions (*shirkats*) a entraîné des compressions de personnel qui ont touché majoritairement les femmes. La liquidation des fermes collectives et leur remplacement par des fermes indépendantes, organisées en associations d'exploitants agricoles, ont renforcé la place des hommes dans l'exploitation agricole. De plus, si le travail des femmes compte toujours pour une grande part dans la culture des parcelles de terre familiales, des terres subsidiaires privées et la production de coton, elles le fournissent de plus en plus en qualité de travailleuses familiales non rémunérées ou de journalières payées à la pièce.

Enfin, l'auteur analyse l'évolution des moyens d'existence qui s'offrent aux femmes en zones rurales. Les emplois non agricoles dans les secteurs de la santé et l'éducation et dans les industries rurales ont beaucoup souffert de la récession post-soviétique. En dehors de l'agriculture, les seuls autres moyens qu'ont beaucoup de femmes de gagner leur vie sont des formes précaires de travail indépendant dans le commerce et les services du secteur informel. Cependant, ces créneaux professionnels sont de plus en plus saturés à cause du surplus de femmes peu qualifiées et sans emploi, donnant à ce type de diversification un caractère involutif. L'amenuisement des possibilités d'emplois lucratifs pour les femmes s'accompagne d'une autre tendance: le contrat de mariage perd de plus en plus son caractère officiel. L'enregistrement officiel du mariage et du divorce est considéré comme une obligation coûteuse à laquelle on peut aisément échapper en optant pour le mariage et le divorce islamiques (*nikoh* et *talaq*). C'est ce que font de plus en plus de gens, bien que la loi sanctionnant la polygamie ou le divorce unilatéral n'ait pas changé. A l'heure actuelle, il semble peu probable que les femmes pauvres ou sans terre en zones rurales réussissent à s'organiser pour défendre leurs intérêts

dans un pays où les associations professionnelles, les partis politiques et les organisations de la société civile telles que les ONG manquent encore de présence.

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### **Resumen**

En este documento, Deniz Kandiyoti analiza los resultados diferenciados desde la perspectiva de género de las reformas agrarias postsoviéticas en Uzbekistán. Su estudio se basa en el trabajo de campo realizado en las provincias de Andijan y Khorezm entre 2000 y 2001.

En la primera sección, Kandiyoti sitúa el proceso de reforma agraria en el marco de la economía política de Uzbekistán, país donde la producción de algodón destinada a la exportación representa un porcentaje considerable del producto interno bruto (PIB), los ingresos en divisas y el empleo. Tras la desintegración de la Unión Soviética, las finanzas públicas experimentaron una crisis que dio lugar a un doble proceso de desmonetización y de reagrarización en el sector rural de Uzbekistán, que aumentó considerablemente la dependencia de los terrenos domésticos y secundarios para la autosubsistencia, y de las actividades informales no agrícolas y ajenas a la agricultura. Los objetivos simultáneos de mantener los ingresos procedentes de la exportación de algodón y de facilitar un nivel básico de subsistencia a los trabajadores rurales consolidaron la división entre un sector estancado de pequeños agricultores y el sector de la exportación, dependientes el uno del otro. En este estudio, Kandiyoti muestra cómo la distinción por género como tema central de estudio, puede ayudar a comprender la naturaleza y los mecanismos de esta dependencia mutua.

En la segunda sección, la autora maneja datos de empresas para ilustrar el proceso de la reestructuración agrícola. El cambio de granjas colectivas a sociedades por acciones (*shirkats*) se ha traducido en una disminución de la fuerza de trabajo que ha afectado considerablemente a las mujeres. La liquidación de granjas colectivas en beneficio de granjas independientes, organizadas como Asociaciones de Granjeros, ha consolidado la gestión agrícola como un trabajo concebido para hombres. Además, si bien el rendimiento laboral de las mujeres en los terrenos domésticos y secundarios y en la producción del algodón ha seguido siendo alto, éstas se incorporan cada vez más a la fuerza de trabajo como miembros de la familia no remunerados o como jornaleras con salarios insignificantes.

Por último, Kandiyoti analiza las opciones en continuo cambio que tienen las mujeres rurales para ganarse la vida. Las ocupaciones no agrícolas en los sectores de la salud, educativo y de industria rural acusaron principalmente los efectos de la recesión postsoviética. Para muchas mujeres, las formas precarias de autoempleo en el sector comercial informal y de los servicios siguen siendo las únicas oportunidades alternativas de generar ingresos. Sin embargo, la presión aumenta cada vez más en estos segmentos del mercado del trabajo, debido a la oferta excesiva de mujeres desempleadas y poco calificadas, por lo que este tipo de diversificación está

adquiriendo un carácter involuntario. Otra tendencia que reduce las posibilidades de que las mujeres encuentren un empleo remunerado es la creciente informalización del contrato matrimonial. El registro oficial del matrimonio y el divorcio se consideran obligaciones costosas, de las que puede prescindirse apoyando el *nikoh* y el *talaq* (matrimonio y divorcio islámicos). Aunque no ha habido cambios legales que sancionen la poligamia o el divorcio unilateral, cada vez más personas pueden recurrir a los mismos en la práctica. Actualmente, la representación organizada de los intereses de las mujeres rurales pobres y sin tierra, parece una posibilidad remota en un contexto donde las asociaciones profesionales, los partidos políticos y las organizaciones de la sociedad civil, tales como las ONG, no tienen una presencia significativa.

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## 1. Key Issues in Agrarian Reform

Agrarian reforms are an intrinsic component of the package of market-oriented policy measures implemented in the transition economies of the former Soviet Union (FSU). In the less industrialized countries of Central Asia, which are heavily reliant on agriculture and primary extraction, restructuring the rural economy presents special challenges. In Uzbekistan, continuing central controls and a state monopoly over agricultural land has led to a different configuration of transition to the market from that of the European republics of the FSU (Lerman 1998). Nonetheless, the initial stages of transition in Uzbekistan, as elsewhere, have been accompanied by economic recession and rising unemployment, as well as greater reliance on the domestic economy for basic goods and on informal self-help networks to palliate increasing pressures on existing safety nets.

The agricultural sector has acted as a “shock absorber”, providing livelihoods for an ever-greater number of people on a shrinking resource base, especially in the high population density areas of the Ferghana valley.<sup>1</sup> It must be noted here that only 10 per cent of the territory of Uzbekistan is habitable land and that the rural population—over 60 per cent of the total—is concentrated on 4.5 million hectares of irrigated arable land in oases and along rivers. The amount of arable land per rural resident (0.37 hectares) is low compared to other FSU republics (two hectares per person in Ukraine and 0.75 in densely populated Moldova).

The large rural labour surplus of Uzbekistan, the low levels of rural wages compared to the rest of the Soviet Union and low levels of labour mobility had already been widely documented before the break-up of the Soviet Union (Craumer 1992; Lubin 1984). According to Khan and Dhai (1979), a comparison of five Central Asian collective farms in the 1970s showed that they diverged from the Union-wide norms with respect to the large number of households on each farm, the larger size of households, the high ratio of *kolkhoz* members relying on outside employment and the smaller number of days per year worked on average (166 as compared to 250 for the Soviet Union as a whole). Craumer suggests that the crucial challenge for the government is “to push agricultural reforms fast enough to improve food and cotton production and move surplus labour out of agriculture, yet not so fast as to disrupt economic and social stability” (1995:45).

Against this background, the pace and content of agrarian reform in Uzbekistan is being shaped by a complex set of factors. These range from the inheritance of the Soviet period to current domestic political considerations and the agenda of the international donor community. This section offers a general introduction to the discussion of the gender-differentiated outcomes of agrarian reform based on fieldwork in the provinces of Andijan and Khorezm. It focuses on three key issues:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1989 and 1994, employment in agriculture grew at an annual compound rate of 4.6 per cent, while agricultural output declined by 3.8 per cent (Khan 1996).

<sup>2</sup> The key issues to be addressed within a comparative framework were identified at the Agrarian Change, Gender and Land Rights Workshop held at UNRISD, Geneva, 27–28 October 1999.

- the place of agriculture in the overall economy and its significance to the state;
- the nature and scope of agrarian reforms; and
- the place of land in the household economy.

### ***1.1 Land in the political economy of Uzbekistan***

#### **1.1.1 The Soviet legacy**

Ever since the Tsarist conquest of Central Asia, cotton cultivation has played a pivotal role in the political economy of the region.<sup>3</sup> By the time collectivization took place under the Soviet regime, the Ferghana Valley had already been producing cotton for Russian textile mills. Uzbekistan was integrated into the Soviet Union as a raw material producer. After 1922, the Russian textile mills that had been dormant during the Civil War began to operate again. As Soviet relations with major cotton exporters like the United States and England became strained, Moscow looked to Central Asia to make up for the shortfall in supply and to save hard currency needed for imports. Under Stalin, two twin goals were pursued in the Central Asia region: collectivization and “cotton independence”. Curtailing imports of foreign cotton was critical for the crash industrialization programme of Stalin’s First Five Year Plan (1929–1932). The policy of collectivization was accomplished well ahead of schedule in Uzbekistan. By the end of 1932, 77.5 per cent of all rural households had been incorporated into 9,734 *kolkhozy* (collective farms) and 94 *sovkhozy* (state farms).

The levels of coercion involved in producing this transformation and the incidences of passive resistance that accompanied them are well documented in the records of the period.<sup>4</sup> The rural economy was geared to the extraction of maximum amounts of cotton for domestic processing by the Moscow centre and for export on the world market as an important source of hard currency. Uzbek cotton accounted for two-thirds of all cotton produced in the Soviet Union.

The acreage devoted to cotton was expanded continually until it reached a peak in the 1980s. Between 1960 and 1990, the area of irrigated land in Uzbekistan increased by two million hectares, representing about 60 per cent of all irrigated land in Central Asia. By 1986, irrigated sowings as a percentage of all sown areas had expanded to 85.8 per cent, and the importance of grain dropped from 57 per cent of the sown area in 1940 to 35 per cent in 1979 and 22 per cent in 1986 (Craumer 1992). Yields were continually forced up through the massive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, although they had levelled off by the 1970s and had started declining in the 1980s. By the late 1980s, the water resources of the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya rivers basins were fully utilized (leading to the much-publicized desiccation of the Aral Sea) and the project of diversion of water from Siberian rivers to Central Asia was abandoned. Soil exhaustion due to inadequate crop rotation was also beginning to affect the cotton crop.

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<sup>3</sup> It was the Russians who introduced and adapted American strains in Central Asia, increasing yields and quality (Pahlen, 1964:94).

<sup>4</sup> On collectivization in the Soviet Union, see R.W. Davies (1980) and for a classic analysis of Russia, see Sheila Fitzpatrick (1995). Her comments concerning the break in continuity, the expulsion of *kulaks* (former peasants who owned medium-sized farms through reforms carried out in 1906) and the insertion of the party machinery into rural life applies equally to Central Asia. Cotton monoculture heightened elements of coercion through “cotton campaigns”, enlisting large sections of the population (such as schoolchildren and urban dwellers) to work in cotton harvests or setting up “socialist competition” among production units to force up labour norms.

Nonetheless, the “command-administrative system” of cotton farming that was put in place (Thurman 1999) still lingers on, albeit in somewhat modified form.

There is an extensive literature both on the ecological consequences of cotton monoculture in Uzbekistan and on the elements of coercion imposed on the workforce and the general population that had to be mobilized during the cotton harvest to meet targets (Carley 1989; Gleason 1991; Rumer 1989; Spoor 1993). What is important, however, is the role the cotton economy has played in shaping the relations between state elites in Uzbekistan. This extractive economy set up a particular dynamic between Moscow and the Central Asian periphery that left an enduring legacy.

Cotton production mediated the links between Moscow, republic elites, regional elites and their local constituencies. Moscow relied on republican leaders, who relied upon regional leaders who, in turn, relied upon district leaders and farm chairmen to ensure that the cotton plan was fulfilled. It was on this basis that republican leaders in Uzbekistan could demand added financial transfers from Moscow. As the centre increased its demands in the form of more and more unrealistic plan targets, the local party bosses curried favour with Moscow by passing these pressures on to the districts. The close relationship between Rashidov, first Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party and Brezhnev, who purportedly exhorted him to reach for higher and higher targets, is frequently held up as an example of this dynamic.<sup>5</sup> The posthumous disgrace of Rashidov and the imprisonment of some 2,600 officials in 1987 for their part in the “cotton scandal” (also referred to as the “Uzbek affair”) followed when it became apparent that payments were being made for fictitious cotton deliveries. At the heart of this episode were allegations that Uzbek officials, at all levels of the republic, had been defrauding the central government through an elaborate system of bribe taking and padding reports. The state allegedly paid more than one billion roubles in 1978–1983 for cotton that was never produced, based on an inflation of cotton output by as much as 4.5 million tonnes.

This purge led to an upsurge of nationalist feeling. People were less concerned about corruption, especially if it had the effect of diverting funds into Uzbekistan, and more about the persecution of Uzbek cadres (Pomfret 1995). Indeed, as Critchlow (1991) pointed out, the native elites who occupied leadership positions in the republic’s Soviet institutions were also exhibiting “proto-nationalist” tendencies, mobilizing the grievances of the Uzbek masses against the centre, playing on popular dissatisfaction with the ethnic discrimination and economic failures of Soviet rule. The crackdown during the Gorbachov era was extensive, although the policy of attempting to replace local cadres with Russians and cadres from other republics was successfully stalled.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly Rashidov, who was an archetypal Soviet-appointed Central Asian leader, is also credited with the consolidation of power in the hands of native Uzbeks in the local party apparatus during his tenure as party boss between 1961 and his death in 1983 (Gleason 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, President Islam Karimov issued a decree on 25 December 1991, pardoning most of those convicted in the “cotton scandal”. In the nationalist atmosphere of political independence, this was a means of signalling that this affair had been a symbol of foreign intervention. For a more detailed account of the purges and reactions to them, see Fierman (1997).

### 1.1.2 The post-independence period

This background is worth going into in some detail since this centre-periphery dynamic has persisted in a somewhat modified form since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Uzbekistan as an independent republic in 1991. It has now been transposed to a tug-of-war between the Tashkent-based elite that retains control over cotton deliveries and exports, the major source of hard currency, and the provincial and district governors who have to fulfil the cotton procurement quotas set by the state. Although provincial governors (*hokims*) have a great deal of discretion, they are direct appointees of the centre and their political longevity depends on their ability to meet production targets. The give-and-take necessary to ensure the loyalty of regional bosses, by providing them with the wherewithal to extend patronage to their own constituencies, is one of the driving forces behind domestic politics.

Luong and Weinthal (2001) argue that regional competition over the distribution of resources has continued to dominate Central Asian politics after independence. Yet without Moscow to provide the republican leadership with the means to fulfil the expectations of regional elites, the leaders of newly independent states had to find these resources themselves or risk instability by upsetting the existing social contract. They suggest that the contrast between Kazakhstan, which moved to a speedy privatization of its energy sector and Uzbekistan, which did not, may be partly explained by the fact that the cotton sector provided the latter with an alternative source of rent to reward loyalty and to appease opponents.

However, the social contract of the Soviet period is being exposed to new sources of strain. During the early years of his tenure, President Islam Karimov yielded some prerogative to manage part of the cotton output to provincial (*oblast*) leaders and brought them closer to political inner circles. However, in time, the established patronage networks were disrupted and relations between centre and periphery reconfigured. Between 1993 and 1996 regional bosses were increasingly deprived of their share of cotton export revenue to consolidate the central government's monopoly over all exports (Ilkhamov 2000a). This occurred against a background of decline in cotton export earnings linked to a fall in international cotton prices since 1995, as well as a decline in cotton production itself of about 20 per cent since 1991 (World Bank 1999).

The government has drastically reduced the latitude of collective enterprises in decision making on sowing policies. Compulsory quotas for the distribution of crop acreages have been adopted by governmental decree and passed down to the provincial, district and farm levels.<sup>7</sup> Some commentators note that the interests of the state elite, regional bosses and managers of farm enterprises may now be on a divergent path (Roy 1999; Ilkhamov 2000b). Roy argues that during the Soviet period the Communist parties of the republics did not have direct access to the means of coercion (such as the army or police). Now that they have access to these state instruments, he claims they need less support from the countryside. Ilkhamov puts forward a more convincing argument. He suggests that the economic resource base of local elites is shrinking as they have less and less discretion over the export-oriented cotton economy. This

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<sup>7</sup> Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers, No. 317, 24 June 1997.

binds them more tightly into informal networks and patron-client relationships that share out the net aggregate revenue generated in the domestic peasant economy. It is therefore in their interest to shift resources from the official register to the much less accountable petty commodity economy. This leads to a process of concealed erosion of the basis of the export economy and creates grounds for conflict between central and regional elites. This conflict sometimes erupts into the public arena with the not infrequent dismissal of governors charged with corruption and inefficiency.

### 1.1.3 The agrarian reform agenda

What further complicates the range of pressures under which the government of Uzbekistan has to operate is the fact that international agencies are also involved in setting the agrarian reform agenda, insisting on privatization and structural reform. Some of the measures adopted to meet these reform objectives, however limited, have expanded the latitude of some local players in evading the tight central control aimed to link them into the production of the export commodity.

While the reform measures advocated by international organizations have, so far, had a relatively negligible impact, some policy changes initiated by the government of Uzbekistan since independence have had more significant consequences. During the more liberal period of debate after *perestroika* and the immediate aftermath of independence in 1991, denouncing the ravages of cotton monoculture in Uzbekistan had become a routine component of nationalist discourse in the popular media. Interestingly, two themes, those of ecology and of women's health (the two being interrelated), figured most prominently in these debates. The use of women as cotton workers, leading to their exposure to dangerous chemical agents, was held up as the epitome of "enslavement" during the Soviet period and a nostalgic discourse on "traditional" Uzbek divisions of labour emerged.

Although these debates were set aside, some significant shifts in policy did take place. The break-up of the Soviet Union meant that the trading links with other republics were disrupted leading to a shortfall in grain, and shortages of flour became apparent in many parts of the country. The response of the government was to expand the acreage of land devoted to wheat production substantially<sup>8</sup> and to increase the size of private plots that the population is entitled to. With production of an estimated 3.7 million tonnes of wheat in 1998—six times the level of 1991—Uzbekistan has largely achieved the goal of drastically reducing grain imports. Household plots now comprise about 3 million holdings encompassing 10 per cent of arable land (World Bank 1999), a substantial enlargement of the acreage devoted to private use. This latter measure was also in part a palliative for the facts that public employers were in deficit and chronically in arrears of wages, and that households were becoming increasingly reliant on

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<sup>8</sup> Government objectives to pursue wheat self-sufficiency have had a major impact on cropping patterns since independence. Between 1990–1996 there was a reduction in the areas sown to cotton (from 44 to 35 per cent) and forage (from 25 to 13 per cent), while the share of arable land allocated to cereals increased (from 24 to 41 per cent). However, the drop in forage crops caused a decline in animal husbandry and a critical shortage of feed, and the substitution of cereal for cotton lowered the returns from agriculture, since land used for cotton produces 1.2 to 3.0 times more added value per hectare than land sown to wheat (Trushin 1998).

self-provisioning and the sale of their private produce for survival. However, the decline in cotton revenue has had negative consequences for foreign currency earnings, deepening the crisis in public finance and aggravating the tensions between Tashkent and the regions.

These conflicting pressures have been reflected in the process of agrarian reform. The legislation on land and farm restructuring has been oscillating between increasing access to private land in line with populist pressures and the structural reform agenda of international donors on the one hand, and counter-measures to tighten and restrict private access to land in response to the imperative of retaining control over the production of cotton on the other.

The broad agrarian reform agenda of international donor and lending agencies revolves around the achievement four main goals: (i) macroeconomic stability; (ii) progress in structural reforms (privatization); (iii) the establishment of secure and tradable property rights; and (iv) market-determined exchange and interest rates. What is being proposed, more specifically, is the removal of barriers to farmers' incentives by eliminating the massive price distortions for cotton and wheat, and instituting mechanisms that could stimulate efficient and environmentally sound methods of irrigation (Herman 1999).

The pricing issue is recognized as crucial. Khan (1996) argues that during the Soviet period the shift in cropping patterns and the retention of a large labour force in agriculture was, in fact, the result of the systematic use of price incentives rather than just administrative coercion. After collectivization, although the area under cotton was increased beyond its peak pre-revolutionary levels, the yield per hectare was still low. In 1935 Soviet authorities quadrupled the procurement price of cotton with dramatic results; by 1937 the production of raw cotton had trebled and yields reached an all-time high. The favourable terms of trade for cotton, compared to other agricultural products, continued for the next two decades. In 1952 the procurement price of cotton was nearly 37 times that of grain, although the average cost per tonne of production was about seven times higher than that for grains for the USSR as a whole. After the 1950s cotton lost its advantageous position for a while. By 1963 the procurement price for cotton was adjusted in a way that kept the price-cost ratio higher for cotton than for grain, and cotton was subject to relatively little "concealed" taxation.

After independence the terms of trade for agriculture deteriorated drastically. Uzbekistan was cut off from the budgetary grant it received from the USSR, and the government was forced to find new sources of revenue. Extraction of surplus from agriculture by driving a wedge between the procurement price and the export price of cotton was a readily available alternative. By 1994, the procurement price for cotton in real terms was a fraction of what it was in 1990.

Currently, agriculture is being squeezed through a system of low output and high input prices. Prices for cotton and wheat are subject to a mandatory system of production quotas and state orders complemented by rationing of inputs, water and equipment and financed with "centralized credits" by government-controlled banks. Prices are set as a result of negotiations

between the producers and government-controlled product processing associations that are monopsonistic buyers. These are well below world market prices.<sup>9</sup> Producers also have to contend with late payment for their deliveries, which further erodes their returns due to high inflation. Input prices, on the other hand, have been subject to large increases.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, direct subsidies to producers have also been sharply reduced, and *de facto* subsidies now consist of free use of the irrigation system, and debt relief and rescheduling.

This combination of suppressed output prices, monopolistic prices for inputs and reduced subsidies has meant that the internal terms of trade have moved strongly against agriculture. The agricultural sector is estimated to have lost 65 per cent of its purchasing power since 1990. For instance, the price of fertilizer has increased 60 times while the price of cotton only increased seven times. Various calculations of the indirect tax imposed on agriculture have been offered. Herman (1999) estimates that a large indirect tax equivalent to \$200-\$400 is charged annually per hectare of irrigated land. Trushin (1998) offered the following estimates for 1995: subsidies amounting to \$608 million, an outward flow of between \$1,098 and \$1,223 million, a net resultant outflow from agriculture of between \$499 to \$615 million. This represents between 2.3 and 2.9 per cent of GDP, or 8 to 10 per cent of GDP produced by the agricultural sector. Khan's (1996) estimate was of a similar order of over 10 per cent of the value of GDP originating in agriculture. Table 1 below is based on more recent World Bank estimates.

These trends have had some implications for farm mechanization and labour use. In his speech to the Tenth Session of the Oliy Majlis, President Karimov acknowledged the decline in levels of mechanization, in particular in the use of combine harvesters for the cotton harvest. Whereas in 1992-1993, combines harvested up to 40 per cent of the crop, this went down to 6 per cent in 1996 and only 4 per cent in 1997. In many places, and in Ferghana especially, practically the entire crop is picked manually. Although local authorities blame this on the shortage of machines or their bad state of repair and maintenance, there is evidence that machines may be lying idle: of 1,480 units of machinery in Dzhezak only 542 were utilized, and in Syrdarya of 1,453 machines only 867 worked (Karimov 1997).

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<sup>9</sup> By way of comparison, Chinese farmers received the full international price at the farm gate—\$1,590 per tonne in 1998—in contrast to \$775 per tonne received by Uzbek producers. With prices at 60-65 per cent of international levels and the condition that foreign exchange must be surrendered at the official rate, cotton producers in Uzbekistan are clearly disadvantaged (World Bank 1999). There is no evidence of parallel markets for cotton. There is some indication that cotton may be finding its way illegally across the border to Kazakhstan but the evidence is weak. There have also been cases of collective farms setting up joint ventures in textile production with foreign investors and contributing their share in cotton. This corresponded to a brief period of relaxation of central controls in 1992-1993, which has since been reversed.

<sup>10</sup> There is little concrete indication, as yet, of the extent to which producers might benefit if market prices for inputs were to replace the monopolistic prices currently in operation. One area which seems to be working to the benefit of smallholders is that of tractor hire. As more individual farmers and farmers' co-operatives acquire machinery, they tend to lease them out, and do so at cheaper prices than the state machine-tractor parks (MTPs). These latter tend to have more up-to-date equipment but rent them at higher prices than most households can afford. Now that a parallel market in tractors is emerging, producers have more choice. This is not the case with combine harvesters, however, which are too expensive to be acquired by private individuals and still remain the property of collectives or MTPs. Seed and fertilizer are tightly rationed, and producers have relatively limited alternatives to acquire these on the market by making cash payments. However, these alternatives are expanding and fertilizer bought for cash on the free market is considerably cheaper.

These changes in the use of equipment and labour may be partly attributed to unfavourable terms of trade. Cotton pickers who are paid a daily wage are less expensive per tonne of cotton harvested than combines, although this was contested by some of the farm managers interviewed.<sup>11</sup> It may also be the case that this use of manual labour represents an effort at employment provision in a context where manual processing of the crop is the only activity directly paid in cash. This shift increases the demand for women's and children's seasonal labour input, the traditional source of labour for manual operations.

As the process of privatization proceeds, farmers who have no incentive to produce cotton may attempt to diversify into other, more lucrative crops. Like agricultural producers the world over, farmers in Uzbekistan also try to circumvent the formal state system for the sale of commodities by using barter, the bazaar system or bribes. Cotton yields may fall further as a result. However, as will be seen in the next section, the state is keeping in place a system of contracts with independent farmers leasing them land on the understanding that they will continue to plant a certain acreage to cotton. If there is a shortfall in the expected tonnage the farmer must, if necessary, find the cotton elsewhere to make up for it and risks having his/her lease revoked if the farm fails to meet contract targets. As long as this system is kept in place through punitive measures, rather than incentives, it opens itself to a variety of passive resistance mechanisms on the part of agricultural producers that, at the macro level, translate into an "inefficient" agricultural sector.

In summary, land and agriculture are absolutely central to the political economy of Uzbekistan. **Agriculture accounts for 30 per cent of GDP, 60 per cent of foreign exchange receipts and about 40 per cent of employment.** Uzbekistan ranks as the world's fourth largest producer of cotton, its exports account for 16 per cent of global trade in cotton, and cotton alone accounts for nearly 50 per cent of export earnings (see Table 2).

The state has a major stake in keeping in place a system of governance that will ensure the continued extraction of surplus from agriculture and its appropriation by the centre. The break-up of the collective farm system and pressures for privatization are destabilizing this system of extraction, as is the shrinking revenue generated by the agrarian sector. The legislation on land reform since independence in 1991 reflects these contradictory pressures.

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<sup>11</sup> Several interviewees claimed that hand picking resulted in a "cleaner" and more thorough harvest. However, "dirty" and wasteful harvesting is caused by old equipment in a bad state of repair. A *shirkat* manager in Ulughnor who had just purchased a Case harvester (such Western imports are still relatively rare) claimed that it was much better and cheaper to harvest by combine. It must be added that this is a province experiencing labour shortages and where they use pickers from neighbouring areas to make up for the shortfall.

**Table 1: Uzbekistan: Net resource transfers in agriculture  
(in million current sums)**

	1996	1997	1998 (est.)
<b>Subsidies</b>	57.847	69.121	87.000
Direct input subsidies	0	0	0
Irrigation subsidy	23.000	30.000	40.000
VAT exemption	6.500	11.165	15.000
Credit subsidies/ rescheduling/write-offs	20.000	18.000	26.000
Capital investment and machinery services	3.847	5.456	n.a.
Pre-financing of cotton and wheat	4.500	4.500	6.500
<b>Taxation through price gap</b>	-38.902	-61.959	59.256
Cotton	-26.653	-49.954	-54.700
Wheat	-12.249	-12.005	-4.556
<b>Taxation through foreign exchange gap</b>	-46.000	-38.400	-89.000
Cotton	-43.000	-31.000	-71.000
Wheat	-13.000	-7.400	-18.000
<b>Net transfer (in per cent of GDP)</b>	-4.8	-3.2	-4.5
<b>Memo Item:</b>			
Official foreign exchange rate (sums/\$1)	48.3	78.1	98.0
Notional market rate	78.1	98.0	150.0

Source: World Bank (1999).

**Table 2: Uzbekistan: Composition of international trade, 1993–1998**

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Exports (in million \$ )</b>	2.877	2.940	3.475	3.534	3.695	2.888
Cotton	41	51	46	44	38	41
Energy products	0	0	13	8	14	9
Gold	19	13	18	26	20	23
Other	40	36	24	23	28	27
<b>Imports (in million \$)</b>	3.255	2.727	3.238	4.240	3.767	2.816
Food	19	32	19	30	21	16
Energy products	20	25	2	1	1	1
Machinery	0	0	36	36	50	48
Other	61	44	44	33	29	36
Trade/GDP	120	100	67	57	54	40
Exports/GDP	56	52	35	26	27	20
Imports/GDP	64	48	32	31	27	20
Export volume index	100.0	84.0	87.4	90.0	96.3	79.9
Import volume index	100.0	63.4	67.6	83.9	77.3	59.0
Real GDP index	100.0	95.8	94.9	96.5	98.8	101.5

Source: Table based on figures provided by the Centre of Economic Research.

## **1.2 The nature and meaning of agrarian reform**

### 1.2.1 From *perestroika* to agrarian reform

Among the republics of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is noted for pursuing a gradual strategy of partial changes in the area of agrarian reform (Spoor 1995; Ilkhamov 1998). Unlike Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan there has not been a disbanding of collective farms. Instead, state farms, which were centrally funded, were transformed into collective enterprises (*shirkats*) that manage their own budgets, and privatization took the form of restructuring them as joint-stock companies. The process of privatization, which was accomplished in the housing sector and retail trade during 1992 and 1993, did not extend to agricultural land where new legislation extended private access to land without redefining property relations (Schroeder 1996). Land cannot be privatized, sold, mortgaged, given away as a gift or exchanged. Only leasing land for a specified term is allowed.

The official rationale against privatization included concerns over land speculation and the creation of absentee landlords, and the fact that cultivation in Uzbekistan is totally dependent on irrigation, which is delivered by a state-run irrigation system. However, as explained above, the possible disruption of deliveries of cotton, the leading export crop providing the main revenue base of the state, is certainly one of the features of agriculture in Uzbekistan that makes it harder to break away from the structures set up under the command economy. There are a set of clearly contradictory pressures at work. On the one hand, the state has a stake in the maintenance of existing export revenues and in keeping control over them. Agriculture provides the main source of revenue for the state budget. On the other hand, the insolvency of the collective farming sector, the cost of continuing subsidies, the growing land hunger of a population that has increasingly fallen back on self-subsistence, and the impetus from international donors to step up the pace of market reform created pressures toward expanding private access to land. Land reform legislation thus reflects a contradictory bundle of priorities and objectives.

The property regime in land remained relatively stable between 1948 and 1985. After some relaxation on the size of private holdings during World War II to increase self-sufficiency in food, the collective farming system established itself in the postwar years and remained unmodified for several decades. The first wave of changes came with *perestroika*. Agricultural reform in Uzbekistan began in 1989 as an extension of Gorbachov's centrally initiated attempts to increase food production and farm efficiency. There has since been a multipronged attempt to expand "private" access to land. These efforts have taken place on three fronts: (i) moving to a "lease" or contract system of production in collective farms; (ii) expanding the amount of land allocated to personal subsidiary plots (or *tamorka*), and; (iii) the creation of an "independent" farming sector. As a result of this "pluralistic" approach, the agricultural sector has evolved into a multi-layered patchwork of farming enterprises: collectives (or *shirkats* of both open and closed joint-stock companies), co-operatives, individual leasehold plots and independent farm units with varying degrees of rights to ownership and use.

Uzbekistan's agriculture was organized into *kolkhozy* (collective farms) and *sovhozy* (state farms). In 1990, there were some 940 *kolkhozy* and 1,108 *sovhozy*. In the case of the latter, which functioned as state enterprises, workers were employed at fixed wages, whereas the *kolkhozy* paid their workers from their own earnings. The first step in agricultural reforms was the abolition of the state farms and their conversion into co-operative enterprises in an attempt to relieve the state budget of the burden of wage payments to a large agricultural workforce. Within the *kolkhozy* the practice of *arenda* (*pudrat* in Uzbek, meaning lease) became established. Production is organized and managed by family farming units, while the *kolkhoz* provides certain services and inputs and receives a share of the revenues. This involves the signing of contracts between *kolkhoz* management and individual households (*oila pudrati*), or sometimes work brigades, which are allocated land in proportion to available labour. The typical arrangement is for the farming unit to meet the state procurement order at a fraction of the price received by the *kolkhoz*, and to share the revenue for above-quota sales according to agreed proportions.<sup>12</sup> This type of contracting is now the norm.<sup>13</sup>

Since the Soviet period, households were also allowed to have a small plot of land, usually adjoining the house, for their own use. The new legislation allocated more private land to households. According to one estimate, the amount of land for personal plots increased from 110,000 hectares before independence to 630,000 hectares in 1994 (362,840 hectares of which was crop land). However, these legal norms are subject to local availability. In high population density areas, new families may not receive an allocation or their plots may be well below the legally allowed norm.

### 1.2.2 An "independent" farming sector?

The development of the independent farming sector has gone through various stages. It must be noted here that since 1990 there have been some 55 laws, decrees and resolutions passed including revisions to laws related to land reform. Several commentators have pointed to inconsistencies between the various legislative acts. In 1990, the Union of Private Additional Farms was started by presidential decree. This was followed by new legislation in 1991 (On Further Strengthening Peasant Farms and State Support for Entrepreneurial Activity in Uzbekistan) and in 1992 (Law of Peasant Farms) concerning the operations of new "independent farmers".

Initially, "leased" peasant farms were created in the framework of collective enterprises. They were typically allocated marginally productive fields from land reserves. Their contracts were transacted with collective farm managers and their produce sold to the collectives at their own price (which was even lower than the state procurement price). The collectives also made illegal

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<sup>12</sup> This system of contracting is strongly reminiscent of the household responsibility system adopted at the early phase of transition from Chinese communes to individual farming. It represents an attempt to stimulate individual responsibility for land through a system of incentives. However, the nature of contracts may be quite variable in Uzbekistan, and it is not always totally transparent. Households may pay for the use of land in cash or in kind, through the sale of a crop at an agreed price or a combination of these, depending on what is being produced.

<sup>13</sup> A farm manager interviewed by the author in 1998 in the province of Kashkadarya mentioned that they had refrained from moving to family brigades since this would imply a loss of employment for many current brigade workers. They therefore entered leasehold arrangements with work brigades. There is sometimes a mixture of patterns with work brigade leases co-existing with family leaseholds.

demands that peasant farms produce part of their crops to fulfil state procurement quotas. This is hardly surprising since farms were created at the expense of the collectives, but without adjusting the latter's obligations with respect to state deliveries of crops. Mearns (1996) noted the high level of vulnerability of peasant farms and suggested that the slowdown in their establishment was due to the fact that they were seen to jeopardize the ability of collective farms to meet state orders of wheat and cotton by diverting land and labour from the collective. Moreover, as collectives got into deeper financial problems, they started to be in chronic arrears of payments to farmers who could not get the money for the crops they produced. A report from the European Commission's Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States and the government of Uzbekistan (TACIS/Government of Uzbekistan 1996) on the Bulungur district of Samarkand cites this factor as one of the main reasons for the failure of many independent farms and the decline in their numbers between 1991 and 1995. Between 1993 and 1995, 1,646 peasant farms failed (800 of these in 1995 alone).

The decree of 18 March 1997 separated independent farms from collective enterprises by granting them independent juridical status, the right to hold their own bank accounts and to enter into transactions with buyers of crops and suppliers of inputs in their own right. Up until that point, accession to the status of independent farmer involved a number of administrative hurdles (including the presentation of a petition and business plan, first to the collective farm management, then at the district level) but was not tied to formal criteria for eligibility based on minimum sizes of land holdings. The latest law, passed in April 1998, introduced new criteria that are designed to tighten access to the status of independent farmer and to make a distinction between owners of smallholdings (referred to in this paper as *dekhan*, or "peasant farmers") and independent farmers (referred to as "farmers"). Farms and *dekhan* farms are defined below.

Farms:

- are legal entities;
- have leasehold of tenure for a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of 50 years, with possibility of renewal;
- use family members, relatives and other full-time workers on open-ended work contracts;
- are established by written application to the *shirkat* and district-level *hokim*, attaching a business plan and the description of the land plot desired;
- have a minimum herd size of 30 animals for livestock farms, minimum of 10 hectares for cotton and wheat, minimum of one hectare for horticulture and orchard crops (the maximum size of holding is not specified); and
- their land use is restricted to specified agricultural activities (specified in lease contracts).

Peasant (*dekhan*) farms:

- have optional legal status;
- have life-long tenure, which can be inherited;
- can only use family members and relatives as labour;
- may have a maximum holding size ranging between 0.35 hectares and one hectare depending on climatic conditions and the need for irrigation;
- may use their land for any agricultural activity and residential building; and
- are established by application to the *shirkat* and district-level *hokimiyat*.

Both farms and *dekhans* farms are subject to land tax after a two-year tax holiday.

Despite these legal distinctions, the interests of both *dekhans* and farmers are represented by a network of Dekhan and Farmers' Associations set up in the 12 provinces with district-level branches. These Associations were formed in accordance with Decree No. 168 of the Cabinet of Ministers, passed on 22 April 1998. Associations are primarily financed by the contributions of their members.<sup>14</sup> They are, however, set up simultaneously as membership associations safeguarding their members' rights and monitoring organizations that ensure adequate standards of land management. (These dual aims are reflected in the organizational structure of Associations shown in Appendix I.) Their main tasks are specified as follows:

- defending the rights and interests of *dekhans* and farmers accorded by the legislation of the republic;
- monitoring the activities, creation and liquidation of *dekhans* and farmers;
- systematically studying the efficiency of land use by *dekhans* and farmers, making suggestions to appropriate *hokimiyats* (district or provincial governorates) about providing additional land or its withdrawal according to procedures established by the legislation;
- rendering assistance in providing small- and medium-sized agricultural enterprises with seeds, planting materials, pedigree cattle and other resources;
- rendering assistance in receiving information about production technology, transport, juridical, marketing and other services;
- rendering assistance to *dekhans* and farmers in the marketing of their production in local markets and abroad; and
- rendering assistance, both advisory and technical, to *dekhans* and farmers in receiving and assimilating local and foreign credits.

Three different types of production units may be included as members (see Appendix I). These are: (i) farms that meet the minimal criteria set out in law and are juridical entities; (ii) co-operatives that may be formed by several farms or *dekhans* farms and have juridical status, and; (iii) *dekhans* farms that may opt for a juridical status but are subject to limits on their holding sizes. This is clearly a heterogeneous membership whose interests may be quite varied, a fact acknowledged during interviews with the heads of the Association, one of whom conceded there may be further changes as the privatization of collectives proceeds. It was, nonetheless, asserted that what unites *dekhans* and farmers is individual (*shahsi*) property; they work on land that is theirs, with long-term leases.

Another, less explicit, rationale may be the creation of an infrastructure to facilitate a changed structure of revenues from agriculture. The donor community has long been pressing for the phasing out of the state procurement system. Indeed, the shares of outputs that are subject to state procurement orders have declined. Wheat is subject to a two-tiered pricing system; 25 per cent at the state order price and 25 per cent at a higher administered price or the "negotiated" price. In fact, this amounts to 50 per cent since the additional negotiated price is in practice mandatory. The state order for cotton is 30 per cent of planned production. Producers who meet production targets, in principle, have the right to sell the residual 70 per cent to the state

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<sup>14</sup> For instance in Khorezm there is a membership fee of 850 sums, and members have to pay 1 per cent of their yearly profit.

marketing board for a higher price. However, producers who do not meet their production targets do not have the right to sell any cotton at the higher price. For this reason, actual state procurement is much higher than the formal state order since ambitious production targets are frequently not met. The loss in revenue arising from the reduction of state orders is eventually supposed to be compensated for by the institution of land tax, the termination of subsidies and the introduction of water charges. The registration of all land users for the purposes of taxation is therefore high on the policy agenda.

In this connection, the Farm Restructuring and Development Programme of the Government of Uzbekistan has sought technical assistance through the TACIS programme of the European Union to develop the basis for a National Real Property and Title Registration System. This project, currently in its second phase, has as its stated objective the acceleration of implementation of ongoing and future land reforms by introducing "a uniform system of land administration and management consistent with the development of markets in land and real estate". The partner organizations are the State Committee on Land Resources (Goskomzem) and the Main Directorate of Geodesy, Cartography and State Cadastre (Uzgeocadastre). Goskomzem was established in accordance with Resolution No. 314 passed on 27 July 1998 to report directly to the Cabinet of Ministers as the organization responsible for land management, land registration and monitoring of land usage. This may be a step toward simplifying the administrative structure of land reform since there are many government institutions involved in land reform creating areas of duplication, uncertainty and confusion. A new administrative infrastructure is being encouraged by donors to stimulate transparency and security of rights over property.

The main intent of the April 1998 law on *dekhan* and independent farmers (see page 12) appears to be the introduction of a distinction between a small-holding sector subject to a size "ceiling", on which the state makes no demands aside from land tax, and a "commercial" sector, which has more latitude for expansion in terms of acquiring land and non-family labourers but is tied into the state procurement through a system of contracts (*shartname*). The leasehold contracts stipulate the size of acreage to be allocated to specified crops and the proportion of the crop subject to state deliveries. As will be explained at greater length in the next section, this represents an attempt to pass on the risks of production to independent farmers while maintaining the state procurement system of certain strategic crops such as cotton and wheat. This is a major bone of contention with the international donor community, which would like to see access to private enterprises (if not to the land on which the enterprises operate) accompanied by the legally defined power to make decisions about the use of the property, within a framework of long-term security of land tenure and without interference from other institutions.

In addition to meeting minimum landholding and herd size requirements, specified by the April 1998 law, aspiring independent farmers now have to pass an examination and obtain a farmer's certificate (*attestatsia* or attestation). This is justified on the grounds that people who have inadequate knowledge about agronomy should not be allocated land since they would be

unlikely to achieve the yields specified by their contracts. This examination is quite a formal one conducted by a panel of administrators and experts at the district level based, in principle, on universal criteria of competence and knowledge. In practice, former collective farm administrators and those who are well connected seem to have a competitive edge. This constitutes an additional hurdle for women who were considered unsuited to the job of being independent farmers by all the officials interviewed.<sup>15</sup>

Women have, so far, been systematically disadvantaged in the process of agrarian reform. The restructuring of collective farms and their transformation into joint-stock companies redefined former members of the collective as shareholders. There is no evidence that women have been excluded from this process. Interviews with heads of *shirkat* revealed that shares were distributed on an individual basis according to final salary and length of service. However, since most women are unskilled workers with shorter working years before retirement and frequent maternity leaves, it is very likely that they hold a much smaller value of shares than men.<sup>16</sup> With the shift to independent farming, the notion that farms are entities managed by men, where women and children work as unpaid labourers, is becoming fact. As competition for land increases, both formal hurdles (of qualifications and examinations) and informal ones (of connections and patronage) may marginalize women even further.

In summary, an examination of changing legislation between 1990 and 1998 suggests that, after an initial spate of measures to expand households' access to private holdings, the emphasis is now on distinguishing between a **smallholder sector** with few prospects of graduation to commercial farming, using small plots mainly as a social safety net, while providing more restricted access to a **commercial sector** of independent farms that are tied into the state procurement system through their leaseholds and contracts. Both the process of farm restructuring (transformation of collectives into joint-stock companies) and the creation of an independent farming sector have effectively marginalized women from claiming independent access to land. This is happening in a context of increasing land hunger. As will be shown in section four below, many rural women who were formerly employed in rural industries and in social services (mainly in health and education) have now lost their source of income. The pool of women attempting to earn a living from smallholder production and informal trade and services is growing while their resource base, in terms of access to land, is shrinking.

### ***1.3 The changing place of land in the household economy***

#### **1.3.1 The growing importance of land**

Questions pertaining to access to land in Uzbekistan must also be set against changing rural livelihood strategies in response to a new macroeconomic environment. There is little doubt that the place of land in sustaining livelihoods has undergone substantial modifications. Individual households did not play a significant productive role in agriculture during the

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<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, a woman farmer who came forward to be interviewed was something of a showcase. Not only had she been a former brigade chief at her collective farm, but she was also a trained agronomist and had benefited from a study tour to Finland.

<sup>16</sup> Calculating these differences is hardly worthwhile in a context where the benefits accruing to shareholders are mostly fictitious. Most enterprises are in arrears of debts and unable to distribute dividends.

Soviet and late-Soviet period, in contrast to the present situation. Uzbekistan now has the unusual situation of schoolteachers, local administrators, doctors and agricultural workers vying with each other to get a toehold in agricultural land. In the Ferghana valley where population density is very high, land hunger is particularly acute.

Whereas informal incomes deriving from private cultivation and trading activities existed under the Soviet system as additional incomes (Grossman 1989), Humphrey (1998) notes that they have now moved to centre stage as the arena where new survival strategies are enacted in the post-Soviet republics. Farm restructuring in Uzbekistan has undoubtedly created new hardships. Since collective enterprises are in permanent deficit, they have tried to cope by either shedding employees, or keeping them "on the books", but being in arrears of wages or only paying workers intermittently and in kind. For many households, pensions have become the only source of ready cash, and late payment and curtailment of benefits are taking their toll. Rural households have tended to respond by adopting a mixed portfolio of activities, allocated along age and gender lines, depending on local conditions for employment and cultivation. A combination of salaries and wages, which may be paid in cash or in kind; self-provisioning and sale or barter of produce from personal plots or animals; income from trading and other informal activities; and benefits and entitlements (such as pensions and maternity benefit) currently characterize rural livelihoods (Kandiyoti 1998). As a result, reliance on household and subsidiary plots for self-subsistence, and on off-farm and non-farm informal activities, has increased substantially. As pointed out earlier, this is also the type of tenure that is subject to the least amount of regulation and is therefore recognized as more profitable.

### 1.3.2 Types of tenure

Current land tenure arrangements give rural households access to different types of plots. The first type is the household plot on which the house is built with a small garden *agarot* (plot). Household plots are held in perpetuity and are inheritable, even though strictly speaking, only the house is private property. Women do not normally have claims on either house or plot since post-marital residence is virilocal, and the dwelling is considered the property of the husband's family. In cases where there is more than one son, it is usually the youngest who is expected to cohabit with parents and inherit the house.

The second type of plot is the *tamorka* or private subsidiary plot to which all citizens were entitled with expanded rights since *perestroika*. The acreage allocated to households was expanded more than twice compared to 1989. The legal size of private plots was increased at first from 0.06 hectares to 0.25 hectares, and eventually 0.35 hectares of irrigated land and 0.5 hectares of non-irrigated land. These are usually allocated from the land reserves of collective farms and based on transactions between the collective and the male household head. The actual size of the plot and its distance from the house depend on local conditions of availability.

Former *kolkhozes* (now restructured as *shirkats*) continue to occupy the bulk of irrigated land and account for about 50 per cent of the value of all crops, mostly producing cotton and wheat. Since *perestroika*, members of collective farms have been organized into family brigades and allocated a specific acreage to farm on an *arenda* or *pudrat*. This also gives them the possibility of

growing additional crops on leased land after the wheat harvest and benefiting from membership in the collective for securing inputs for their household and *tamorka* plots.

Finally, as explained above, legislation on land includes provisions for the setting up of independent farms that have the status of separate juridical entities, the right to open their own bank accounts and to hold leases of up to 50 years. Initially, such farms were formed as leaseholds that remained tied to collective farms. These types of farms increased significantly between 1991 and 1995, but they still accounted for only 6 per cent of total arable land and had declined in certain provinces since 1995 (TACIS/Government of Uzbekistan 1996). With the 1998 law, access to the status of independent farmer is being further restricted. The applicants who want to become private farmers now have to meet more stringent criteria and pass a formal examination. According to 1999 figures, the acreage cultivated by independent farmers in the provinces of Khorezm and Andijan represented 2 per cent and 4 per cent of total agricultural land (see Appendix II).

### 1.3.3 Combining types of tenure

The different types of land tenure described above may co-exist in various combinations. Households attempt to optimize the number of plots they cultivate depending on the labour resources at their disposal, their ability to press their rights to an additional plot and their alternative sources of income. The following case from the Ulughnor district of Andijan province illustrates the combination of incomes from different types of plots:

*Ulugbek is an independent farmer who has 27 hectares of cotton land and two tractors, 0.16 hectares of tamorka land planted to vegetables and three hectares of vineyard, which he leased from the shirkat for 10 years. On the cotton farm, there is work from March until November. He works with his two brothers and their children, making up a workforce of 14, which they complement with two hired workers. Work on the tamorka is his wife's responsibility. The work in the vineyard is seasonal and involves his own family.*

*He agrees that most of his profits come from the vineyard and his tamorka, and that cotton farming is not profitable. However, his claims to both tamorka and vineyard land are contingent upon his status as leaseholder for the shirkat.*

Depending on the type of crops grown, the allocation of labour to multiple plots can substantially increase women's burden during the production season. This is evident in the case below from Eski Kishlak in Andijan, which also illustrates how the combination of tenure operates.

*Saodat, 35, shares the same courtyard as her mother and father-in-law, and her husband's younger brother, his wife and their children, but keeps a separate kitchen. Her elderly father-in-law, who is a World War II veteran, enjoys certain benefits, including a plot of 1.5 hectares, which his sons and daughters-in-law help to cultivate. Saodat has her own separate kitchen garden. She also works on her husband's tamorka, a 0.6 hectares paddy field (shalpaye), growing rice and on shirkat land, where she is in charge of the care of half a hectare of land planted to cotton. Work in the paddy field is very labour*

*intensive. Planting has to be finished by the end of May and weeding needs to be carried out in about 40 days, followed by another weeding period in about a fortnight. Meanwhile, Saodat has no time off from shirkat work where the weeding of cotton (yagona) coincides with this period.*

*In August, Saodat works at thinning out cotton bolls so that the plants do not get too bushy. At the same time she takes care of her garden and when her figs are ripe, goes to sell them at the Karasu bazaar nearby. She also grows vegetables in the summer months, but these are barely enough to meet household needs.*

*The cotton harvest starts in September. This also coincides with the harvest of the watermelons that they grow on hilly, non-irrigated land (adyr arazi). The cotton harvest continues through October and extends through to November if the plan is not fulfilled. Harvesting wages are paid in cash but the rest of her work on the cotton field is remunerated only in kind (100 kilograms of wheat, 20 litres of oil and 25 kilograms of rice were received for the care of half a hectare of land). It is Saodat, not her husband, who is officially registered as a member of a work brigade in the collective farm.*

*In the winter months Saodat has no source of cash income. She started making samsa and manti (a type of pasty and meat-filled dumplings) and selling her cooked food at Karasu bazaar. She admitted to this with a degree of reluctance since trading in the bazaar, especially for relatively young women like herself, is considered improper. However, she is an enterprising woman and has been cooking and selling in markets for the last two years. Her profits are small but provide a ready source of cash.*

#### 1.3.4 Pressures and contradictions

Despite the gradual nature of the changes in land tenure patterns, the share of the individual sector (household plots and peasant farms) in agricultural production has increased substantially (from 28 per cent in 1990, to 41 per cent in 1994, to 53 per cent in 1997). The production of meat and milk has shifted almost entirely to the household sector. This was in part related to an acute shortage of feed crops that has worsened with the conversion of land planted with barley and lucerne to wheat (the aggregate feed available in 1997 was about one-third of 1991).

The apparent dynamism of this sector should not, however, make us lose sight of the rigidity of what Ilkhamov (1998) has described as a three-tiered rural economy. This structure consists of *shirkats*, which still occupy the major part of irrigated, arable land; a small number of independent farms; and a mass of collective farm employees who cultivate smallholdings or *dekhan* farmers. The resilience of the collective enterprises has also been documented in the case of Russia (Amelina 1999) where they serve as a safety net of last resort and as input providers for the smallholdings of their employees, and ensure a measure of "stability" in the countryside. This is not dissimilar to the situation in Uzbekistan where, in addition, there is a common interest between the rural poor, who perceive decollectivization as a potential threat to their welfare, and the government of Uzbekistan, which relies on the procurement system for its revenues and fears the destabilizing influences of deepening unemployment in the countryside.

It remains to be seen to what extent the precarious balancing act represented by the simultaneous attempt to provide smallholders with a subsistence base, while developing and

diversifying leasehold markets in land, can be sustained. Given the shortage of available land, the presence of different categories of claimants within the same territory sets up a zero-sum game among them. Thus, land leased to farmers on a long-term basis can only be compensated for by reducing allocations made to households by collective enterprises (or by altogether refraining from allocating land to new families). The alternative would represent an outright loss of the collectives' own productive capability. This dilemma was freely acknowledged by the farm managers interviewed. Yet, this situation is in line with the policy objective of "phasing out" collective farms in favour of a farming sector based on individual property rights (of enterprises, if not of the land itself).

In the shake-out accompanying this process the weakest players, namely collective farm workers who rely on their small plots, are likely to be the losers. Yet the fact remains that the rural population still retains a toehold in subsistence farming, and that smallholder production for the market is undoubtedly a central feature of rural livelihoods in Uzbekistan—one that depends crucially on the divisions of labour and pooling arrangements within households. This makes a more detailed understanding of the rural domestic economy essential for policy formulation purposes. One of the aims of the research on which this paper is based has been to uncover how the allocation of household members to different activities is structured (along gender and age lines) and what the implications are in terms of access to resources. This analysis must, however, take account of the concrete forms that farm restructuring is currently taking in Uzbekistan.

## 2. Context and Methods

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of evolving agrarian reforms in Uzbekistan upon rural women's livelihoods and land rights in the context of rising unemployment and increasing poverty, following the break-up of the Soviet Union. The rural population in Uzbekistan is 62 per cent of the total population, and the majority of women are engaged in rural-based agricultural and service occupations. Some of the central questions addressed are:

- In what ways is agrarian reform redefining access to resources?
- What are the gender-differentiated outcomes of this process? Has it affected intra-household divisions of labour in different regional contexts?
- How are women responding to the shift from being *kolkhoz* employees or other public sector employees, with rights to welfare entitlements, to becoming unremunerated family labourers?
- How are women contributing to and being affected by agricultural changes and diversification into off-farm and non-farm activities?
- What forms do women's agricultural and non-agricultural activities take?
- Which categories of women are most dependent on access to cultivation and leasehold rights?
- How do these processes impact upon the broader question of women's rights and social entitlements?

Andijan and Khorezm, two provinces where agriculture and access to land are particularly critical to survival, were selected as areas of fieldwork. The province of Andijan in the Ferghana

Valley in the east of the country has the highest population density, a high level of rural unemployment and underemployment, and significant levels of land hunger. It is an area of irrigated cotton cultivation on collective farms, and rice and vegetable cultivation on smallholdings for self-subsistence and for the market. Khorezm is in western Uzbekistan, in an arid area adjoining the ecologically damaged Aral Sea (see map below). Similar crops are cultivated, but within a very different rural ecology. Due to high levels of soil salinity, cultivation is impossible without an annual leeching of the fields and extensive irrigation. Control over water resources is of paramount importance, and land is worthless without this critical input (see Appendix II for details of land use for the two provinces).

Two different types of rural settlements have been selected in each province: an “old” settlement with an established community and more extensive social infrastructure, and a “new” type of settlement.<sup>17</sup>

In Andijan, the village of Eski Kishlak represents the former type of rural community with a long history of sedentary farming and early collectivization dating from the 1930s. In contrast, the Ulughnor district of Andijan, located in a steppe zone, was a “virgin land” area opened to cultivation in the 1960s, where a *sovkhos* (now called Yengi Hayat) was established in 1968. This settlement was formed by immigrants from neighbouring districts who came to seek employment. With the retrenchment of labour from collective enterprises and arrears in wages, this area is now considered one of the poorest districts in the province (and was, for that reason, included in the World Bank Consultations with the Poor in April 1999).

**Figure 1: Map of Uzbekistan**



<sup>17</sup> The names of the settlements, farming enterprises and individuals have been changed to protect the anonymity of respondents.

In Khorezm, Ok Bugday is an older settlement with relatively better infrastructure, where the collective farm continues to be the main provider of jobs. The Yengi Kishlak Farmers' Association represents a totally new pattern whereby a former collective farm, which was in deep deficit, has been totally liquidated and the land distributed to former members of the collective. This experiment, which was the first of its kind at the time of fieldwork, is becoming increasingly widespread under the new package of measures for the "sanation"<sup>18</sup> of agricultural enterprises (see section 3.2). It provides an appropriate setting to examine how the new property regime is shaping up and what types of gender-differentiated outcomes it is producing.

Three different types of data were sought to capture both the *process* of agrarian reform and its *outcomes* in terms of different livelihood options.

**Key informant interviews:** These were carried out with collective farm managers in each location, district-level administrators (who hold the land-use registers of the collective farms in their district) province and local-level heads of Dekhan and Farmers' Associations, heads of *selsovyet* of the villages under investigation and women deputy *hokims* (in charge of women's affairs) at the provincial level. Information on changes in land tenure, collective enterprise management and emerging forms of enterprise obtained from these interviews were supplemented by the analysis of laws and relevant decrees passed between 1991 and 1999.

**Open-ended group discussions:** Information on new types of social vulnerability were elicited through the use of discussions with groups of rural women identified as having different problems and needs. Three broad groups of rural women with differing employment/unemployment profiles have been investigated in each of the research sites and are defined below.

1. *Women in agricultural occupations:* The majority of these are either registered in *shirkat* and working as family leaseholders (*oila pudratchisi*) or contributing their labour to the leaseholds as unpaid family workers. With increasing labour retrenchment in the collective farm sector, the number of unemployed women has been growing steadily, creating both a new pool of rural casual workers (*mardigors*) looking for wage work in weeding and harvesting operations and swelling the ranks of those looking for supplementary incomes in petty trade and services. However, the fact that *shirkat* households have greater access to different types of land plots (see section 1.3.2) means that women in these households may experience a significant intensification of seasonal labour burdens as they work simultaneously on *shirkat* land, *agarot*, *tamorka* and sometimes additional leased plots. There is a narrow stratum of women in the technical/administrative echelons of collective farms, seldom going above the level of brigade chief in the organization of production, although women bookkeepers, clerks and technicians do exist. There is an even narrower layer of women in the "independent" farming sector. These two latter categories are the subject of separate case studies in sections 3.2 and 4.3.
2. *Women workers in rural industries and non-agricultural service occupations:* One of the characteristics of rural areas under the Soviet regime was that social

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<sup>18</sup> "Sanation" consisted of a two-year pre-bankruptcy process that aims to re-establish the creditworthiness and economic viability of an enterprise. This programme has been brought to a close.

infrastructure, especially health and educational services, was highly developed. Rural industries, often directly related to the collective farm sector, were also present in many localities. Both the social services and rural industrial sectors were important employers of women and offered opportunities for non-farm employment to a substantial number of rural women. Women workers in rural industries have been particularly badly hit by labour retrenchment and non-payment of wages. Unlike collective farm workers who have better entitlements to private plots, industrial workers have less to fall back on when they lose their wages, unless they are in skilled/technical occupations which they can practise on their own account. This is also true of women who are employed in rural social services, working as teachers, kindergarten attendants, nurses or midwives. However, the category of service workers forms a rather heterogeneous group, since it includes many individuals who are not being paid wages, as well as some public sector employees (mainly administrative cadres) who receive their wages on time.

3. *Women in trade and informal service occupations*: This is a rapidly expanding and heterogeneous category. Women's trading activities may range from marketing household agricultural produce in local markets to being shopowners or agricultural wholesalers, some being involved in cross-border trade. Informal services in catering, dressmaking and other crafts activities (such as sewing quilts, and making hats and carpets) are also on the increase. The loss of earnings experienced by both those in the collective farm sector and in rural industries and services is pushing an ever-greater number of women to seek opportunities for off-farm and non-farm occupations in this sector.

*In-depth case studies*: Selected women engaged in the different types of rural occupations described above were the subject of detailed in-depth interviews, which took a life story format. These provided more inclusive insights into work histories and intrahousehold allocations of tasks, responsibilities and entitlements.

The findings of the study are presented in two parts. The first illustrates the different pathways of agrarian reform and farm restructuring with reference to selected enterprises in Khorezm and Andijan. The second part addresses the gendered outcomes of these processes.

### **3. Pathways of Farm Restructuring: The *Shirkat* and the Farmers' Association**

Farm restructuring in Uzbekistan has taken a variety of forms. The most common has been the transformation of former *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* into joint-stock companies or *shirkats*. This process will be illustrated below by means of two case studies: the Ok Bugday *shirkat* in Khorezm and Eski Kishlak *shirkat* in Andijan. Under this model, the assets of the collective are evaluated and the total share value (or some portion of it) is distributed to farm members on the basis of salary, length of service and other assessments of labour input. The organization of production remains essentially unchanged and continues to rely on family leaseholds. However, a new system of management that makes each production unit a separate accounting unit responsible for losses and profits has been introduced.

A less common pattern—implemented in Khorezm by special Decree No. 243 of 13 May 1999—is the complete liquidation of former collective enterprises and the reallocation of the land to

independent farmers. In this case, what is at stake is not the distribution of shares but of actual land parcels. This requires additional decisions concerning which individuals will exercise legal rights over which land parcels. Liquidation was implemented in nine enterprises formally declared as bankrupt. At the time of fieldwork in 1999, this was a relatively rare occurrence and the Khorezm collectives were seen as an experiment. The programme of sanation of agricultural enterprises, which entered its second round in 1999–2000, has now ceased. Its main instruments were external management, debt restructuring, sale of unnecessary assets and stocks, strengthening of financial controls, laying-off of surplus workforce, and cleaning of inter-farm irrigation and drainage structures. After the sanation period, enterprises that were able to improve their performance were restructured into *shirkats*, while those showing no sign of improvement were liquidated and transformed into Dekhan and Farmers' Associations. As of January 2001, a total of 213 enterprises nationwide were under sanation and 74 enterprises had been restructured into such associations. Although the process of sanation has now been discontinued, the number of liquidated collective enterprises is likely to grow through bankruptcy. The Yengi Kishlak Farmers' Association in Khorezm, which represents one of the early examples of this pathway, will be examined in some detail as a case study.

### **3.1 From kolkhoz to shirkat**

#### **3.1.1. Khorezm: The case of Ok Bugday**

The process of transforming collective farms into joint-stock companies or *shirkats* started in Khorezm in 1997. There was a total of 132 collective enterprises in the province, of which 123 have become *shirkats* while nine collective farms that were in deeper deficit than the others, were totally liquidated and transformed into Farmers' Associations.

Ok Bugday became a joint-stock company in 1999. This collective owns 2,740 hectares of cultivable land, about 60 per cent of which is allocated to growing cotton, followed by rice (15 per cent), sugar beet (11 per cent) and wheat (7 per cent) as the main crops. The remainder is sown to feed crops and vegetables. This land is cultivated by 1,800 family leaseholders,<sup>19</sup> and 1,620 households have been allocated 368 hectares of *tamorka* land. The *shirkat* also has a livestock farm, which employs 36 workers, with 815 heads of cattle, 300 of which are cows. There are relatively few people employed in rural industry or service occupations.<sup>20</sup>

The former *kolkhoz* introduced family leaseholds in 1985. This was meant to increase the sense of responsibility of the workers by allocating them the same plots year after year as family units. The shift to the *shirkat* brought about two further changes: (i) the distribution of shares to members of the collective, and (ii) the redefinition of family leaseholds as separate accounting units. Receiving shares of the total assets of the enterprise and costing the returns on

<sup>19</sup> The size of land allocated to each family depends upon the crops for which there are different norms. These are five hectares for wheat, 1.1 hectares for rice and 1.7 hectares for cotton. The labour power available to households is also taken into account.

<sup>20</sup> The *shirkat* construction workshop employs around 120 people, the cereal cleaning factory, 35 and the vegetable canning factory employs 38 seasonal employees. There are also some 40 health workers and 370 teachers. The *shirkat* has a machine-tractor park, two general stores, and a few carpentry and metal workshops.

production at the household level are aimed to further increase the sense of ownership and responsibility of *shirkat* members.

A committee of 34 *kolkhoz* members was appointed to calculate all the assets of the enterprise and to make decisions concerning the shares to be distributed to collective members. All those who have worked for the *kolkhoz* for more than two years (including pensioners) were eligible. The criteria for the size of shares were based on length of service and salary level. A total of 3,500 shares were distributed; of these 800 were given to pensioners, 270 to technicians, tractor drivers and other technical personnel, and the rest to current workers in family brigades. About 50 per cent of these shares have gone to women workers.

The average value of shares is 8,360 sums but an individual share can be as large as 40,000 sums, as for instance in the case of an engineer who has served over 20 years. The shareholders (*paychik*) have the right to pass on these shares to their heirs. The mechanism of distribution of dividends to shareholders does not appear significantly different from the process of distributing over-quota profits to *kolkhoz* members. The same obstacles that made such distribution unlikely in the past still persist. Collective enterprises are typically in arrears of debt payments to various input providers and unable to pay their members regular wages, let alone dividends. Therefore the benefits accruing from shareholding are, at present, hypothetical rather than substantive. Shareholding also brings with it the possibility of having to shoulder the debts of the collective if it were to go into liquidation.

A woman brigade chief, who had worked in that capacity for over 20 years, acknowledged that the transition from work brigades to family leases and now to *shirkat* have represented a progressive retrenchment of labour. In the process of turning into an association of shareholders, the *kolkhoz* had to shed a further 425 brigade members who are now unemployed (almost 20 per cent of the total workforce of 2,250). Of these, 65 per cent were women. The *shirkat* manager mentioned plans to set up a mud-brick production workshop where some of the unemployed men might find work, but there were no plans to accommodate unemployed women. The effect of labour retrenchment on these women is that they are being pushed into a category of casual agricultural workers, without the social benefits attached to being members of an enterprise.

In terms of the organization of production itself, it is unclear what the impact of the shift to *shirkat* status will be. Among the crops grown, those subject to state procurement quotas are as follows: 100 per cent for cotton, 60 per cent for rice, 50 per cent for wheat and 100 per cent for sugar beet. The *shirkat* enters into separate delivery contracts with the different district-level state buyers and input providers. The district purchasers of crops are the cotton factory, the grain products processing organization, the sugar factory and the milk products factory (for marketing purposes only, since there are no delivery quotas on milk). On the input side, the machine-tractor park (MTP), the state petroleum organization, the fertilizer and agrochemical outlet are the main suppliers.

The *shirkat* receives advances for the payment of inputs into a special account through the Pakhta Bank (Cotton Bank).<sup>21</sup> This advance represents 25 per cent of the previous year's proceeds. The advances are released in different tranches and are earmarked for specific categories of spending, such as fuel or fertilizer, leaving little discretion to the management in the use of such credits. Reallocation of funds is only possible by special application, a procedure that is unlikely to be responsive to the rhythm of decision making required within any given production season. It is therefore important for the enterprise to have its own sources of liquidity to make cash purchases or to enter into barter arrangements with some of the providers. In the case of Ok Bugday, the sale of livestock provides them with a dependable source of revenue. They sell about 70 heads of cattle a week in season.

The procurement quotas for each crop are divided and allocated to different brigades. There are currently 20 cotton brigades, five rice brigades, two wheat brigades, two sugar beet brigades and two animal fodder brigades. The delivery contract for cotton the previous year, for instance, was 4,600 tonnes. This was divided among the 20 cotton brigades, which comprise 957 family leaseholders. The yields expected from each family leasehold are set according to production norms for the different crops.<sup>22</sup>

A significant departure from the past is that brigades are no longer the unit responsible for production. They only work on common maintenance tasks like cleaning and repairing water canals. The responsibility for meeting production targets rests with each family leasehold, which now constitutes a separate accounting unit. Every leaseholder enters into a separate contract with the *shirkat*, which is transacted yearly, specifying the acreage of land they lease and how much they will produce and receive in payment.<sup>23</sup>

Each family *pudrat* is provided with a separate notebook and chequebook where they record all the expenses they have incurred for inputs. At the end of the year, when they settle accounts, the cost of inputs that are owed to the *shirkat* and the salary cost of the technical services provided are deducted from the amount owed to the leaseholder according to contract stipulations. In the case of a leaseholder who has produced six tonnes of cotton fetching approximately 300,000 sums, about half will go toward expenditures covered by the *shirkat* as advances for inputs and about 40,000 sums will be deducted toward the salary costs of the *shirkat* administrative staff (bookkeepers, water services and agronomists).<sup>24</sup> The net return will

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<sup>21</sup> These advance payments are not made into money accounts but a type of state-backed credit account (*beznalichmeje*), which enables the enterprise to obtain the necessary inputs for fertilizer and pesticides, fuel, machinery and spare parts from the relevant state providers. This means that most transactions do not need to go through the medium of cash, with the exception of salaries and harvesting wages.

<sup>22</sup> These are: 30 centners of cotton per hectare, 45 centners of wheat and 45 of rice. One centner equals 100 kilograms.

<sup>23</sup> I was shown a typical one-year contract for two hectares of cotton land. Its terms stipulated that the *shirkat* undertakes to provide a starting advance (payment for inputs) equivalent to 25 per cent of the proceeds of the preceding year. If the leaseholder produces cotton over the amount specified by the contract, 50 per cent of that amount must be yielded to the *shirkat* at the state delivery price. This particular contract stipulated a delivery of 5,760 kilograms of cotton based on a yield of 28.9 centners per hectare amounting to 299,520 sums.

<sup>24</sup> The administration of the *shirkat* continues to be relatively large and consists of salaried personnel who receive their wages from the proceeds of the *shirkat*. These are: the *shirkat* head, his deputy, bookkeepers, technical personnel (agronomists, machinists, machine repairers, water engineers) and brigade chiefs. The last echelon in the administrative structure to receive salaries are the brigade chiefs. It is difficult to reach an estimate of the level of overstaffing in these salaried positions.

be of around 70,000 sums, which constitutes about 25 per cent of the total amount appearing on the contract.

Direct producers are thus disadvantaged in three different ways: they sell their cotton at low delivery prices; they pay for their inputs through non-cash advances that price these commodities at a higher level than their cash value in the bazaar, and they support an administrative staff of overseers and technical personnel. Given the fact that they are also deprived of cash earnings as wages (*ish hakki*), this means that their private subsidiary plots constitute their main source of livelihood.

This new structure of production appears to be particularly onerous for the *shirkat* administration, a fact that was freely acknowledged during interviews. It now has to issue 1,800 separate yearly contracts and keep track of the expenses of all the leaseholders through the new chequebook system (one copy of these records is kept by the lessee and another submitted to *shirkat* bookkeepers). The head of Ok Bugday is carrying out what he called a "mini-experiment". He has kept 67 family leaseholds in a single unit which is now registered as the Ok Bugday Farmers' Co-operative and co-ordinated by the brigade chief. This farming unit will work as an integrated unit in costing terms. It will be possible to compare, at the end of the following year, whether this co-operative format is more effective than the household-based accounting system.

A central dilemma of this enterprise, as of many others, may be captured through the following extract from an interview with the head of the *shirkat*:

Interviewer: *Now that you have an internal accounting system, you must have some sanction for those who are in permanent debt to the shirkat or who systematically fail to fulfil the terms of their contracts. Do you have the right to revoke their leases or to stop issuing them with a new lease?*

Head of the *shirkat* (after a pause): *I have the right but not the possibility (Haqqim var, lekin imkoniyetim yok).*

Interviewer: *What do you mean by that?*

Head of the *shirkat*: *Look, at the moment there are 300 families that owe the shirkat around 15 million sums. But we Uzbeks have our own culture. What is the most important thing in our lives? Being able to stage a good wedding for our children and a decent funeral when someone passes away. When a member of the shirkat approaches me saying "I need 40 kilograms of rice and 20 litres of oil for my son's wedding", what am I supposed to do? How can I refuse him? We need to be able to look each other in the face. I have to be able to say selam-in aleykom [good day] to them. A lot of the debt comes from such ceremonies.*

This statement goes to the heart of the social contract between the *kolhoz*dji (workers in collectives) and their management. The ties that still bind workers to the collectives consist of a mixture of lack of alternatives on the one hand and forms of paternalistic protection on the other, which are coming under increasing strain as the resources of collective enterprises dry

up. Apart from keeping their workbooks registered in the *shirkat* for the purposes of pensions and social benefits, there are a number of incentives that members of the collective receive. They have access to cotton stalks of the harvested fields as cooking fuel and animal fodder, they use *shirkat* land to graze their private animals,<sup>25</sup> and they have the right to sell cotton oil from any excess production of cotton, or sugar from their sugar beet. Family brigades are also given the possibility of planting carrots, beans or other fast-growing crops for their own use on *shirkat* land on a leasehold or sharecropping basis after the wheat harvest. Most importantly, the access of households to private subsidiary plots is mediated by membership in the collective enterprise, and *kolkhoz* workers are entitled to larger plots than the general population.

These mutual accommodations have led some observers to argue that the cotton export sector is dependent upon a stagnating smallholder economy on which it draws for its manpower needs (Ilkhamov 1998 and 2000b) while the latter is parasitic upon the hidden benefits referred to above. A less noted feature of this mutual dependency is that it is based on a gendered division of labour at the household level that produces an intensification of women's agricultural labour on both household plots and family brigades. This process will receive detailed attention in section 4.3 below.

### 3.1.2 Andijan: The case of Eski Kishlak

The village of Eski Kishlak has a population of 19,184 and 3,484 registered households. It is close to Andijan city and within easy commuting distance to district markets. As the administrative centre of a group of six villages, it benefits from a more developed social infrastructure. It has 11 schools (two at the secondary level and one Russian language school), a local hospital, one SVA (rural ambulatory medical unit) and four FAPs (feldsher and midwife units). There is also some rural industry: a towel factory and a poultry factory/farm. This means that although the Eski Kishlak *shirkat* remains the most important employer, possibilities for non-farm employment are more plentiful than in Ok Bugday. However, all local employers have been experiencing difficulties in paying wages and have laid off workers and resorted to offering remuneration in kind. This has meant that a large number of households, previously relying on salaries and wages, now only have their household plots to fall back on.

This situation is compounded by the fact that Eski Kishlak is located in the province of Andijan, which has the highest population density in the country (513.7 people per square kilometre as compared to the national average of 54.2). The fertile Ferghana valley, an ancient centre of sedentary farming in a semi-arid zone, has long been recognized as a demographic time-bomb and noted for its high rates of unemployment and underemployment.

One of the policy responses during the Soviet period was the reclamation of desert and steppe land with "virgin lands" projects, such as the Yengi Hayat collective in Ulughnor established in 1968. These were capital-intensive projects requiring massive investment in irrigation, farming equipment and social infrastructure. The new collectives attracted migrants, mainly from parts

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<sup>25</sup> A number of governmental decrees introducing punitive measures (including surveillance by mounted militia) have been introduced since 1994 to prevent crop damage due to grazing. This appears to have had little effect since enterprise managers tend to turn a blind eye to this infraction.

of the valley experiencing acute land shortages. These tended to be younger families that paternal households and local enterprises were unable to accommodate. Out-migration from the valley to “desert” *oblasts* even further afield (such as Djizzak and Surhandarya) was not uncommon. The current fiscal crisis has hit enterprises such as Yengi Hayat particularly hard. Lack of water means that self-subsistence and petty trade from household plots is not a livelihood option here. As a result, there is evidence that many families have started to leave and are going back to their villages of origin in the valley. Currently, Yengi Hayat is experiencing labour shortages and relies on seasonal migrant labourers for the cotton harvest.

In Eski Kishlak, on the other hand, population pressure on land is exceptionally high and the allocation of *tamorka* and new house plots (*chek*) is becoming increasingly problematic. It is difficult to estimate the actual number of households that have no access to land (estimates of as high as 30 per cent were received for the number of landless and unemployed), but it is widely accepted that their number is growing. What typically happens is that newly married couples who apply for a separate *chek* and want to register as a separate household unit, thereby meeting the legal requirement for receiving an additional private subsidiary plot, are denied the possibility of doing so. As a result multiple family households continue to live together with only one *tamorka* to share among them. Since they technically constitute a single household unit, they are not considered landless. However, a growing phenomenon of “hidden” landlessness is under way since the supply of household labour far outstrips the possibilities of access to land. It is against this background that the restructuring of the Eski Kishlak collective (formerly a *sovkhos* or state farm) is taking place.

The Eski Kishlak *sovkhos* was initially reorganized in 1992 as an association of *shirkats* (*shirkat uyushmasi*). The constituent subdivisions of the former *sovkhos* (such as car-tractor stations, repair and maintenance workshops, and dairy farms) were broken up into separate enterprises, directly accountable to the regional authorities. The aim, in line with earlier decentralization policies implemented since *perestroika*, was to make each unit more accountable and profitable. Since 23 December 1999, Eski Kishlak was transformed into a closed joint-stock company based on the distribution of shares to all members of the collective. The separate subdivisions have, once again, been brought under the single management of the new *shirkat* and are no longer directly subordinate to the regional authorities.

The process of distribution of shares, the organization of production through contracts with family leaseholders and the chequebook system for accounting follow the principles described above in some detail in connection to the Ok Bugday *shirkat*. The only difference in Eski Kishlak is that instead of treating each leaseholding family as a separate accounting unit, these have been grouped into 269 “links” with a brigade chief (or foreman) at the head of each grouping of about five to six leaseholders. The holders of chequebooks are the brigade chiefs who act as intermediaries between family leaseholders and *shirkat* management. Thus, Eski Kishlak has so far opted to retain some of its former brigade structure and to incorporate it into the new

accounting system based on chequebooks.<sup>26</sup> The *shirkat* continues to provide tractors, fertilizer and irrigation services, leaving the manual work to the leaseholders. However, leaseholders are held accountable for meeting the production targets specified in their contracts. Interviews with leaseholders reveal puzzlement, confusion and anger on the part of both brigade chiefs and members of their leaseholders' group.

*Oyashahon: I am a team leader, and there are four more women in my team. I have a chequebook for five hectares shared out among us. I have a share of one hectare. They did not make up a contract because they gave shares and cheques in spring, but later they took the cheques back. The shirkat has to fertilize, irrigate and provide tractors for five hectares of land. Up to now, they only fertilized once and the tractor worked three times. We look after cotton like our baby, everyday we go to the field. This is not just. They have not yet explained many things to us: what is a share, how to use the chequebook? Many people do not trust these shares and cheques. We should get dividends for our shares, but at the moment nobody knows about this. The shirkat gave me one kilogram of butter, two kilograms of rice, five kilograms of pasta and 100 kilograms of wheat for my work.*

*Kizlarkhon: On a one-hectare field, I grow cotton, do the weeding, do the thinning and pick cotton. If I do not fulfil the plan, I have to pay for it. Since the spring they have not paid our wages. Instead of my wage they gave me one kilogram of butter, two kilograms of rice, five kilograms of pasta and 100 kilograms of wheat.*

*Zamirakhon: Since the spring I have done the weeding, sown cotton and cleaned away the pellicles. But on the shirkat's side, they have fertilized once and watered twice. If I do not fulfil the plan, I have to pay. Is it fair? The leadership of the shirkat does not value the work of kolkhoz workers.*

*Roziyakhon: I did not sign a contract with anybody. Thus I was not given any share either. I work on one hectare of the land of the team leader. Since the spring I only received one kilogram of butter, two kilograms of rice, 100 kilograms of wheat and five kilograms of pasta. None of us gets any salary. I have done everything in the same way as Kizlarkhon and Zamira.*

*Khadicha: The shirkat sows, provides machinery and fertilizers. But I do not have a contract. I did not receive any money to date. The shirkat gave me one kilogram butter, five kilograms pasta, two kilograms rice and 100 kilograms wheat.*

The chequebook system is based on the principle that the brigade chief will be able to remunerate the workers by paying them salaries. In fact, not only do leaseholders receive negligible in-kind payments, but they also claim that the *shirkat* provides them with inadequate inputs and services and then penalizes them for not meeting their production targets. This is a cause for great bitterness, aggravated by a context of growing polarization in access to land, as will be shown below.

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<sup>26</sup> As should be evident from the discussion of Ok Bugday, enterprise managers have a certain degree of latitude in how they implement the new accounting system. What was clear from interviews in both Khorezm and Andijan is that a high degree of confusion exists on how the chequebook system is supposed to work. This is because the chequebook system is based on simplified definitions of costs (mainly inputs) and profits (money paid for crops), by-passing the complicated nexus of non-monetized exchanges between farm managers and leaseholders.

There have been significant changes in cropping patterns in Eski Kishlak. The drive for self-sufficiency in grain since independence has meant that part of the acreage previously allocated to feed crops and cotton is now planted to wheat. Until five years ago, there was hardly any wheat cultivation in Eski Kishlak. In 1997, *shirkat* land was allocated to the following crops: cotton (1,429 hectares), wheat (429 hectares), rice (10 hectares) orchards (eight hectares) and other crops (90 hectares).<sup>27</sup> By 2000, this balance had changed in favour of wheat (1,050 hectares), with more than a doubling of acreage in the space of three years, with cotton coming second (816 hectares). In 1997 there were 20 independent farms with one-year leasehold contracts with the *shirkat*, and three with 10-year contracts. Three years later, there are 32 independent farms cultivating 183 hectares of land.

These shifts in cropping patterns have had a more profound impact on patterns of land tenure and labour deployment than farm restructuring per se. In 1997, the labour of *shirkat* households was mainly allocated to two types of plots: cotton plots cultivated by family leaseholders and *tamorka* land where a local variety of rice, *devzire*, constituted the mainstay of the domestic economy, supplemented by vegetables (Kandiyoti 1998). Instances of leasing additional plots from the *shirkat* were relatively rare, involving mainly plots on non-irrigated hilly land (*adyr*) or plots for vegetables.

The shift to wheat has stimulated a competitive land lease market. Unlike cotton, wheat makes it possible to plant other crops after the harvest in June. Those who can afford it have started leasing land from the *shirkat* at competitive prices to grow rice after the wheat harvest.<sup>28</sup> There has also been a shift from *devzire* to *ak shali* (white rice), which has much higher yields (of 80 centners per hectares, almost double that of *devzire*) and fetches a similar price. Whereas previously *devzire* rice was planted in early spring, now a second crop of white rice is planted after the wheat harvest in July. This crop is ready for harvest in September. The fact that the rice harvest coincides with the cotton-picking season does not appear to create labour bottlenecks because of the high number of unemployed. In 1997, there were already some signs that unemployed women were coming together in teams of *mardigor* offering their services mainly on paddy fields. Although many people still harvest their own rice, those who have larger plots and all independent farmers increasingly employ *mardigors*.

There is thus a visible increase in the supply of casual agricultural labour in Eski Kishlak both as a result of growing unemployment and of changing cropping patterns, which have produced a substantial increase in labour intensive operations. There is also a gendered division of labour among casual workers; teams of men equipped with scythes (*orakchi*) work at the rice harvest, whereas teams of women work at weeding. Men receive six kilograms of rice per *sotik* (one-hundredth of an acre) harvested (amounting to a minimum of 1,500 sums per day), whereas women's daily wage is less than half, at about 700 sums. This means, in effect, that a family

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<sup>27</sup> These data were obtained from earlier fieldwork in 1997-1998 (see Kandiyoti 1999b).

<sup>28</sup> It would be fair to say that there is a type of informal market in land, allocations going to the highest or best-connected bidder. The result is that enterprise managers are more likely to use their decision-making powers to enter into lucrative deals with better-off leaseholders. There is little question that this infringes upon the entitlements to land of rank and file members of the collective. As might be expected, these transactions are extremely hard to document, although some villagers complain vocally about the results.

leaseholder has an interest in letting the women of his household get on with the cotton harvest for the *shirkat* while he hires himself out as an *orakchi* at higher rates of pay. Whether a household can release its female members to work as *mardigor* or not depends on a number of factors among which the age-gender composition of the household (which determines the intensity of domestic and child care duties), alternative earning possibilities and labour obligations to *shirkat* and *tamorka* plots. To the extent that both avenues for alternative earnings and access to additional plots have been decreasing, new pressures are created to find earnings in casual work in agriculture. Some women have organized themselves into teams seeking casual work on different crops practically year round, as the example below illustrates.

Mavluda, 35, is the head of a team of women *mardigors*. She started four years ago with a team of six women, which has now grown to 10. Of these, five are married and five are single. There are two teachers, four *shirkat* workers, one student, one unemployed widow and an unemployed married woman. Eight of these are neighbours who were born in the same *mahalla* (neighbourhood). Two are from another *mahalla*. Mavluda explains the conditions of their work in the following interview.

Interviewer: *Where do you work?*

Mavluda: *We go to Kurgantepe 10 kilometres away, where we have an old client. In Eski Kishlak the daily wage is 600 sum. We get 800 sum in Kurgantepe, but it comes to the same thing because we pay about 200 for transport. We have a month's work there because the white rice ripens before the devzire rice and we work on both. Of course, we only work for larger farmers. For example, one of the farmers we work for has five hectares of land and he grows wheat, rice and looks after livestock. There are more people now with more than two hectares of land. Before they used to plant vegetables, but now they grow rice.*

Interviewer: *Who are these people?*

Mavluda: *Oh, I don't know.*

Interviewer: *Do you find work year round?*

Mavluda: *Almost. Now in June we work in rice. In July it will be time for the onion harvest. From August to November we pick cotton. For three months—between December and March—there is no work. In March cotton planting starts. In April and May we work at yagona [weeding] in cotton. Of course, the best money is for rice, but it's unhealthy work. You get rheumatism, and there are bugs down there.*

Interviewer: *Don't you harvest the rice?*

Mavluda: *No, teams of men mardigor (orakchi) do the harvesting with scythes.*

Interviewer: *How much do they get paid?*

Mavluda: *They receive six kilograms of rice per sotka harvested. So they get more than us. We get about 700 sums per day.*

Aside from highlighting wage disparities between male and female casual labourers, Mavluda's account also points to a gradual process of polarization and growing inequality in access to land in Eski Kishlak. Those who have capital are in a position to lease land for cash, thus enlarging their holdings at the expense of claimants from among rank and file *kolkhoz* workers. It is therefore not simply a question of population pressure on land (which undoubtedly exists) but also the fact that access is now taking place in the highly commodified context of a new land lease market. By way of contrast to the present situation, we may take the example of a woman who had leased a piece of land after the wheat harvest in 1997. She harvested a crop of 4 tonnes of carrots, of which she gave the *kolkhoz* one tonne in payment. This was a sharecropping arrangement that she could honour without a significant outlay of capital (although she paid for tractor hire and for fertilizer). This is not easily achievable nowadays and is the cause for bitter commentary on the part of Oyashkhon and her team who speak of broken promises and unfair dealings.

Interviewer: *After the wheat harvest, did the shirkat distribute land for cultivation?*

Kizlarkhon: *They gave us 10 sotka of land. I planted sunflowers. I paid 1,000 sums for a tractor. Irrigation was up to us. The shirkat had promised to give each of us 10 sotka of land after having the wheat harvest. They had also promised to give us machinery, but they did not.*

Zamirakhon: *We also were given 10 sotka of bad land. They sell good land. They did not give it to us for free either. They took that money out from our wages.*

Roziyakhon: *I like being a dekhan. If there were land, I would work. They gave the land to those who have money. We are in a poor situation now. I have 10 sotka of land on which I planted sunflower and sweet corn.*

Khadicha: *We also planted sunflower and sweet corn. We did everything ourselves.*

Oyashahon: *I also got 10 sotka and planted sunflower and sweet corn. They were supposed to give us 10 sotka more for growing carrots, but they have not yet given us anything. I asked for good land, but the manager evades me. Dekhans want to work, but the leadership does not create necessary conditions for work.*

To understand the sense of grievance expressed by these women, it is important to remember the terms of the social contract between collective farm managers and their workforce. Work on cotton plots for the collective has long been regarded as a form of corvée labour, which never paid a living wage, and even less so since the financial collapse of the collective farming sector. However, *kolkhoz* workers were given various forms of usufruct rights to common land and to personal plots in compensation for their collective labour obligations. There was also an expectation of receiving some assistance with inputs such as tractors and fertilizer for the cultivation of personal plots. Before the expansion of wheat cultivation in Eski Kishlak the amount of common land that could be redistributed for personal use was severely limited since the cotton crop cycle does not allow replanting after harvest. Additional household land consisted of house plots, *tamorka* land and leased non-irrigated land. With the increased acreage

of wheat, the quantity of common land that can be reallocated to household use has, in fact, increased in absolute terms. The *shirkat* workers who receive no remuneration (except for a limited quantity of foodstuffs) feel they are entitled to a share of that land and feel extremely bitter about being fobbed off with tiny parcels of bad land while wealthier villagers are able to help themselves to choice parcels for ready cash. This is a context, therefore, where the combination of high population pressure, loss of non-agricultural employment, changes in cropping patterns and rapid commodification of land have eroded the social contract between farm managers and their workforce. Although increasing out-migration to Tashkent and to other regions may take some of the pressure off, as do processes of diversification into alternative off-farm and non-farm activities, to which we shall return later, there is little doubt that Eski Kishlak represents a new pattern of polarization in access to land.

### **3.2. Liquidating the collective: The Yengi Kishlak Farmers' Association**

Nine collective farms in Khorezm in different districts of the province, in deeper deficit than the others, were declared bankrupt in 1999. Whereas accession to the status of independent farmer had so far been made on a voluntary basis and by individual petition, the members of these collectives had no choice; they were "privatized" as a means of liquidating unprofitable and debt-ridden enterprises (by Special Decree No. 243). Only one of those enterprises was able to clear off all its debts by selling its assets. The other farmers started out with some debt inherited from their former collectives.

One of these former *kolkhoz* is now renamed the Yengi Kishlak Farmers' Association (*farmer birlashmasi*). It is in the district of Dortkishlak with a total population of 7,600 people. In Yengi Kishlak itself there are 781 households and a population of 4,558 of which 2,308 are women. Of these, 525 work outside the collective in services and industry. The nearest market is nine kilometres away, and they have a bus service four times a day. There are three schools, one kindergarten, one vocational school, one hospital and three libraries. There are some additional workplaces in the district: four private shops, a silk factory, 10 wheat and three rice mills, three motor repair workshops, a refrigeration plant, a gas factory and a petroleum station.

After 1991, all the households in Yengi Kishlak benefited from the allocation of an additional 12 *sotka* of *tamorka* land. The first independent farmers also started to appear in line with the new legislation; one in 1995 was followed by 14 more in 1996. When the Yengi Kishlak *kolkhoz* was declared bankrupt in 1999, a liquidation committee was set up by the district *hokimiyat*. This committee sold all the assets of the collective to pay off its debts totalling 130 million sums, which were taken over by former members of the collective who became the new farmers. These debts were owed to the providers of various inputs, such as MTPs, the state petroleum company and agrochemical firms, and amounted roughly to 50,000 sums per hectare in debt arrears for each farmer with five years to repay the debt.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The head of the Dekhan and Farmers' Association mentioned on this point that the most profitable crop is rice and that one hectare of paddy yields about 6 tonnes of rice, which would fetch about 800,000 sums. This was provided as an indication that the amount involved was not an excessive debt burden for the farmers.

The land of the collective was made available to prospective farmers by advertisement, and 153 people applied. An examination was organized by a committee of 14 experts, headed by the deputy governor of the province (in line with the provisions of the 1998 law), as a result of which 53 new farms were created. As of 2000, there were a total of 65 farms; one was a livestock farm, 11 were fruit farms on orchard land and 56 were mixed cotton and grain (rice and wheat) farms. Only one among those selected was a woman farmer, whose case will be examined in greater detail below.

The existing demarcations of land lots were kept intact. The land parcels were allocated to prospective farmers by lottery. One of the women interviewed described the process as follows: *"The head of the collective put all our names in his doppa (hat), and every time a land lot was called out he dipped into his hat to draw out a name. Otherwise, you see, there would have been terrible fights since all the plots are not of the same size or quality"*. Indeed, the parcels range from a maximum of 97.7 hectares to one hectare. Moreover, the enterprises designated as "farms" are not homogenous entities. They range from single household operations (as in the case of 11 households that cultivate orchards) to groups of family leaseholders cultivating the same parcel. On larger tracts of cotton and rice land there may be anything up to 15 or more family leaseholders, an important point which will be discussed later.

Whereas previously independent farmers were allocated land by applying to the collective farm and seeking approval of its General Meeting, these new farmers had their allocations directly ratified by the Land Registry. In principle, they have leases ranging between a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 50 years.<sup>30</sup> Each year a new contract is transacted between the farmers and the district branches of government-controlled product processing associations: the cotton factory and the grain products organization. They have state orders (*goszakaz*) for different crops and have to deliver 50 per cent of their wheat and rice and 100 per cent of the cotton. They may receive credit at a discretionary rate of 15 per cent and have a tax holiday for two years.

Before the break-up of the collective, *kolkhoz* land was cultivated by 550 family leaseholds. The management entered into contracts with the various buyers and providers of inputs on behalf of the whole enterprise. Now that each farmer transacts his/her own contract directly with input providers and with the buyers of crops, they also receive their production advances directly from the buyers, in accordance to the terms of their contracts. The head of the Association, a new appointee who until recently was the head of the district water department, sees his role primarily as providing a support service. He helps farmers to draw up their contracts and to obtain timely inputs, seed and fertilizer in particular.

The former family leaseholders are still working on the same land. The new farmers have to draw up yearly work contracts (*mihnai shartnamesi*) with them, undertaking to pay a monthly salary for their work depending on the acreage that they cultivate. In principle, the farmers

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<sup>30</sup> However some respondents reported shorter leases. If after two years the farms fail to keep to the terms of their contract, their leases may be revoked and the land reallocated, which points to a probationary period in this instance.

have the legal right not to renew these contracts. However, the prospect of evicting fellow members of the collective who have cultivated the same family leaseholds for a long time must, at present, be difficult to even contemplate. There is some anecdotal evidence about people “changing places” to be with their relatives and of new farmers inviting members of their wider kin group to work on their farms. It is too early yet to draw any inferences from such information. However, a reconfiguration of the existing workforce seems inevitable in response to new pressures.

Some of the tensions inherent in this process of transformation may be best understood with reference to concrete cases. Munavvar Hodjaeva is the only new woman farmer in Yengi Kishlak Farmers’ Association. She is an attractive 37-year-old mother of two children, who is an agronomist by training. She studied at the Tashkent Agrarian Institute and specialized as an entomologist. Her husband is a tractor driver. She used to work for the collective as an agronomist and received a salary of 6,000 sums per month. However, she lost her job when the collective was liquidated and applied to become a farmer. She was allocated 26 hectares of land on which six families worked as leaseholders. Thirteen hectares of this land is planted to cotton and 12.5 hectares to rice.

At first sight, the appearance of a relatively young woman among the ranks of the new independent farmers was unexpected. In those instances where rural women are found in decision-making roles, there is often a bias toward older, post-menopausal women with married children and daughters-in-law. However, this apparent anomaly disappeared upon closer scrutiny of the profiles of those who were selected as farmers out of the total pool of applicants at Yengi Kishlak.

Sixty-two per cent of those who were allocated land parcels are members of the technical/administrative cadres of the former collective, with only 38 per cent rank and file *kolkhoz* workers whose primary occupation is agriculture. The following table lists the occupational breakdown of the new farmers.

**Table 3: The occupational breakdown of new farmers**

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Kolkhoz worker	25	38.5
Bookkeeper	13	20.0
Engineer/mechanic	9	14.0
Teacher	6	9.0
Agronomist	4	6.0
Water engineer/technician	3	5.0
Legal expert	2	3.0
Construction technician	1	1.5
Librarian	1	1.5
Veterinarian	1	1.5
Total	65	100.0

In keeping with this profile, 32 per cent of the farmers have university-level education, 29 per cent technical/vocational education and 38 per cent only middle school education. This amounts to a high proportion of farmers (61 per cent) with tertiary-level schooling.

Interviews with various provincial and district-level administrators concerning the rationale for “examinations” in the selection of farmers consistently stressed the technical nature of the job and the requirement of appropriate professional skills. Depictions of ordinary members of collectives as “ignorant” and likely to fail as farmers were conveyed through the following expressions: “*hesap kitap bilmiydiler*” (they don’t know how to keep accounts), “you have to know *when* and *how much* fertilizer to use” or “*bu ishe havas etmek yetmiydi*” (it’s not enough to be keen). Whether the system of production under collective management, where all farming decisions were top-down, has indeed deskilled *kolkhoz* workers as potential farmers or not is a moot point. What is relevant here is that entitlement to land is unambiguously presented as a technocratic prerogative.

My initial interpretation of this administrative discourse was that it represented an attempt to underscore the meritocratic basis of the decisions taken, presenting them as devoid of favouritism or preferential treatment. The data from Yengi Kishlak suggests that more pressing concerns may also be at work. The redeployment of former technical cadres made redundant by the break-up of the collective clearly constitutes a top priority. It must also be recognized that these cadres possess “social capital” accrued from their experience with collective farming; their ability to enter into transactions with input providers and marketing boards in their own right is higher than that of rank and file members of the collective.

It is as a member of this stratum, as a trained agronomist, that Munavvar Hodjaeva finds herself among the ranks of the new farmers. Needless to say, this type of recruitment has a built-in gender bias. Very few women occupy administrative and technical positions in collective enterprises. They are mainly concentrated in unskilled agricultural work or in social sector jobs in health and education. It is interesting to note that in Yengi Kishlak the teachers who have been allocated land are all men, who represent a minority in the profession.

It would be highly pertinent to compare the profiles of independent farmers who applied for land allocations on an individual, voluntary basis with the “new” farmers of liquidated enterprises. Although no systematic data exist on this subject, it is possible to suggest that the “early” farmers were individuals in a position to initiate and carry through the complicated bureaucratic steps involved in receiving an allocation. This required, among other things, adequate knowledge of the application procedures and good relations with district authorities who have the final say. Not surprisingly, members of collective farms who are in higher administrative echelons are best placed to clear the necessary hurdles. Paradoxically, the fact that many aspiring farmers were still in employment as managerial or technical cadres may inadvertently have increased the number of “registered” women farmers. Since only “full-time” farmers are legally entitled to receive land, men holding such posts resorted to registering their wives as the titular head of their farming enterprise.<sup>31</sup> The redundant cadres of Yengi Kishlak had no choice, however, but to register themselves as farmers or seek an exit option by finding work elsewhere. What must be retained from this analysis is that the number of registered women farmers not only provides a very imperfect guide to women’s land entitlements, but also offers very little insight into the **actual** mechanisms that lead women to become the titular heads of farms.

The exit option is unavailable to the majority of technical cadres in Yengi Kishlak in a context of deepening unemployment where agricultural enterprises are shedding employees. The farming option, on the other hand, brings with it new problems and dilemmas which are well illustrated by the case of Munavvar Hodjaeva.

The 26 hectares of land Munavvar was allocated already had six family leaseholders working on it. They each cultivate the same mix of crops: 2.5 hectares of cotton and two hectares of paddy, with one family also raising silkworm. All the families, including her own, retain their *tamorka* plots. Most *tamorka* are planted with wheat and vegetables on a double-cropping basis.

These “sitting tenants” now have to be incorporated into Munavvar’s farm as workers. She signed work contracts with six individuals who are the heads of their family leaseholds. Only those individuals are entitled to receive a salary, although she acknowledges that they actually work as entire families, with at least three or four people contributing to production. They also help each other out. If one family is working on rice and is free during the cotton harvest, they help those working on cotton. At the peak of harvest they may also employ *mardigors*, who only get daily wages. The permanent workers who have contracts with her are meant to receive 2,000 sums per month for one hectare of cotton or rice land cultivated.

Asked whether she had any difficulty keeping up with these payments, she acknowledged she had encountered serious problems. Although she had received her first tranche of advances for

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<sup>31</sup> One farm in a village in Andijan province was registered in the name of a young daughter-in-law who was at home with her under-age children since she was the only one eligible in her household for this purpose. Administrators freely acknowledged the “cosmetic” nature of the choice of women as heads of independent farms in most instances.

cotton and for silkworm, the money had not been sufficient. She had to use her own resources by selling her animals and the produce of her *tamorka*.

Questions concerning the economic feasibility of her enterprise elicited considerable unease, as is evident from the extract below.

Interviewer: *If you had to sell animals and the proceeds of your tamorka to pay wages might it not have been more profitable to buy machinery on credit and only hire daily labourers when you needed them?*

Munavvar (laughs uncomfortably): *Oh, I don't know. Maybe...Maybe this is what will happen in the future.*

Interviewer: *Which job do you prefer? Being a farmer or your former job?*

Munavvar: *Of course I prefer my own job. But I was left without work and had to do something.*

Similar sentiments were echoed by other respondents in the course of open-ended group discussions. Zarifa, who is 49 years old and the mother of eight children, is married to a former brigade chief who opted to become a farmer. This is how she describes her experience of this change:

*My husband became a farmer a year ago and we now have 37 hectares of land, of which 27 hectares is planted to cotton and 10 hectares is paddy. On this land, my own family is responsible for four hectares of cotton and one hectare of paddy, and the rest is distributed among the other families. My husband was pensioned off sick. My son is the organizer of the farm. He hires the tractors and finds the fertilizer. But my husband manages the budget. There were 14 families working as leaseholders on this land. They now have mihnāt shartnamesi with us. Someone looking after two hectares of land gets 3,500 sums. My husband, who is a farmer, doesn't get a salary. But I am registered as a worker and have the right to a salary. Most of the pudratchi are women.*

Interviewer: *How did you start the farm?*

Zarifa: *We sold 88,000 sums worth of animals. You see, we were dreaming of a plot of 4-5 hectares. Instead a plot of 37 hectares fell on our karta [land parcel shown on village map]!*

Although it may seem unusual that anyone should bemoan receiving a large parcel of land, the conditions under which these allocations were made make this reaction quite understandable. Although the land now belongs to individual farmers on long leases, the conditions under which production decisions are made have not changed. The farmers are still tied into the unprofitable procurement system. Aside from meeting the terms of their delivery contracts, the independent farmers now have the additional burdens of having to pay their own workforce and remaining solvent. This means, in effect, that both the social costs of production and the risks involved are passed on to them. In a relatively short period many may face the dilemma of having to evict most of their workforce or face bankruptcy. Setting up as farmers has meant, in many cases, having to dig into private household reserves by selling animals or using *tamorka*

crops to capitalize their enterprise. Since they do not have the option of diversifying into more profitable crops, they can only attempt to cut their costs.

The gradual phasing out of an overblown and unproductive rural workforce is a stated government objective, accompanied with the parallel promise of the growth of rural industry and services that will absorb excess labour. However, the currently depressed state of the agricultural sector discourages the growth of services and industry, creating a vicious cycle of growing unemployment and poverty. Under these conditions, land reform of the type represented by Yengi Kishlak can become a disempowering experience, hence the reticence of many new farmers. They are, in fact, managers with severely limited rights to ownership or control.

Those who appear to do somewhat better are not the new farmers, who are in the position of managers working under numerous constraints, but those who are able to lease land against cash payments to grow crops that are not subject to procurement quotas. This is the case of Djumagul, who is 52 years old and the mother of 10 children. She worked in Yengi Kishlak collective for 37 years and is now a pensioner. Her husband used to be a dispatcher for the *kolkhoz*. She was widowed in 1992. She now lives with her married son, his wife, her three unmarried children and two grandchildren.

Djumagul sold their animals and leased an apricot orchard of 0.40 hectares for 200,000 sums. They also leased two hectares of land to grow melons and watermelons, for which they had to pay 300,000 sums for one year. They have to pay tax for land and water and will only be liable to tax on their profit after two years.

There were 58 hectares left over from the 1,527 hectares of land distributed to 65 farmers. Of these, 16 hectares were allocated as *tamorka* plots, and 42 hectares were kept in reserve for future construction projects. This land was leased out on an *arenda* basis against payment of a fixed amount per hectare. There are 45 leaseholds of this type. Apart from having to pay tax, these leaseholders are not obliged to grow crops that are subject to procurement quotas and can sell their produce at market prices. However, the ability to lease land in this fashion implies that a household has either enough spare cash or sufficient animals for sale to finance such a venture. It also means that the household has a large enough workforce to take care of the land.

*Djumagul: I have three sons and put this lease in the name of the youngest one, who is unemployed. We grow apricots and sell them at the nearby market. Some of the harvest is dried (the ones that are full and fleshy), and the rest are sold fresh. We are three or four people working: myself, my daughter-in-law, my younger children... I also call in relatives and neighbours to help. I go to the bazaar myself. Sometimes my daughter-in-law does. In any case I keep the family money. We also have a tamorka of 25 sotka. We get about one tonne of wheat from it which leaves us 700 kilograms of flour. This is enough for us for about three months. I bake bread once a week.*

Interviewer: *Where do you find the inputs for your tamorka?*

Djumagul: *I use dung from my animals as fertilizer. But we have to buy fertilizer in any case for all our other land. There is a fertilizer shop in Urgench city and my son bought 300 kilograms, although I am not sure how much he paid for it. We also rent a tractor from MTP for ploughing—we hired one in January. But to tell you the truth I don't know whether my son paid cash or whether he will pay from his profit.*

With a *tamorka* of 0.25 hectares, an apricot orchard and two hectares planted to watermelons and inputs secured through direct cash payments, Djumagul seemed relatively better off than farmers with much larger plots tied into the state procurement system. With her pension and contributions from other members of her household, it was clear that she considered herself relatively affluent.

For the majority at Yengi Kishlak, however, who worked as family leaseholders with the former collective enterprise, the shape of the future is unclear. For many, it seems business as usual and they do not yet have any clear notion of what has changed. Hudabergen, who is 53 years old and a former *pudratchi*, talks about her family.

Hudabergen: *I have seven children, five daughters and two sons. My husband is 56 and works as the night watchman at the kindergarten. We are altogether 12 people living in the same household; my two married sons, their wives and children and my two unmarried daughters. I was a pudratchi, but I am a pensioner now. I am responsible for our tamorka where we grow wheat. I have 12 sotka. I also plant six sotka for vegetables myself. I have four cows and use their droppings as fertilizer. My son works for a farmer and is responsible for one hectare of cotton land and we all help. The farmer provides the fertilizer. Now is the time for watering. My two daughters and two daughters-in-law harvest this one hectare of cotton. The younger ones do this work. I take care of their children. In any case, we put them in the kindergarten in the busy season. They charge 600 sums per child each month but since their grandfather works there, they give him this benefit as part of his wage.*

Interviewer: *What is the difference in your view between the family leases you had before and working in the independent farms you have now?*

Hudabergen: *I don't know really. One of my sons is a worker in the livestock farm, the other works as a cotton worker for a farmer. I can't tell the difference.*

The “farmerization” policy in Yengi Kishlak has created a new stratum of leaseholders, with a new juridical status, transforming former members of the collective with no leasehold titles or rights into the new farmers’ workers or sharecroppers. The occupational profile of the new farmers suggests that the majority is drawn from the now redundant administrative and technical cadres of the former collective. Not surprisingly, there is only one woman—an agronomist—among them.

Given that the new farmers are still bound by the same procurement obligations as the former collective, the profitability of their enterprises must be in doubt. Indeed, land may be seen as a liability rather than an asset in the context of their current obligations: to meet crop

procurement quotas on the one hand and to keep on former leaseholders on the other. In time, growing strains may develop with respect to keeping on this workforce.

At the moment, neither the new farmers nor their labourers seem able to project themselves into the future. It would be necessary to follow the trajectory of these new farms for at least two agricultural seasons to form a clearer understanding of what the implications of this pathway might be. For many enterprises that underwent sanation, reverting to co-operative management will be the reward of debt repayment and shedding extra assets and employees. This option no longer seems available to Yengi Kishlak, although it would undoubtedly have been preferred by the majority. What seems apparent, however, is that the creation of different categories of **men** with formally different juridical rights creates a great deal of unease, whereas the blanket definition of **women** as unpaid family workers seems to be accepted unquestioningly by most respondents. The likely marginalization of former family leaseholders in the process of liquidating collective enterprises will intensify the search for alternative livelihoods among rural women. It is to a discussion of these alternatives, and the obstacles in women's way, that section four is devoted.

## **4. Gender and Rural Livelihoods: Obstacles and Alternatives**

### ***4.1 The paradoxes of gender in Soviet Uzbekistan***

Rural livelihoods depend not only on the resource base of different localities but also on the age and gender composition of households and intrahousehold divisions of labour. These have important implications for domestic burdens, the distribution of production tasks, pooling and sharing arrangements, and budget control. Moreover, these arrangements are fluid and responsive to both lifecycle events and changing economic circumstances.

Intrahousehold gender relations are highly variable, culturally embedded and not amenable to easy generalizations. In the case of the former Soviet Union, several paradoxes of Soviet policies—especially among non-European nationalities—have been noted. Despite the uniformity of the economic and legal changes imposed on Soviet rural life, especially the rigid limits set on productive property allowed to each household, the organization of the domestic domain remained highly specific to different localities and reflective of local conceptions of kinship (Humphrey 1983). This was also the case in Uzbekistan, despite the fact that the emancipation of women was a major item of Soviet ideology and practice in Central Asia (Alimova 1991, 1997; Kemp 1998; Massell 1964; Tokhtahodjaeva 1995). The norm of small, egalitarian families was being promoted by Soviet modernizers while ethnographers of Central Asia (such as Poliakov 1992 and Snesev 1974) were documenting the persistence of large, patriarchal families, the marriage of underage girls and the payment of brideprice (*kalym*).

Despite the much-vaunted labour force participation rates of women under socialism, Lubin (1981) estimated that for Uzbekistan in the 1970s, the majority of those working outside social production (around 12–15 per cent of the able-bodied population) were women and that those working in the industrial and service sectors were mainly involved in manual and lower-skilled

jobs. Even in the medical field, where women constituted more than three-quarters of medical personnel, they tended to be concentrated in the lower rungs of the profession. Furthermore, Lubin suggested that these patterns persisted despite efforts to draw women into social production and training programmes, indicating a preference for occupations that were optimally suited to fit in with domestic chores and routines by providing shorter hours, longer holidays and easier access to consumer goods that were in limited supply.

Demographic data on fertility may help to clarify these labour force participation preferences. In a comparative survey of women's employment and fertility patterns undertaken almost two decades ago by the International Labour Organization, one of the editors of the volume felt it necessary to devote a separate paragraph to the case of Uzbekistan (Anker 1985). This was because it was the only country among those surveyed (which included Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Cuba) where the education-fertility connection did not seem to hold. In other words, women had educational attainment levels similar to the industrialized socialist countries with birth rates more comparable to those of developing countries of the South.

The pro-natalist policies of the Soviet Union resulted in the award of a large number of Glory of Motherhood and Heroine Mother medals to Central Asian women. It was not until the debates preceding the 1981 Family Policy Law that concerns about regional disparities in population growth started being openly expressed (Feschach 1986; Weber and Goodman 1981). Although the policies adopted did not involve any direct attempt to curb population growth in high fertility areas (but rather to offer incentives for larger families in low fertility regions), the issue of population control was finally put on the agenda in Central Asia. Indeed, around the time of *glasnost*, the question of family planning emerged as an emotionally charged and highly politicized issue (Watters 1990). The anti-family-planning platform, articulated in the press, was associated with nationalist sentiments presenting large families and the maternal roles of women as items of cultural distinctiveness and integrity. This position was countered with arguments about the detrimental effects of frequent births on women's health and the importance of maternal well-being for the rearing of a healthy new generation. These debates took place against the background of a more general reappraisal of the Soviet legacy and the emergence of revisionist approaches to women's forced emancipation in Central Asia, challenging the conventional wisdom regarding its presumed benefits. What escaped notice, however, was the degree of "fit" between the Uzbek cultural ideal of large families and the Soviet pro-natalist and welfarist policies that reduced the cost of additional children, especially for rural families.

I argued elsewhere (Kandiyoti 1996) that these so-called "survivals" of tradition noted by Soviet ethnographers were, in fact, bolstered by the Soviet command economy, which restricted labour mobility and, together with the policies referred to above, inadvertently reinforced the preference for large families. It is too early to predict the effects of market reforms on domestic organization in Uzbekistan. Declines in fertility rates are being noted, especially since 1995. However, the ultimate paradox may reside in the fact the Soviet system, despite its discourse of

radical break from the past, may have given some patriarchal and communal relations a longer lease of life, while the post-Communist state, despite its much-heralded return to “indigenous” values, may preside over the transformation and dismantlement of communal life. This must be partly evident from our earlier discussion illustrating how the paternalistic social contract between collective farm managers and their employees is coming under increasing strain in the process of farm restructuring, or being dissolved altogether with the liquidation of such enterprises.

This does not necessarily imply, however, that the hold of patriarchal families over women will thereby be weakened. On the contrary, there is ample evidence of narrowing life options and tightening family controls. A woman who has lost her earnings as a professional, such as Intizar (see section 4.5), falls on the mercies of her husband’s parents for access to cultivable plots. Forced cohabitation with in-laws is the lot of many young married couples who are unable to get a house plot or the finances to set up house separately. The recourse that women might have had to arbitration mechanisms to press their rights (through local women’s committees) may be on the wane. A powerful alternative discourse, which takes Islamic law as its point of reference, is in the making, and is being reflected in women’s changing expectations of marriage, divorce and polygamy, which are explored in greater detail below (see section 4.8). Ilkhamov (1998) suggests that the fact the rural economy of Uzbekistan is being increasingly reduced to a subsistence-based household economy is leading to a revival of patriarchal values. Although it may be premature to draw such conclusions, the fact that many rural households only have their family labour to fall back on does reinforce intrahousehold age/gender hierarchies.

#### **4.2 Domestic economy and household structure in rural Uzbekistan**

In many respects, family structure and the domestic cycle in rural Uzbekistan present significant similarities to patterns in the Middle East, and South and East Asia, where post-marital residence is virilocal, descent is traced through the patriline and son preference is a widespread norm. Although the Soviet system effectively restricted possibilities for accumulation and transmission of property, customary law, which recognizes the marital domicile as the property of men, continued to prevail. Widowed women with older children could be found as heads of their own households. However, divorced women and young widows are expected to return to their parental home. Marriages are viewed primarily as alliances between families. They involve elaborate steps, which unfold over a period of several months from matchmaking, the exchange of gifts between in-laws, the preparation of a trousseau for the girl and clothing gifts for the boy, to the wedding feast itself. These conventions are respected regardless of whether a marriage is arranged or based on mutual acquaintance and consent. The expenses involved may absorb substantial amounts of a household’s savings and frequently require assistance from the wider kin group.

Once married, a young couple is ideally provided with a separate dwelling unit, preferably within or near the boy’s father’s courtyard. Being registered as a separate household confers rights to a *chek* and to a *tamorka*. However, these rights are frequently non-enforceable under conditions of land scarcity. Older couples or widowed parents have strong expectations of co-

habitation with at least one of their married male children—usually their youngest son—who inherits their house. In practice, many households diverge from this pattern, either due to the absence of male children, or due to the vagaries of employment and of housing conditions (for instance, some workers in collective enterprises are provided with smaller purpose-built apartments, or *zhil dom*).

In rural households, younger married women with under-age children carry the heaviest burdens, whereas older women with cohabiting daughters-in-law may enjoy greater relative leisure. An earlier study in the provinces of Kashkadarya and Andijan (Kandiyoti 1999b) found clear evidence that it is mainly women in their 40s and 50s who are able to allocate their time to extra-household activities, either because they have grown daughters or because they can rely on daughters-in-law to carry out household chores. Those, for instance, who are involved in trading activities are mainly older women with married children. This is partly, but not exclusively, due to the fact that the mobility and visibility of women, especially in public and male-dominated places such as markets, is much better tolerated at more advanced ages. The levels of participation by older women in communal life, and their tendency to manage or jointly manage the household budgets, was also found to be higher. Some of the most crucial labour relations in rural households are enacted between different generations of women.

However, despite significant similarities with patterns in the wider Muslim world and parts of South and East Asia, there are some distinctive features of rural women's employment in Uzbekistan, which must be noted here. These have to do, on the one hand, with women's high literacy rates, due to an effective system of universal education, and on the other hand, with a developed rural social infrastructure, which provided women with a significant source of salaried jobs and opportunities for non-farm employment. These have been among the main casualties of post-Soviet recession in Uzbekistan.

Currently, a factor that has a decisive impact on the livelihood portfolios of rural households is a favourable dependency ratio with a sufficient number of earners deployed in a range of farm and non-farm activities. Although some studies suggest that the incidence of poverty increases with family size,<sup>32</sup> the crucial determinant appears to be not the size but the composition of the household. Multiple-earner households, particularly when working adults hold sought-after jobs that either pay regular wages or present opportunities for supplementary earnings, can be relatively affluent, as the following example from Eski Kishlak suggests.

*Komilzhon (57) and Sabira (52) live with their two married sons, their wives, two unmarried daughters and four grandchildren. He is a brigadier (head of production team) at the shirkat and although he earns a small wage he has quite a lot of say in decisions concerning the allocation of land. His wife was entitled to an early pension because she has a large family, and receives 2,200 sums per month. Their elder son is a driver for the shirkat for which he earns a nominal 1,000 sums, but he is also able to work privately. His wife, a dressmaker working from home, earns about 1,000 sums per week. Their younger son is a*

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<sup>32</sup> The EUI (European University Institute)/Essex survey in Uzbekistan (EESU) carried out in 1995 and used as a benchmark for poverty assessment found that lower-income households tend to be larger.

*policeman in Kurgantepe and earns 7,000 sums per month. His wife is a teacher currently receiving 1,100 sums maternity benefit. Komilzhon and Sabira's elder daughter works at a kindergarten and earns 1,200 sums per month. Their younger daughter is a receptionist at the Daewoo automobile plant in Asaka and earns 3,000 sums per month.*

In this household of 12, there are seven adults bringing in a wage and one pensioner receiving benefits (although the working daughters, who are of marriageable age, would not be expected live with their parents much longer). Furthermore, the occupations of the men provide considerable scope for additional earnings. They also have a four-*sotka* plot by their house and 12 *sotka* of *tamorka* land where they grow rice for their own use. The relative affluence of this household is attested to by the fact that they own a wide range of consumer goods, including a car, and that their largest expenditure for the previous year consisted of contributions to a relative's wedding, which included the sale of a bull that fetched 49,000 sums. The household head appears to be well integrated in a social network that made it possible to secure desirable jobs for his children. This is a type of configuration which permits the enlargement of land holdings through the lease of extra *shirkat* land. The non-salaried women in the household (pensioned wife and daughters-in-law) constitute a ready pool of family labour that can be supplemented by casual workers during peak times. As a general rule, holders of administrative/managerial positions are better able to secure access to jobs for their children, which in turn helps to further agricultural undertakings such as the purchase of animals or leasing land.

However, this type of "virtuous" diversification is the prerogative of the few. For the vast majority of *shirkat* workers, whose access to both salaries and additional plots has been steadily declining, a process of compulsory diversification into off-farm and non-farm activities is under way. This process may be described as "involutionary" to the extent that it adds new entrants into a pool of informal services that are already in abundant supply.

In the following section, the mechanisms that condition women's entry into agricultural and non-agricultural informal occupations will be considered in some detail.

#### **4.3 Leaseholders, farmers and casual workers: Women in agriculture**

The vast majority of rural women in Uzbekistan are involved in work for *shirkats* as family leaseholders. They combine this work with responsibility for household plots and domestic chores. As will be seen in sections 4.4 and 4.5 below, women in non-farm occupations are also part of a large unpaid agricultural workforce since they have labour obligations to both household plots and *shirkat* plots, especially at peak times. The high cost of inputs such as machines, fertilizer and pesticides leads households to substitute their own labour and less costly inputs wherever possible. Reciprocal harvesting arrangements and labour exchanges without cash payments among neighbours and kin are common. These patterns are quite clearly illustrated in the cases of Sanem, Munavvar and Ziver, all registered as leaseholders in the Ok Bugday *shirkat* in Khorezm.

#### 4.3.1 On women's shoulders: Family leaseholds

Sanem is 50 years old and the mother of seven children. She has been working in Ok Bugday for 32 years and has been a member of a family brigade since 1985. Now she is the head of her family leasehold and the holder of the chequebook. This is not unusual for a woman of her age who has to co-ordinate an almost exclusively female workforce of daughters-in-law and daughters. The male members of her household have alternative employment, putting her in a more advantageous economic position. One of her sons is an engineer, the other works at the cotton bank and her husband was employed at the *raipo* (official shop for the distribution of goods), until he lost his job with the privatization of the shops.

Sanem leases five hectares of cotton land, which she cultivates with her two daughters-in-law. She has cultivated the same plot since 1985. Work in cotton starts in January with the leeching of the fields.<sup>33</sup> The water technicians decide which fields get watered first. This process was completed for her around mid-March and the ploughing and separation of rows for planting finished by 25 March. The ploughing was done by a tractor they hired from the *shirkat* but the sowing, which took place in early April in the year of the study, was done by the women manually "because we are more careful with the seeds". By 11 June the cotton had flowered. By 20 August, the cotton was ready for picking.<sup>34</sup> Sanem rents a combine for the main harvest of her five hectares of cotton land, which points to the relative affluence of her household. However, all the work on the household plot, where they grow vegetables, and on the *tamorka*, which is planted with rice, is done manually.

Sanem says about their 12 *sotka* of paddy; "this plot is for our own benefit" (*kendi menfaatimiz uchun*). Like other workers on family brigades, she sees her work in cotton as an obligation, which brings little profit. The *tamorka* plot is cultivated very intensively; double cropping of wheat and rice is not unusual. Sanem rented a tractor for ploughing but did everything else by hand. The rice was planted in mid-May. Three women (herself and two daughters-in-law) did the job with the help of a few relatives. Then the field was put under water. Twenty-five days after planting, the weeding starts. Pests and worms can start appearing 10–15 days later. Sanem uses ash rather than chemical insecticides for pest control and claims it is just as effective. After 35 days she has to apply fertilizer, which her son buys in a shop.<sup>35</sup>

Munevvar, who is 48 and the mother of five children, is also the head of a family leasehold of 4.5 hectares of cotton and the holder of the chequebook. She has cultivated the same plot since 1985. She works with her daughter-in-law and her two daughters. She acknowledges that more machines were used during the cotton harvest previously, but claims that hand-picked cotton is

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<sup>33</sup> In Khorezm because of the high level of soil salinity, cultivation is impossible before the fields are leached up to three times between January and April.

<sup>34</sup> There are several cotton picking periods as bolls mature at different times. The first harvest, which starts at the bottom of the bush, is the first "sort". This fetches the highest price. There are four sorts between the end of August and November with both the quantity and quality getting lower. Eighty per cent of the cotton is picked during September and is of the best quality.

<sup>35</sup> Those who can afford to pay for their fertilizer in cash can get it more cheaply in the bazaar or from some special shops. However, some family brigades who cannot pay may be given a bit of extra fertilizer for their leasehold to apply to their *tamorka*, the cost being deducted from their labour payment for the year. They therefore receive part of the payment for their work on the *shirkat* plot, in kind, as inputs for their *tamorka* plot.

cleaner and better. She says she picked as much as three tonnes of cotton per week with her two daughters and her daughter-in-law. She relies on her family only, except during peak harvest time when women from other brigades (for instance, those in the rice brigades, who are free at that time) come and pick for them at piece-work rates. Women also frequently enter into labour exchanges and reciprocal harvesting arrangements which lower the costs of production, especially on their *tamorka* plots.

Last year Munavvar received 320 kilograms of cotton oil since she managed to go over her quota. She sold her oil to a wholesaler. She also obtained some animal feed from the pressed cotton seed.<sup>36</sup> Munavvar has a *tamorka* of 12 *sotka* where she has been planting rice for four or five years because it is more profitable. She gets a double crop by planting rice before and after growing wheat. Again, all the work – except for ploughing – is carried out manually by women.

Ziver, who is 38, echoes the others on the question of their self-sufficiency in labour: *“We have enough labour power to do our own work. I have four children, two are still in school but the others have finished. They all help. We do everything by hand on our tamorka.”*

The examples above show how the cotton-export sector is subsidized by a stagnating smallholder economy where women’s labour plays a crucial role. Although the actual extent to which women’s unremunerated labour and non-monetized exchanges between female kin and neighbours contribute to keeping this sector afloat deserves more detailed scrutiny, the data at hand point firmly to this conclusion.

An even more thoroughly feminized sector in terms of labour is that of family leasehold production for the *shirkat*. The percentages of men and women registered as family leaseholders provide an inadequate guide to the simple fact that most workers on family leaseholds, as illustrated by the examples above, are women (regardless of whether the registered lessee is a man or a woman). Only the registered leaseholder is entitled to payment, which these days takes the form of in-kind payment in foodstuffs, but all female family members are expected contribute their labour. This includes women in non-agricultural occupations. As will be seen from the examples below, a daughter or daughter-in-law who is a teacher, a nurse or a factory worker is fully expected to contribute her labour, especially during peak times such as harvest. The extent to which leasehold work rests on women labourers depends on a variety of factors, among them the “livelihood portfolio” of the household as a whole. In cases where men are able to secure salaried positions or jobs in trade, it is women who are primarily responsible for fulfilling their household’s obligations to the *shirkat*. In households consisting of *shirkat* workers only, who are by far the worse off, patterns may be more variable and depend upon the age and gender composition of the household.

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<sup>36</sup> This constitutes one of the few perks of working in cotton. The same applies to other crops. Members of the sugar beet brigades receive sugar when they produce over their quota, and they can sell or barter sugar for other goods.

#### 4.3.2 Agricultural wage work: The growth of the *mardigor*

In Eski Kishlak, where job losses in rural industry and services have pushed more women into the agricultural workforce, being a *mardigorlik* serves as a major source of additional earnings. These may be used to meet survival needs as well as to capitalize smallholder production or other ventures.

Mavluda (discussed in 3.1.2 above) heads a team of ten women *mardigor*. Her husband who is employed by the poultry factory received 15 *sotka* of land as his wage. However, the poultry factory only provides land to those who accept to grow corn as chicken feed for the factory or to provide corn in exchange for the land. Some years ago, they had not been able to obtain that land since they had no money to purchase the corn. Mavluda's earnings as a casual worker have made it possible to make the purchase and secure the plot where they now grow rice. She had already lost her own job as a cleaner in a school and has taken up casual agricultural work on a regular basis.

The motivations and circumstances of women who choose to work as *mardigor* may be quite varied, as interviews with three members of Mavluda's team reveal.

*Gulnora: I am 29 years old and married for four years with one child. I have been working as a mardigor for three years now. I lost my job working in the laundry and drycleaning service in 1997. Then I went to the poultry factory and worked there for six months. But they started firing people there as well, and I lost my job. So I joined a group of friends from my neighbourhood and started to work as a mardigor. I have a big family; there are 12 of us altogether. My parents-in-law are pensioners. Then there is my brother-in-law, his wife and two children, my husband and I with our child and the unmarried brother and sister of my husband. They are all unemployed. We only have some shalpaye in the name of my father-in-law. The men work there. My sister-in-law, who sits at home, does the cooking. The men also work as mardigor in their own team.*

*Nasiba: I am 18 years old and not married yet. I only finished secondary school. Then I started to work as an apprentice with a dressmaker. I trained as a dressmaker for two years. I have been with this team of mardigor for two years. We are seven at home. My mother sits at home but she is a dressmaker. My father works in the shirkat where he has leased 1.5 hectares of cotton land, and he also cultivates melons and watermelons on adyr land. My older brother works in car and tire repairs; he rents a shop for that. Then I have two sisters and a brother younger than me. We have 18 sotka around our house where we plant potatoes, onions and other vegetables. I tried to apply for a job in the towel factory but didn't get it.*

*Rahima: I am 17 years old and have finished class 11. I have been working as a mardigor for two years. I also learned to make dresses. I had a master who trained me for two years. We are 12 in our house. My father is a hektardji (leases 2.5 hectares of cotton land from the shirkat). My mother is a pensioner. My older brother also works in a cotton brigade with his wife. They have two children. My other older brother also works in the kolkhoz. His wife is on maternity leave now. They also have two children. I have another older brother who is single like me. We all work together on the family leasehold. We have 20 sotka around our house but no tamorka. We don't qualify for more plots unless my brothers get separate houses, but they can't do it. We put in a petition asking for cheks three years ago but didn't get them. Nowadays it is very difficult to get a chek so many families like us are staying together because they*

*can't separate. Only the houses of people who migrate (gochup giden) are for sale and they are very expensive. At least half a million sum, if not more.*

Gulnora, Nasiba and Rahima share a common predicament. They live in large households where labour resources far outstrip their access to land and where opportunities for other earnings are limited. They have either lost their jobs (as in the case of Gulnora) or failed to find a job (as in the case of Nasiba). However, Nasiba and Rahima are both trained as dressmakers and use their earnings from casual agricultural work to finance a more lucrative activity, namely sewing school uniforms for children.

*Nasiba: We can collect money that way in order to buy materials to sew school uniforms. For each uniform you get one kilogram of meat.<sup>37</sup> In 10 days of rice work we can get 7,000 sums. With this we can buy material from the bazaar. Let's say that I earned 18,000 sums in one month of this work. I can earn 36,000 sums by selling school uniforms out of that money.*

Asked whether they would prefer to have more money for their dressmaking or more land, they are quite unambiguous; they want land. As will be explained below (section 4.6), there are too many women offering dressmaking services already.

#### 4.3.3 The path of the few: Independent women farmers

While the *shirkat* leasehold and smallholder sectors become more and more reliant on female labour and as the number of women *mardigor* increases, the fledgling sector of "independent" farmers is overwhelmingly managed by men relying on the unpaid labour of family members supplemented by casual workers. Most of the women farmers registered in two provinces investigated turned out, upon closer scrutiny, not to be managers of their enterprise but the titular heads of enterprises that could not be registered in husbands' or sons' names. This occurs when these latter are already in full employment, doing other jobs.<sup>38</sup> There are, however, notable exceptions such as Munavvar Hodjaeva, the only woman farmer in the liquidated Yengi Kishlak *shirkat*, discussed in section 3.2 above.

Women who are farm managers tend to be well-trained individuals with previous managerial experience in the collective farm system. This is the case of Mahbuba Albaeva, a widow who started her enterprise in December 1997. She was trained as an agronomist and was formerly a brigade leader on the Amir Timur *kolkhoz* in Andijan where she worked in cotton for 20 years. She was also a union (*profkom*) representative and the deputy head of the rural administrative unit (*selsovyet*), which means that she was well integrated into the circle of local administrators in her district. She has two children, both in non-agricultural jobs and she does not rely on family labour. Some of the former members of her brigade on the *kolkhoz* now work on her farm. She holds a 50-year lease for 90 hectares of land, where she grows wheat (50 hectares), cotton (35 hectares), maize (five hectares) and rice (two hectares). She also acquired and repaired six old tractors.

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<sup>37</sup> The price of one kilogram of meat is often given as a unit of payment since it is indexed against inflation. So services are pegged to the cost of meat rather than some fixed tariff in sums.

<sup>38</sup> It is a stipulation of the law that independent farmers be engaged in farming full-time.

Although Mahbuba is the head of the farm, she hires the services of a male manager (*ish yurutudju*) whose job is to find fertilizer, draw up the contracts with crop marketing boards and hire mechanics when necessary.<sup>39</sup> She employs a total workforce of 70 people. Of these only 14 have the right to salaries and 56 are seasonal workers; 46 of these are women.

Mahbuba acknowledges that the switch to independent farming resulted in job losses. Whereas the collective farm would have employed about 100–150 people on 90 hectares, she now has a smaller workforce, only 20 per cent of which retain pension rights and other benefits. However, she lets her workers plant vegetables after the wheat harvest, and so far she did not make claims on any of their produce. But she benefited from a tax holiday for two years and fears that when she does start paying tax, she may well move to a sharecropping arrangement. Fertilizer and petrol are her most expensive inputs, and they are getting ever more expensive. Her workers receive payment in kind (from the wheat harvest) and wages of 35 sums per kilogram of cotton picked during harvest.

For wheat cultivation Mahbuba only needs a small labour force (for irrigation and applying fertilizer), so she does not divide the land among sharecroppers. She rents a combine harvester from the MTP instead. Cotton land is divided among the families of workers. The state order for cotton is 100 per cent, but they can have the oil and animal feed from the cotton factory at concessionary rates. They also rent their tractors out in the wintertime to the construction firm of the collective farm for extra earnings.

Mahbuba received 4,600,000 sums credit at 14.4 per cent interest from the Dekhan Farmers' Fund for three years. She paid back one million in seven months. She hopes to expand her animal husbandry operation. At the moment, they only have four cows. She would like to apply for credit for 10 years to acquire more. However, she needs to plant fodder crops and to construct a shed to qualify for this credit.

Women such as Mahbuba are rare. She combines relevant training (in agronomy) with years of managerial experience in the collective farm sector as well as administrative positions in local administration. This equips her with both the know-how and the social capital to take up the challenge of running a profitable enterprise under difficult terms.

In Uzbekistan, the feminization of agricultural labour is a glaring fact, especially in the *shirkat* and smallholder sectors. This tendency, already incipient before the break-up of the Soviet Union, has been aggravated by the dual pressures of demonetization of the economy (making self-subsistence a last refuge) and rapid erosion of non-farm employment possibilities. The independent farming sector, on the other hand, is generally managed by men. Few women

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<sup>39</sup> Although she made no explicit reference to the reasons for this choice, it was apparent that this was someone "fronting" for her in the exclusively masculine world of input providers and crop purchasers. Whereas women are represented among the technical/administrative cadres of former collectives, they have no presence in the circuits that distribute inputs and credits to the farming sector.

possess the skills or the social capital necessary to transact business with input providers and crop buyers.

#### **4.4 Women in rural industry: "We're only here for the benefits"**

Women in rural industry face declining prospects, in line with the fortunes of the enterprises that employ them. This was the situation both for the poultry factory in Yengi Kishlak and the towel factory in Eski Kishlak.

The towel factory in Eski Kishlak employs about 140 workers of which about 60 per cent are women and 40 per cent men. Women are involved in spinning, weaving and dyeing operations. The factory has a main building and two workshops. The management has apparently transacted an agreement with a German firm that will provide new equipment, and they hope to start producing new types of towels for export. This project was in its early stages at the time of research, however, and may not come to fruition for some time. Meanwhile, the factory operates with outdated machinery requiring constant repairs, is subject to frequent stoppages because of power cuts, and is frequently unable to give its workforce wages, paying them in kind (towels) instead. The vocational training infrastructure has also been eroded alongside production and jobs. Until 1995, there was a vocational school in Eski Kishlak (UPK-Uchebnii Proevotsvini Kombinat) to prepare workers; it is now closed. Training on the job is the only option available.

Yet having access to a factory job is still regarded as a privilege, and interviewees concede that is difficult to get these jobs: "*You have to go with a recommendation (napravleniya) from your school and you must also be connected (arkali)*".<sup>40</sup>

A group discussion with factory workers gives us some indication as to why this is the case. Saodat, who is 24 years old and a spinner, has been working in the factory for four years. Mamura, 23, is a dyer and also a worker for four years. Elnora, who is 20 and has been with the factory for over a year, is also a spinner. She spent the first six months as a trainee. Saodat and Mamura are both married and expecting their first child. Elnora is single. This is how they describe their pay conditions:

Saodat: *I get 4,000 sums per month. We received our salaries between November and January. After that we got paid with towels.*

Mamura: *The highest wage is about 8,000 sums. I get 4,500. I have received towels since January.*

Elnora: *I get 4,000 sums but can make more if I go over my quota.*

Interviewer: *What do you do with the towels you get?*

Mamura: *I give mine to a wholesaler. These are usually women, some come from outside the village.*

Saodat: *Some women sell their own towels in the bazaar on their days off.*

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<sup>40</sup> The word *arkali* literally means to have someone behind you.

Interviewer: *Do you sell towels in the bazaar?*

Saodat, Elnora, Mamura (all at once): *No, we don't sell in the bazaar. Only older women do that.*

It is not only conditions of pay that present problems for these young women. The work is carried out in three shifts (*smena*): 6:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 2:30 to 11 p.m. and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. These shifts change every week. The fact that they are involved in shift work does not absolve these young women from their household duties nor from their labour obligations to family plots. They have long days which start at dawn with housework and cooking interrupted by shift work and work on household plots, paddy fields and the care of domestic animals.

With declining vocational training opportunities, irregular or in-kind wages, and heavy workloads resulting from the triple burden of shift work, domestic work and agricultural work, the attractions of factory work may seem slight indeed. It is only when the welfare benefits attached to these jobs are put in the equation that the motivation of these women becomes clearer. There is little doubt that what binds these younger women to their jobs are the generous maternity benefits they are entitled to.

Women on maternity leave or *dekret* have the right to four months on full salary and two further years of paid leave when they receive about 2,600 sums per month. The maternity benefit (*bala pulu* or "child money") is paid by the factory. Given the low and irregular nature of their current wages, maternity benefits not only represent a substantial portion of their current earnings but also present the advantage of being paid in cash.<sup>41</sup> There is a certain irony to this since their likelihood of receiving actual cash incomes increases when they are on benefit. This does not mean that maternity and child benefit is always paid on time, and being put on maternity benefit is sometimes a euphemism for being laid off. However, the young women interviewed were fully expecting to receive their benefits.

The attractions of factory work decrease substantially with each subsequent child. Saodat and Mamura, for instance, do not know whether they can carry on with their work after their children are born. Even if they take their children to the nursery, which would cost 800 sums per month each, they would still need someone to pick up the children after nursery because of the timing of their shifts.<sup>42</sup> Preschool child care facilities, which used to be free or affordable, are not only scarcer, but also getting increasingly expensive. Moreover, these women are ambivalent as to whether factory work is the best option for them.

Interviewer: *If you had the possibility of having your own land, would you prefer agricultural work or factory work?*

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<sup>41</sup> In reaction to my suggestion that this actually represents a pro-natalist policy since it gives long-term cash incentives to women who have repeated pregnancies, an administrator responded that this was meant to ensure adequate standards of infant nutrition at a time of recession.

<sup>42</sup> Note here that the cost of nursery places for two children, which they would save by staying at home, plus their maternity benefit equals the salary they currently earn and hardly gives them a financial incentive to return to work. However, late payment or erosion of benefits is very likely to change this equation.

Saodat: *I think factory work is better for women. Agricultural work is hard, and men should do it. Of course, women can help with the garden or with growing melons and watermelons. But there is more profit in agriculture.*

Mamura: *I would definitely have the land. We work eight hours a day year round. I could easily earn that money in one agricultural season.*

Elnora: *If you have people to help you, then land is good. We don't, so I work for my uncles.*

Interviewer: *What is the best life then?*

Mamura: *Regular wages and peace in the house. Now there are more fights in the home because there isn't enough money to go around. Women blame their husbands for not earning enough and the husbands take it out on their wives. Poverty breeds quarrels and prosperity brings advancement (Yog'luk urush geldirer, varlik hurush geldirer).*

The conditions at the poultry factory in Yengi Kishlak in Khorezm are even more difficult, and many women have been put on indefinite unpaid leave. This is the case of Mariam, who is 40 and has been working there since 1980. Gulistan, who is 43, has been on unpaid leave for two years already. Asked why they still report to work, this is what they said.

Mariam: *I come to get a note so I can get my benefit. One needs to get a new note every six months and then I shall go to the office in the selsovyet and claim benefit.*

Gulistan: *Even when we are on unpaid leave, they call us for work but it happens very rarely, mainly when the eggs hatch and they need more workers. Chicks require a lot of looking after. Sometimes they call us when the agricultural season starts. The factory has its own land and they plant rice and fodder there. Instead of wages during this period the factory pays us with eggs or chickens.*

Staying on the books of the factory entitles them to benefits and leaves the door open for casual work at the factory during peak periods. The enterprise is also able to help workers in distress by allocating them small plots of land.

Mariam: *Near our house we have a little land plot of 0.5 hectares where I planted sunflowers. Because we became unemployed, the management of the factory helped us get some land for our household. At the moment I am working on that land. We got one hectare of land and planted rice there. It was given to us as assistance.*

Sanobar, who is 60 and already receives a pension, continues to work at the poultry factory, heading the personnel department. She used to be head of the trade union and started working at the factory since it first opened. She receives a wage of 4,500 sums per month and a pension of 3,000 sums. As a member of management with seniority she is better sheltered from the current crisis.

Angela, who is 26, is still in full employment. She works from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. with a break in between. Her two children attend a crèche. She looks after the hens and collects eggs. In

addition, she works on the factory land. Her salary is approximately 3,500 sums but is rarely paid in cash; she receives eggs and chickens instead.

Sanobar and Mariam have no additional sources of earnings, but Angela and Gulizar engage in trade. Angela brings butter from Tashauz, across the border in Turkmenistan. Gulizar, who has family in Kokand, buys clothing items there, which she sells in Khorezm (such trading activities will receive more detailed attention in section 4.7 below).

There are also some rural industries that are directly attached to collective farms, like the preserve and pickling workshop of Ok Bugday *shirkat*, which has been in operation since 1995. This is a small-scale operation offering seasonal work (between April and November) to a small number of workers. Ok Bugday has three hectares of garden and orchard land, the proceeds of which go into making pickles and preserves. The workshop employs a total of 22 people in season, 13 of which are women. Here too, the manager complains they face problems:

*Our problem is with jars. We can produce more, we have the resources, but it is impossible because of the lack of jars. I go to Kuva (in the Ferghana region) to get jars. A one-litre jar costs 50 sums for us. I bring them by car because the taxes are high for travelling by train and the train goes via Turkmenia. This is not convenient. It takes two days by car and the queues are long. It takes eight days to get to the line, then you queue for eight days and after that you enter the factory where you get the jars. Now we are planning to open a drying factory where we shall dry vegetables and fruit and hope to create 50–60 new jobs. We are hoping for a contract with a German company.*

Clearly, rural industries are struggling and it is no wonder that both the towel factory in Eski Kishlak and the food preserves workshop in Ok Bugday have pinned their hopes on foreign contracts to update their technology and receive capital. However, what binds women workers to the much-diminished versions of their former jobs are the social benefits they are still entitled to as members of these enterprises and the sense of obligation that some enterprises continue to feel vis-à-vis their workers. Resorting to indefinite unpaid leave and maternity leave instead of outright layoffs is a means of keeping workers within the safety net that such enterprises normally afford. This sometimes includes access to plots of land belonging to factories. The fact that this safety net is getting increasingly threadbare as the fiscal crisis of rural enterprises deepens is pushing more women into agriculture and informal services.

#### **4.5 Rural services in retreat: Women in health and education**

Rural settlements in Uzbekistan boast a developed infrastructure of health and education services. Educational establishments range from nurseries and kindergartens to vocational and secondary schools. Libraries, culture houses and youth clubs could be found in surprisingly remote locations. Health services are likewise provided through a multitiered system of SVAs and FAPs through to local polyclinics and hospitals. The wages of these public sector employees may not have been high, but they were paid regularly and in the long period of fiscal stability during the Brezhnev years were protected from the vagaries of inflation.

The health and education sectors were (and still are) major employers of women. School holidays and more flexible working hours attracted many women, trying to combine salaried work with domestic obligations, to school teaching. Nursing also attracted women, who found possibilities for training in local districts, and the medical profession was considered highly desirable for a woman. The fiscal crisis that hit the public sector after the break-up of the Soviet Union resulted in severe underfunding of both health and educational establishments, and late payment or non-payment of wages, which were becoming rapidly eroded by inflation. During a previous visit in 1996, teachers who were in arrears of wages were deserting their classrooms to find work trading in the bazaar or doing odd jobs to make ends meet. By 1998 this was recognized as a full-fledged crisis, and teachers' wages started to be paid more regularly. Nonetheless, both educational and health establishments show the signs of decline in funding. Buildings go without repair, patients have to pay for food and all surgical equipment, and there is a shortage of medicines.

Makhsuda, 33, is a graduate of Andijan State University and works in secondary school number 21 in Yengi Hayat *shirkat*. Her husband, a graduate of the same university, teaches mathematics in the same school. This is how she describes how they run the school:

*Our school has its own land, given to us by the shirkat. We have 21 hectares of land: 10 hectares are for wheat and 13 hectares are for cotton. All the teachers and pupils are divided into brigades and we work in shifts. We have a separate account. We earn money for our school. We do not get paid for this work but the money is used to pay for the school's repairs and heating. We do not collect money from parents for school repairs. This year the school also bred silkworm – five boxes at 14 grams per box. I know that after the repairs of the school and other work we will have 180,000 sums in our account. We are completely self-financed.*

Makhsuda receives 8,800 sums per month and her husband gets 12,000 sums and they are able to get by on their wages. Dilorom, 36, who is a graduate of the Andijan Language Institute and teaches Russian, receives only 3,500 sums because they have cut down on Russian lessons and she only works part-time. She sews dresses at home and receives orders during the wedding season. Matluba is 21 years old and works as a nurse for Yengi Hayat *shirkat*, has a salary of 5,000 sums, which she complements by giving injections to people in her neighbourhood at 50 sums per injection. Salaried personnel in Yengi Hayat cannot fall back on their *tamorkas* for extra income. Their land is bad and salty, and they lack water. They have to buy their fruits and vegetables on the market.

Intizar is 38 years old and works as a nurse at the local polyclinic in Eski Kishlak. This outpatient clinic services five villages, providing hospital referrals when necessary. The clinic has an oculist, a neurologist, a gynaecologist, two paediatricians, two general practitioners, one trauma specialist and a surgeon. Intizar trained for three years and started out as a surgical nurse. At present, she is employed in the nose, ear and throat service but in fact works in all services, covering for those on maternity leave and sometimes having to do home visits. Salaries

are paid in two instalments. She receives 3,500 sums, which is the lowest wage. Her husband, who is a doctor, gets 7,000 sums.

Intizar works at the clinic between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. and tends the crops and animals after work. As the only daughter-in-law in the household, she also carries heavy domestic responsibilities. Although her workload at home is very heavy and her salary is low, Intizar shows a high degree of commitment to her job. When confronted with a choice between receiving adequate payment for her current occupation or having access to more land, Intizar was unambiguous about her preference:

*Intizar: I would prefer to continue with my profession, of course. What would be best is for my husband and me is to be able to open our private medical practice. There is a private cabinet operating here already. But you need lots of money. You need to buy medical equipment and medicines.*

*Interviewer: What is the difference between the private practice and your polyclinic?*

*Intizar: Well, they take more money. For example, just to get your ear washed out costs 200 sums. But if you go there you don't lose time. They give you all your tests straight away, and they give you your medicines. At the polyclinic we have very few medicines, and you have to wait a long time for tests.*

*Interviewer: Do you have any opportunity to work privately, for example being called in to give injections?*

*Intizar: Sometimes, but then I only take money from those who can afford it. If it's a neighbour or a relative, I do it for free.*

Women working for the SVA attached to the Ok Bugday *shirkat* in Khorezm admit freely that their main income comes from working the land. They work at the SVA between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. and allocate the rest of their time to working on their family plots. During the cotton harvest they take unpaid leave and work on their family leaseholds. Although their wages are low (ranging between 3,000 to 6,500 sums), they are paid in cash and on time. They all report using those earnings to pay for gas and heating for the whole year.

*Interviewer: Why, if your main profit is from land, do you work at a state enterprise?*

*Oimzhon: Nowadays, those who have the opportunity try to combine both. I can't leave. We are paid on time. My family needs three sacks of flour per month and it costs 10,000 sums.*

Despite the difficulties they face, women health workers and teachers, just like the women employed in rural industry, are in a privileged position since they have been able to retain their jobs. They still have cash earnings, however small, and qualify for benefits. There are, however, many more who find themselves out of a job and deprived of access to a piece of land. These women attempt to find different niches in a growing informal economy where they engage in services, petty trade or work as casual agricultural labourers. Their trajectories depend to a great extent on their stage in life, their personal circumstances and the social networks they are able to draw upon.

#### **4.6 Involuntary diversification? Women in informal services**

Labour retrenchment in social services, industry and collective enterprises has forced large numbers of women to fend for themselves and use whatever opportunity they could find to make a living. The case of Rosa, below, provides a good illustration of how women are increasingly marginalized from the registered workforce.

Rosa, 51, is a divorced Korean woman with a single daughter. She started out as a trained bookkeeper. Her first job was in the auto garage section of the *sovhoz* of Eski Kishlak, where she was born. She got married in 1974 to a man who was also from Andijan. They went to Syrdarya province to work in Gulistan, where she was a bookkeeper in a dressmaking factory. In 1980 she returned to Eski Kishlak and started working in the personnel inspection department of the *kolkhoz*. After 1983 she worked at the poultry factory of Eski Kishlak. In 1994, she got tuberculosis and is now on an invalid's pension of 2,692 sums per month.

Rosa lives with her 25-year-old daughter, who is unmarried and is a dressmaker. Since 1995, Rosa has been working as a caterer out of her home, taking orders for cakes and bakery items for special occasions and selling pickled vegetables and Korean salads. This has now become her main livelihood. She charges 50 sums for baking a cake. But she also takes some of the produce left over; some flour, an egg or two, sugar. In the winter, Rosa does pickling and conserving. She has a small six *sotka* plot around her house where she plants her vegetables with her daughter's help. She caters for special occasions like *gaps*,<sup>43</sup> birthdays or weddings all year round. Her daughter charges the price of one kilogram of meat (700 sums in 2000) to make a dress, although her tariff varies in function of the intricacy of the design and the means of her clients. As a widow without sons, Rosa is keenly aware of her limited means of gaining access to land.

Interviewer: *If you had the possibility of receiving land or credit, which would you prefer?*

Rosa: *I would prefer the money and could expand my work. For the land there are a lot of things you need to do, you have to prepare the soil, rent a tractor...*

Interviewer: *Can a woman who is on her own get a tamorka? Or is it more difficult?*

Rosa: *Well, if I had a son things would be different. Then it would be easier to have a tamorka. If I had a 25-year-old son he might get married and then I would have a daughter-in-law. Then there would be some movement (harekat).*

Rosa's case highlights the limitations that women face when they are on their own. Without a husband or a co-habiting married son, she does not see how she could make a claim to a plot of land and, even if she did, how she could find the resources to cultivate it. The only time that she did have access to a small plot, besides the land her house stands on, was when she was working at the poultry factory. That plot was part of the remuneration received by workers of the enterprise. With the loss of her job, the plot was lost to her as well.

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<sup>43</sup> Women's rotating get-togethers, which also act as savings circles (see Kandiyoti 1998).

Although Rosa feels she and her daughter have an established clientele, the problem with the type of work they engage in is that many women have similar skills. There has been a veritable explosion of women offering dressmaking or catering services for relatively meagre returns. For instance, Nasiba and Rahima discussed above (see section 4.3) are engaged in casual work in agriculture to capitalize their dressmaking activities. Dilorom, who is a Russian teacher (see section 4.5), also makes dresses to order. Many of the women interviewed reported they are able to make dresses, *kurpa* and *kurpacha*,<sup>44</sup> and some know how to make and embroider traditional hats (*doppa*). However, the market for their services is relatively limited since there is an oversupply of such services and a shortage of cash.

This is also the case for the preparation of food, which draws on an even more abundant skill than sewing. Many women prepare ready-cooked foods for sale on local markets. Especially in the winter months when there is neither agricultural work, nor any cash salaries coming in, many women resort to selling cooked food. Unlike women, men previously working in construction brigades or technical jobs with skills such as carpentry, brick-laying or motor maintenance are better able to secure lucrative forms of self-employment. In the case of women, the competitive niches they occupy, already oversupplied by armies of unemployed, seldom constitute a viable avenue of diversification into non-farm self-employment, but instead increase the already existing pressures on these limited avenues of income generation.

#### **4.7 Only for the brave: Women in trade**

The more lucrative trading operations that women engage in, whether as middle-women, or as wholesalers of agricultural produce, clothing or domestic appliances, require courage, wit and resourcefulness. The most profitable types of activity involve forms of cross-border trade that are not without a certain amount of risk.

Mukarram, who lives in Eski Kishlak, is 44 years old and started to trade rice after she was widowed. She started out as a nursery school teacher. When she was pregnant with her fifth child in 1988, her husband, who was a driver, died in a car crash. Her mother-in-law had died before him. She was left alone with her children and started to trade in 1992 when her youngest son was about five years old. Until 1988, she had lived with her parents-in-law. When she moved out, she got her own *tamorka* of 12 *sotka* with her brothers' help, where she planted rice. She started to sell her own rice and that gave her some starting capital to begin buying up other people's rice.

Mukarram's neighbours know she collects and sells rice and trust her as a middle-woman. She crosses the Kyrgyz border and travels to the market in Osh.<sup>45</sup> Each time, she carries two to three

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<sup>44</sup> The quilted floor coverings adorning all households, which are an essential component of every girl's trousseau.

<sup>45</sup> This is not entirely legal since there is a law forbidding the export of certain critical food products: meat, oil, flour and rice. Selling in Osh is more lucrative because of the demand for rice and because the exchange rate is favourable. Sellers receive Kyrgyz soms, which they are able to convert into Uzbek currency at a favourable rate. There is every reason to believe that these trading activities have been severely curtailed since the tightening of the border security regime following the events of 11 September 2001 and the war in Afghanistan that followed. The impact of these events on rural livelihoods in Uzbekistan merits separate attention.

kaps<sup>46</sup> of rice by minibus. She complains about having to carry heavy loads, but makes light of the fact that she has to negotiate border crossings and bazaar permits. In fact, she feels being a woman is an advantage.

Interviewer: *What about crossing borders and getting your patent for the bazaar?*

Mukarram: *No, that's no trouble. I tell them; look, I'm a widow with five children. They don't give me problems.*

Interviewer: *Are most of the women who do this job widows?*

Mukarram: *Mainly widows or divorced. But some men who are out of work give their wives permission (ruhsat) to do this job.*

Interviewer: *Don't men do this work?*

Mukarram: *Of course, there are men who do this job, but women are better at it. We know how to deal with people, to bargain, to calculate [she laughs]. You see, we have become actresses (biz artist bolamiz).*

Angela, who is 26 and works at the poultry factory in Yengi Kishlak, resorted to trading when her husband got sick with hepatitis and stopped earning. She echoes similar sentiments, but is more outspoken about the risks:

*I go to Tashauz (across the Turkmen border) and bring butter from there. We go there by bus without any problems. But when you come back with the goods, it is difficult. There is one place there through which you can go by a motorbike and not pass through customs. We use this route when we carry butter and we strike a deal with the locals. They get us through, and we pay them 1,000 sums. They only need to get us through one to two kilometres. Now there are patrols, but one can strike a deal with them too. If you try to bring non-foodstuffs, then it is OK, but they do frisk you when you carry food. However, one can always reach an understanding. I have been doing this for three years already. I used to go there with goods too, but it takes a long time to sell. When you just want to get butter it will take you only four to five hours altogether. When I do this, I ask them to give me a day off at work. It is easier for women really. You can have a cry at the customs and play on their pity. Trade brings a large profit.*

Aveza, who is 48 and also lives Yengi Kishlak, used to be a teacher but is a pensioner now. Her husband is an invalid and receives 1,500 sums benefit per month. She lives with her two married sons, their wives and children. She has been involved in trading for the last five years. She goes to Kazakhstan and sells the clothes she buys in the market in Urgench. She is with a group of five women who travel there by train, rent accommodation and spend about a fortnight in the market. She does this about every three months. She is quite outspoken about the difficulties she faces.

Interviewer: *Are there any difficulties about this job?*

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<sup>46</sup> One kap is equal to 50 kilograms.

*Aveza: Everything about it is difficult. The difficulties start the minute you step out of the house. The way these men throw the bales onto the train! Then we have to rent a room to spend a fortnight there. We have to get a propiska (registration at that locality), we have to pay tax at the bazaar. It's a struggle.*

Interviewer: *What makes the job profitable then?*

*Aveza: The exchange rate. We receive tenge (Kazak currency) and then we convert it to sum at the rate of five sums per tenge. That's what makes it profitable.*

In addition to trading, Mukarram has managed to hold on to her pension rights and benefits by job-sharing at the kindergarten where she was employed. Although her trade in rice is far more lucrative, she has not given up her registered job. She works at the kindergarten on Wednesdays and Thursdays between 7:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. and goes to market the rest of the time.

Although Mukarram was widowed, unlike Rosa she has brothers living in the same neighbourhood who helped her through the early years of her widowhood, and now her sons are grown. Crucially, her brothers helped her to press her rights to a separate *tamorka*. By selling her own rice, she was able to raise the capital she needed for her trade. Now she wants more land, confident that she can rely on her sons as labour power and on her brothers to give her the necessary backing in organizing production.

Aveza already receives her pension, and Angela continues with her work at the poultry factory. This combination of a registered job, with very low or nominal wages but with pension rights, and a more lucrative informal occupation is one way women attempt to maximize their options within the current context. However, this type of option is mainly open to women who have both the perceived justification (being widowed with children, having an unemployed husband) or the moral authority (relatively advanced age) to be allowed a higher degree of mobility. There are signs, however, that younger women are under increasing pressure to conform to ideals of full-time domesticity, and many would settle for less than ideal circumstances in marital unions that afford them fewer rights than previously. It is, indeed, possible to speak of the erosion of the Soviet marital contract in favour of more "informal" domestic arrangements.

#### **4.8 A post-Soviet marital contract?**

Matluba is an attractive woman of 29 who has been divorced since 1996. On the face of it, she appears to be someone who might have broken the mould of conservative expectations. As a young divorcee, her tale is that of a self-made business woman who was able to buy her own shop. After her marriage, with her husband's permission, she went on a part-time course at the *technicum* (technical college) in Tashkent between 1990 and 1993 to learn bookkeeping. Her son was born in 1992. After graduation, she got a job at the towel factory and worked there as a secretary between 1994 and 1997. After her divorce in 1996, she went to live with her parents. She was able to save by working as a night-shift controller at the factory, while selling towels during the day. In 1997, when state shops came on the market for rent, she started out by renting her own shop, which she eventually bought.

She describes her activities as follows:

*I go to markets and buy up merchandise. I sell children's clothes and clothing items in general. I go to Karasu bazaar.<sup>47</sup> There you can find Korean and Chinese goods. I also go to Kokand and Andijan. For example if I want to buy galoshes for winter I go to Kokand; there are galoshes from the factory in Angren and also some from the factory in Leningrad. For two years I did all this just by myself. Now I have a salesgirl who minds the shop while I go out buying. Now, I want to change my shop to selling foodstuffs like a supermarket. You know, there are so many sellers of clothes, there is too much competition and the profit margins are getting too small. But food is always necessary. If I can get credit, I can always set up a workshop for macaroni-making or even dressmaking.*

She tells us that she received some help from a friend who is a businessman and who gave her advice. She hints later that her businessman friend is married and that “many people are talking about us”. Despite her considerable achievement, she feels insecure and in a precarious position. There are four daughters and two sons in her parents’ household and the sons are not yet married. She feels there will be no place for her there when they marry and that she must somehow get her own house.

In marked contrast to the previously upbeat tone of her success story in getting her own shop, she comments wearily:

*To tell you the truth, I am tired. I want to have a good husband and sit at home. If only I had a lot of money, I would educate my son. I would even send him to America. I wouldn't even mind being a second wife.*

Interviewer: *Is that allowed?*

A heated debate ensued among the women present. Although the laws of Uzbekistan do not condone polygamy, there is an increasing degree of “informalization” of the process of registration of marriages and especially of divorces. Many examples were offered and although there was no agreement on this question, they all concurred “that is the way it used to be before”.

Under the Soviet system the marriage ceremony had a dual structure; the religious ceremony of *nikoh* officiated at home or in a familiar setting, and official civic registration of the marriage with the ZAGs (registry office) office, usually followed by a visit to the local Lenin monument. Official registration gives women the legal means of pressing their rights to alimony (*aliment*) in cases of divorce, and to child benefit. Nowadays, the expense of registration has increased. Many households only choose to register after their first child is born. Filing for an official divorce has become so prohibitively expensive that many separated couples dispense with this formality altogether. If they want to remarry, they simply resort to *nikoh*. This is why an accurate estimate of the actual incidence of polygyny in Uzbekistan is very difficult to obtain. A

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<sup>47</sup> This is a *jihan bazari* – or “world” market – which means it is possible to find imported items there.

man who only has one “official” wife may take another spouse by *nikoh*. The children of these unions are recognized, however, and the mother receives her child benefit.

All the divorced women interviewed reflect the current state of affairs quite clearly. Saodat, now 24, works at the towel factory, and had got out of a previous marriage to an abusive man when she was 20. She explains her situation as follows:

*My marriage was never registered with the ZAGs so I didn't need to go through a formal divorce. You see you need to pay over 5,000 sums to register a wedding after the fact. It costs 1,500 sums to register in time but men generally can't be bothered. Maybe 20 per cent of people here register. In general, they do it after a child is born because you need a certificate for child benefit.*

Similarly, not only did Matluba dispense with a formal divorce, but she does not consider the formality a particularly high priority. Her husband simply divorced her by *talaq* (pronouncing the formula “I divorce thee”). He remarried by *nikoh* and has other children now.

Interviewer: *Did you apply for an official divorce?*

Matluba: *No. Whoever applies has to pay 30,000 to 50,000 sums for the application. That's a lot of money.*

Interviewer: *Are there many women who like you are separated but don't receive alimony because they are not divorced?*

Matluba: *Oh lots and lots. But since January my husband did give me 7,800 sum although I didn't apply for it.*

Interviewer: *If you had the money, would you now pay to make your divorce official?*

Matluba: *No, I wouldn't. First, I would buy a house. I want to buy a ready-made house for myself and they are expensive.*

Interviewer: *What if you wanted to get married yourself?*

Matluba: *I would do it by *nikoh*. There is no problem with that.*

There is reason to believe that significant numbers of rural women may be separated but not officially divorced, due to the bureaucratic and financial hurdles put in their way. Although they justify *nikoh* and polygamy with recourse to Islamic custom, they admit upon further probing that they are deterred from having any dealings with bureaucracy because of the costs involved. This exposes them to greater vulnerability since they have no recourse to the law. On the other hand, their apparent indifference to this state of affairs also suggests a lack of confidence in the use of official and bureaucratic channels to press their rights. Recourse to kin and to local mechanisms of mediation and settlement are probably used to greater effect, although a detailed study of how these mechanisms actually operate would be needed to draw any further inferences.

During the Soviet period, women's interests were represented at the local level through the Women's Committees. Women had, in principle, access to a public forum to make complaints about domestic violence, drunkenness or neglect. Women's Committees still exist within *mahalla* committees whose duties have now been enlarged to include the distribution of targeted welfare to the poorest.<sup>48</sup> There is some evidence that they are still used by women as a possible resource in cases of conflict, but this is taking place against a background of hardening attitudes regarding women's work and mobility.

Women's work was laden with positive value and made the object of persistent propaganda in Soviet Central Asia. Propaganda aside, mobility through education was not an unrealistic prospect and many women from rural backgrounds were recruited into a variety of professions. Nowadays, not only is education an expensive commodity but the equation between obtaining a diploma and making a good living has been totally disrupted in a context where a flagging public sector continues to be the principal employer. This is compounded for women by a new emphasis on "traditional" Uzbek values that are being promoted and valorized in the context of post-Soviet nation-building. It would be too simplistic to attribute growing social conservatism to a tide of Islamic feeling in a context where the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, which reflects governmental positions, has staged a yearly nationwide competition since 1998 to identify the "best daughter-in-law". This contest, which is beamed to the nation on television day after day, highlights the qualities of docility, maternal caring and competent housekeeping as the ideals of Uzbek womanhood. The "Year of the Family" in 1999 reinforced the same message. Although the effects of these shifts in mood and ideology may appear intangible, they do modify the social rules of access to non-domestic arenas and the legitimacy of women's economic pursuits.

This point was well illustrated by Intizar, who works as a nurse at the polyclinic in Eski Kishlak and had a serious disagreement with her father-in-law. Before marrying her present husband, who is a doctor, she had previously divorced a man who could not understand that her job as a surgical nurse might require emergency night duties. She dealt with her father-in-law's opposition to her work by complaining to the *mahalla* committee.

*My father-in-law is totally against women working outside, especially in the bazaar. When I was pregnant with my second child, I could qualify for dekret if I carried on working. But he tried to stop me. So I complained to the mahalla committee. They called him in and made him see reason. If I stayed at home, what could I do? I could sew doppas but I would have to sell them in the market and my father-in-law would never let me. If only the old ones would let us sell the fruit from the house plot we would have some profit. On the tamorka, they say that eight sotka belongs to their elder son who lives in the city in Andijan and that it is up to him whether he lets us use it or not. My father-in-law is very conservative. His wife was trained as a bookkeeper but never worked. Even now, if she goes to a wedding, he goes and*

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<sup>48</sup> The government of Uzbekistan has since 1994 opted to target assistance to low-income families by devolving the distribution of assistance to local community groups, the neighbourhood or *mahalla*. For an assessment of this system see Aline Coudouel and Sheila Marnie (1999).

*picks her up and she is never allowed to go to the bazaar. Once his former daughter-in-law opened her blouse to feed her baby, and he made a terrible scene.*

Intizar's predicament provides us with a telling illustration of the many paradoxes of gender in rural Uzbekistan. On the one hand, as the junior member of an extended family household she has no decision-making power over family property and how the proceeds of the property will be shared, even though she contributes more labour than anyone else. Her husband, despite being a doctor and a professional, is the youngest son who has to defer to his father's decisions. Whether the younger couple are allowed to sell fruit from the garden or receive a share of their *tamorka* is up to the older man's discretion.

On the other hand, when her rights to her social welfare entitlements, maternity benefit in this particular case, are infringed upon by what she considers to be unreasonable demands, she resists by involving the *mahalla* committee who intercede on her behalf. The Women's Committee of the *Mahalla* committee is meant to support and advise women, intercede in family disputes and try to achieve conciliation between conflicting parties, particularly in cases of divorce or domestic violence. It is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of such mechanisms of communal arbitration. In this particular case, the outcome favoured Intizar who was able to press her rights to a paid maternity leave. It remains to be seen whether this strong sense of entitlement will become eroded as more women are pushed into informal sector jobs and as universal benefits give way to more targeted forms of assistance.

The decline in women's opportunities for gainful employment, especially in non-farm occupations, is accompanied by an "informalization" of the marriage contract. The official registration of marriage and divorce are seen as costly obligations that can easily be dispensed with in favour of *nikoh* and *talaq*. Although there have been no legal changes sanctioning polygamy or unilateral divorce, these may become widespread in practice as more and more people resort to them. The male bias inherent in Uzbek kinship practices had been somewhat attenuated under the Soviet system through the provision of free universal education and the sanctioning of female employment and achievement. A point has now been reached where a young entrepreneurial divorcee with higher education, such as Matluba, fears exclusion from the paternal household and seeks refuge in the possibility of becoming a second wife.

## **5. The Cry for Land: Shifting Parameters of Entitlement**

The pace of agrarian reform in Uzbekistan has been slow compared to its neighbours in Central Asia and to other countries undergoing market transitions in the FSU. The continued reliance on cotton as the major export crop and the stake the state retains in the maintenance of existing export revenues has made a shift away from the institutional structures of the former command economy a halting and difficult process. At the same time, there are several factors contributing to the pressure to expand private access to land, including the insolvency of the collective farming sector, the cost of continuing subsidies, the growing land hunger of a population that

has increasingly fallen back on self-subsistence, and the impetus from international donors to step up the pace of market reform.

Agrarian reform legislation reflects a set of contradictory priorities and objectives. An examination of changing legislation between 1990 and 1998 suggests that, after an initial spate of measures to expand households' access to private holdings, the emphasis has shifted to distinguishing between a *dekhan* sector and commercial sector of independent farms that are tied into the state procurement system through their contracts.

However, an exclusive focus on legal rights reflected in changing codes does very little to elucidate processes of transformation in social entitlements and access to land in rural Uzbekistan. As Hann points out, the focus on formal legal codes "must be broadened to include the institutional and cultural contexts in which such codes operate" (1998:7). When property is conceptualized in terms of the distribution of social entitlements, it is possible to detect a strongly gendered pattern of disadvantage growing among rural producers.

An understanding of changing entitlements must necessarily take account of the type of social contract represented by the Soviet collective farming system. In line with the more general principle of "labour decommodification" operative in Soviet labour markets (Standing 1996), wages of collective workers were always low, but were compensated by a bundle of social benefits channelled through membership in enterprises, including access to a plot for household use. These formal benefits were complemented by more informal mechanisms of paternalistic responsibility vis-à-vis workers, such as helping them to defray the costs of life cycle ceremonies or assisting those stricken by disease or personal tragedy.

The crisis in public finance that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union had important repercussions on the agricultural sector in Uzbekistan. Being cut off from the budgetary grant it received from the Soviet Union, the government was forced to find new sources of revenue. Extracting surplus from agriculture by driving a wedge between the procurement price and the export price of cotton was a readily available alternative and the terms of trade for agriculture deteriorated drastically. Heavily indebted collective enterprises were no longer able to pay their workers any wages. As a result, reliance on household and subsidiary plots for self-subsistence and on off-farm and non-farm informal activities increased. After independence, the acreage allocated to household use was expanded substantially and this served as a safety net under conditions of growing unemployment. Rural Uzbekistan started to undergo a dual process of *demonetization* and *reagrarianization*. The simultaneous objectives of the maintenance of cotton revenues and the provision of a basic level of self-subsistence for workers acted to consolidate the division between a stagnating smallholder sector and the export sector, the two being mutually dependent.

At the enterprise level, however, the attempt to provide *shirkat* workers with a subsistence base, while developing leasehold markets in land represents a difficult balancing act. Land leased to independent farmers and tenants on a short- or long-term basis reduces the pool out of which

allocations can be made to households. This has meant that the claims of *shirkat* workers to additional plots are marginalized in favour of those who have the means to pay. The fact that this is taking place in a period of contraction rather than expansion of non-farm employment, which might have created avenues for diversification, fuels the intense land hunger that is evident in the findings of this study.

It must be pointed out, however, that this situation is the product of a very specific conjuncture. It reflects a point in time when labour retrenchment and growing inequalities in access to land are not attenuated by significant mechanisms of rural out-migration, receipts of migrant remittances and diversification into non-farm activities or viable forms of self-employment. If these alternatives were to materialize, they might provide a degree of relief from what appears to be a deteriorating set of circumstances.

The general effects discussed above are mediated at the local level by different paths of farm restructuring in regions with distinct ecological and demographic features. Neither macroeconomic policies nor agrarian reform legislation constitute an adequate guide to the micro-level dynamics of change in access and entitlement occasioned by the restructuring of enterprises. Two paths of restructuring were examined in some detail: the transformation of *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* into joint-stock shareholding companies or *shirkat*; and the liquidation of collective enterprises in favour of associations of independent farms.

The cases of the *shirkats* of Ok Bugday in Khorezm and Eski Kishlak in Andijan reveal both important similarities and differences. The principles regulating the distribution of shares, the organization of production through contracts with leaseholding families and the creation of new accounting units through a chequebook system appear to conform to a uniform blueprint, which is applied with minor modifications reflecting the preferences and latitude of enterprise managers. The conditions of access to land, however, are significantly different, depending on the mix of crops cultivated and the productivity of the soil. In Ok Bugday where cotton is the main crop and where the productivity of *tamorka* land is crucially dependent on access to irrigation, the scope for the expansion of the leasehold market is more limited. These limitations are also very apparent in the Yengi Hayat collective in Andijan, which was developed on land reclaimed from the steppe. Here *shirkat* workers do not even have their smallholdings to fall back on, since lack of water precludes the cultivation any crops except for some animal fodder and small quantities of wheat. This threatens the operations of the *shirkat*, which is faced with deepening labour shortages as people leave, since non-payment of wages here is tantamount to destitution. In Eski Kishlak *shirkat*, situated on the fertile lands of the Ferghana valley, there has been a significant shift in cropping patterns in favour of wheat. Unlike the crop cycle of cotton that precludes the cultivation of any other crops after harvest, wheat permits a second planting. This has expanded the area of *shirkat* land that could be put out to lease, stimulating a lively leasehold market from which family leaseholders are increasingly excluded. The expansion of rice cultivation on leased plots by better-off tenants has stimulated a demand for casual agricultural workers, *mardigor*, among whom there is now a significant female presence. In light of earlier observations concerning the nature of the social contract between collective farm

workers and their managers, these changes are experienced as a serious infringement of their entitlements and an act of default on the part of management.

The case of Yengi Kishlak Farmer's Association in Khorezm represents the outcome of liquidation of the collective as a result of bankruptcy and the distribution of the land to independent farmers who enter into direct contractual transactions with input providers and crop marketing boards. Unlike independent farmers who apply for this status out of choice, the members of this collective had no other alternatives. The occupational distribution of those who have succeeded in receiving titles as farmers suggests a strong bias toward administrative/technical cadres of the former collective. However, being a farmer represents a mixed blessing. Having land may be a liability rather than an asset if it is tied up with continuing obligations to fulfil procurement quotas on unprofitable terms, on the one hand, and pressures to retain an existing workforce of family leaseholders, on the other.

It is quite clear from the examples discussed above that the impact of agrarian reform on the welfare of rural workers varies significantly as a result of the local specificities of cropping patterns, soil conditions and availability of alternative avenues of income generation. A ubiquitous feature of farm restructuring, however, is the strongly gendered nature of patterns of labour allocation in the agricultural sector.

There are three major categories of tenure in rural Uzbekistan. These are family leaseholds that are tied into the export sector through labour obligations to the *shirkat*, smallholdings used for self-subsistence and sale of surplus produce on the market, and independent farms that are also tied into the commercial sector through leasehold contracts.

An examination of labour allocation to family leaseholds reveals a clear preponderance of women. All the manual operations involved in the production of cotton are carried out by women, assisted by children. Although only one member of a leaseholding unit holds a contract that carries payment rights, all the female members of households, regardless of whether they also have other occupations, are expected to contribute. The division of labour on smallholdings varies as a function of the livelihood portfolio of the household and the nature of the crops cultivated. However, as a general rule smallholders strive to economize on inputs and to substitute their own labour for machines, or resort to reciprocal harvesting arrangements with neighbours and kin, in order to make their plots go further. Women are centrally involved in keeping afloat a smallholder sector that acts to subsidize cotton production for export. Under conditions of growing inequality in access to land and high levels of retrenchment in non-farm occupations, a growing number of men and women are looking for casual agricultural work as *mardigor*. There are significant wage disparities between male and female *mardigor*.

In contrast to the marked feminization of labour in the family leasehold and smallholder sectors, the management of independent farms is a highly masculine pursuit. Not only are the numbers of registered women farmers small, but even fewer among those are actual managers of their enterprises, as opposed to titular heads acting as a proxy for husbands or sons. Women

farmers who act as managers, although they may be at a disadvantage in the exclusively male networks of input providers and crop buyers, tend to have a track record of administrative/technical responsibility in the collective farming sector.

Non-agricultural occupations represented a significant alternative avenue for gainful employment for women in rural Uzbekistan. Health and education services, and rural industry, were important employers of women. These sectors were major casualties of the post-Soviet recession. Many rural industrial enterprises have either closed down or continue to operate with a reduced workforce receiving irregular wages or payments in kind. Nonetheless, however threadbare the safety net afforded by these enterprises, women consider it a privilege to remain “on the books” since it gives them access to benefits. Enterprises endeavour to maintain this safety net by refraining from outright dismissal, resorting instead to putting workers on extended unpaid leave or maternity leave.

However, “informalization” is now built into the structure of employment in formal enterprises. Getting paid in kind (such as receiving towels, eggs or chickens) means that women have to go through the medium of informal trade or interaction with wholesalers to convert their wages into cash. Thus any distinction that may have existed between salaried employment and the second economy has now dissolved. It may be argued, nonetheless, that women affiliated to an enterprise strengthen their fallback position when they enter the informal labour market since they have recourse to benefits and claims to factory land that are denied to those who no longer have a registered job.<sup>49</sup> Not surprisingly, household livelihood portfolios are constructed around achieving optimal combinations of occupations carrying benefits and other privileges with more lucrative informal pursuits. Thus, a woman may opt to use her earnings from casual agricultural work as a *mardigor* to finance production on a household plot that her husband is entitled to by virtue of being a factory worker. Or a woman rice trader may decide to keep her teaching job on a part-time basis to retain her pension rights and other benefits.

The most vulnerable are women who have fallen through the safety net and lost their entitlements to either land or benefits. The shifts from brigade work to family leaseholds and, more recently, to shareholding *shirkats* have represented a progressive retrenchment of the agricultural labour force. The majority of those who have lost their registered jobs are, by the admission of all enterprise managers interviewed, women. This does not mean, however, that they are any less involved in agricultural production. They continue to work on land either as unpaid family labourers, whose access to a plot is mediated through membership in a *shirkat* household, or as casual labourers earning piece-wage rates mainly during the cotton harvest. Heads of Dekhan and Farmers’ Associations suggested that alternative provision for women working in the *dekhan* sector is now legally available through contributory pension schemes. However, the notion that the resource-strapped smallholder sector will find the means to invest in the social security of its members is extremely far fetched. It is more likely that an increasing

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<sup>49</sup> Employment in Uzbekistan continues to be tied to the workbook system (*mihnat daftarasi*) inherited from the Soviet period. For further details, see Kandiyoti 1999a.

number of women will find themselves deprived of social benefits at a time when their claims to productive resources as members of collective enterprises are being rapidly eroded.

Under these circumstances, the only avenues for income generation are found in precarious forms of self-employment in informal trade and services. There are increasing pressures on these occupational niches, however, since they are sought after by different categories of women for several reasons: those who are engaged in agriculture but experience seasonal unemployment during the winter months, those engaged in non-farm activities but unable to receive a living wage, and those who have lost all other possibilities of gainful employment. In addition, the range of activities women engage in is relatively limited. They cluster around the sale of agricultural and dairy produce, ready-cooked foods or clothing items in markets, or private catering and dressmaking services. This results in an abundant supply for a relatively depressed market, making profit margins increasingly small. This type of diversification is involuntarily to the extent that it is not only unlikely to lead to sustainable forms of self-employment, but also yields diminishing returns. Women who occupy more lucrative niches are involved in cross-border trade and use differences in exchange rates to their advantage. However, these occupations also carry greater risks and are subject to the vicissitudes of fluctuations in exchange rates and the severity of border controls.

The patterns of female labour retrenchment and increasing casualization discussed above are taking place in the absence of women's movements or civic platforms where women's interests may be articulated. The structure of Women's Committees at all levels of governance (from province to *mahalla* level) put in place during the Soviet period is still operational and serves mainly as a conduit for the transmission and implementation of governmental policy priorities. These policies, which during the Soviet period took the form of "protection" of women's rights as working mothers (through protective legislation and generous benefits), are now continuing to target women primarily as reproducers of the new nation. The most active campaigns have focused on maternal health and family planning programmes (with special emphasis on birth spacing) as a means of producing a "healthy generation." There are few local NGOs with a specific interest in women's employment or income generation, with the exception of the Business Women's Association, which has served as the conduit for a number of gender-targeted micro-credit schemes. However, the reach of these projects is extremely limited and most initiatives have an urban bias.

Furthermore, post-Soviet attempts at nation-building and the recovery of Uzbek national values have explicitly targeted women as the repository of "traditional" virtues, such as domesticity and submission to parental and spousal authority. These virtues are regularly put on display via events such as nationwide competitions for best daughter-in-law awards and broadcast on the national media. A much less publicized but more pernicious trend is the gradual erosion of women's rights in the marital union. Soviet laws notwithstanding, the male bias in Uzbek kinship meant that not only were marriages virilocal, but the marital domicile was always considered as the property of the husband and his family. Nonetheless, officially recorded civil marriages were performed routinely and always complemented the religious *nikoh* ceremony.

The laws of Uzbekistan do not permit polygamy or unilateral divorce and give women generous rights to child custody, alimony and child maintenance. However, the practice of registering marriages and divorces is rapidly falling into disuse in rural areas where *nikoh* and *talaq* are widely practiced. This is not simply an unproblematic reversion to older customary patterns based on *Sharia* law as an item of cultural preference, but also a direct consequence of impoverishment. The charges involved in dealing with bureaucracies and courts are seen as totally prohibitive and are explicitly addressed as a major obstacle to official registration. Community censure and local arbitration mechanisms may currently be more effective in seeking redress for injustice, although increasing social conservatism and the lack of alternative avenues to press their rights are likely to have disempowering consequences for women.

The situation rural women in Uzbekistan face is, at present, particularly unfavourable. They are experiencing significant job losses in both the agricultural sector and in non-farm occupations against a background of mounting pressures on their labour in family leaseholder production in collective enterprises and on smallholdings. Women are increasingly integrated into the workforce either as unpaid family labourers or as casual wage-workers. Prospects for expanding their access to land look dim in a context where access continues to be mediated through membership in enterprises, from which they are increasingly excluded, or through leasehold markets and the independent farming path, which also marginalizes them. Furthermore, land is not a commodity that can be purchased, sold or mortgaged and the rules of access continue to consist of a mixture of administrative fiat and market mechanisms that can be highly unpredictable in terms of security of tenure.

The cry for land among rural women in Uzbekistan is clamorous. However, this must be understood in the context of both a wish to reinstate the terms of their former social contract with collective enterprises, and despair in the face of the apparent lack of any other alternatives. While the former is already a lost cause, the latter is a hostage to future developments. The revitalization of rural non-farm employment through new investment in industry and services and the adequate capitalization and diversification of their informal income-generation activities would offer many women with more realistic short-term solutions to their current predicament. It is more difficult, however, to envisage how landless or poor rural women's organized interests might be represented in a context where neither civil society organizations, such as NGOs or professional associations, nor political parties or social movements have any significant presence. Their problems in finding a public voice may prove even more intractable than the economic hardships occasioned by post-Soviet recession and market transition.

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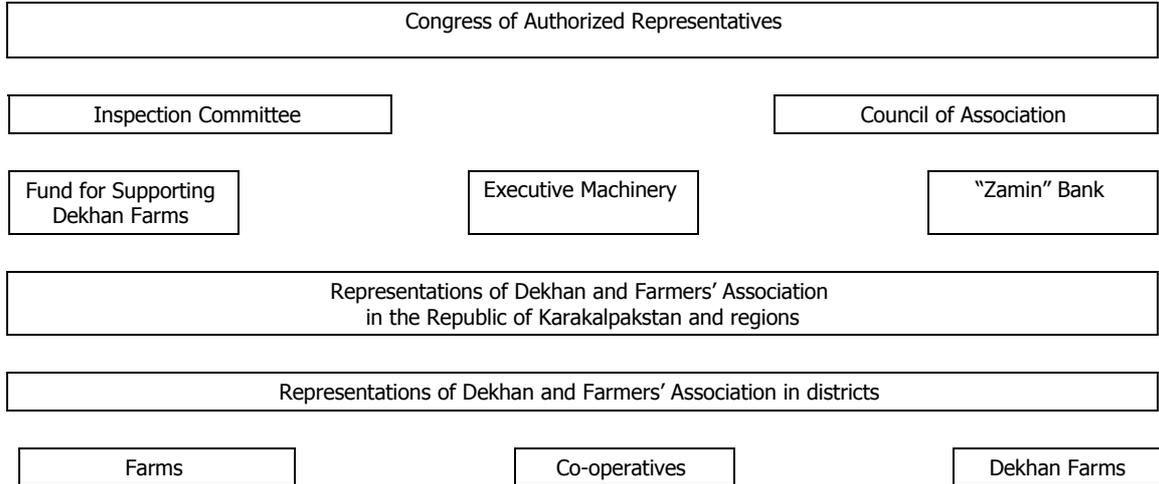
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## Appendix I

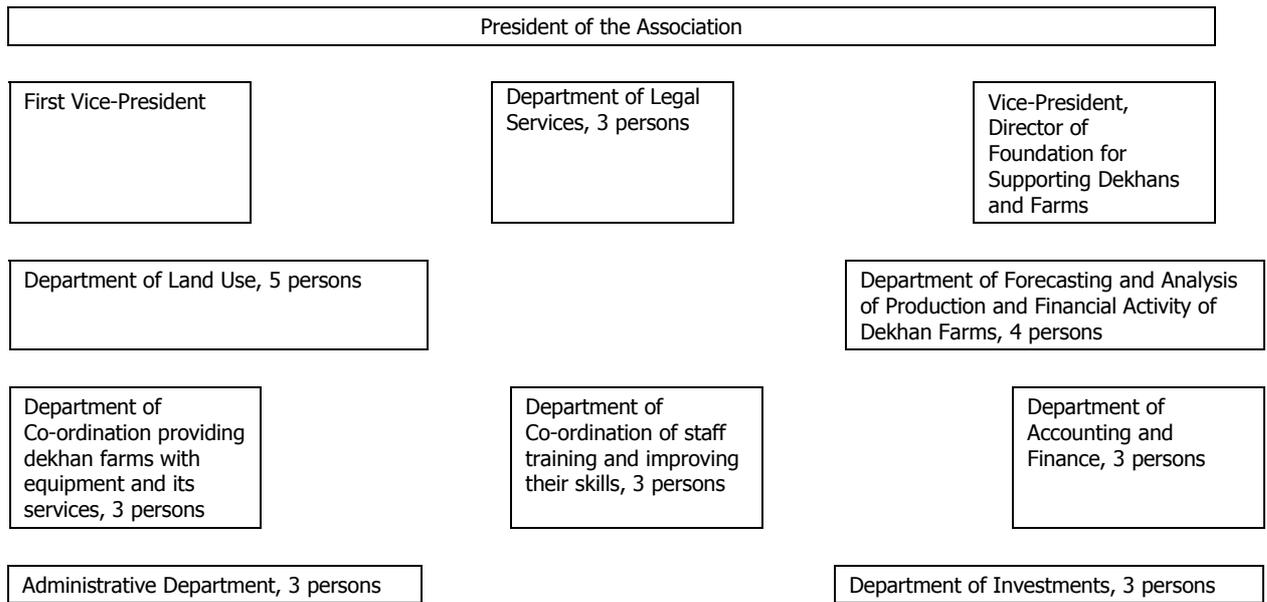
The structures in the following figures were set by decree of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 168 on 22 April 1998.

**Figure 2: Structure of Dekhan and Farmers' Associations**



Dekhan farms will organize on a voluntary basis.

**Figure 3: Executive machinery of Dekhan and Farmers' Associations**



## Appendix II

**Table 4: Distribution of total land (in thousand hectares)**

Province	Year	Total Land
	1992	
Andijan		504.0
Khorezm		883.0
	1993	
Andijan		425.0
Khorezm		883.0
	1994	
Andijan		425.0
Khorezm		682.0
	1995	
Andijan		425.0
Khorezm		681.7
	1996	
Andijan		425.0
Khorezm		681.7
	1997	
Andijan		425.0
Khorezm		681.6
<b>Distribution of total land per type of user engaged in agriculture (in thousand hectares)</b>		
Use		Total land
<b>Andijan</b>		425.0
Lands used for agricultural production		381.9
<i>Of which</i>		
Agricultural enterprises		320.7
Farms		16.0
Household farms		45.2
<b>Khorezm</b>		681.6
Lands used for agricultural production		555.0
<i>Of which</i>		
Agricultural enterprises		507.3
Farms		9.6
Household farms		38.1

Source: Table based on figures obtained from the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics, Government of Uzbekistan.

**Table 5: Cultivable land in all categories of households (in thousands of hectares)**

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
<b>All cultures</b>								
Andijan	241.3	242.5	239.2	239.3	241.5	238.0	233.1	233.2
Khorezm	235.1	235.9	237.9	237.4	241.8	240.0	239.1	237.8
<b>Grain</b>								
Andijan	42.1	41.2	59.6	71.2	96.9	86.7	76.4	82.0
Khorezm	41.9	42.4	55.0	64.5	85.9	78.7	76.1	73.0
<b>Technical cultures</b>								
Andijan	132.5	133.9	116.8	113.0	110.9	110.6	108.3	110.8
Khorezm	107.2	112.8	103.1	102.4	102.1	100.4	108.2	114.1
<b>Cotton</b>								
Andijan	130.1	131.9	114.5	110.9	109.9	109.8	107.4	110.1
Khorezm	107.0	112.6	102.9	102.1	100.9	100.3	100.6	100.3
<b>Potatoes</b>								
Andijan	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.6	4.5	4.0	4.6
Khorezm	1.7	1.8	1.8	3.1	3.0	2.5	2.2	2.2
<b>Vegetables</b>								
Andijan	18.6	17.4	16.9	17.4	15.6	15.3	12.7	13.1
Khorezm	9.3	8.2	8.4	8.6	8.7	6.6	6.6	5.8
<b>Melons*</b>								
Andijan	2.1	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.1	0.6	0.7	0.8
Khorezm	5.9	3.1	3.8	3.1	2.4	2.6	2.8	2.4
<b>Orchards</b>								
Andijan	29.2	28.4	28.6	28.5	27.3	27.0	26.3	25.6
Khorezm o	13.6	13.8	13.9	13.9	13.6	13.0	13.0	10.2
<b>Vineyards</b>								
Andijan	7.1	6.6	6.4	6.0	5.8	5.5	5.5	5.0
Khorezm o	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
<b>Fodder cultures</b>								
Andijan	43.1	45.6	41.2	33.2	13.6	19.9	30.7	21.8
Khorezm	68.7	67.2	65.5	55.2	39.4	49.1	43.1	40.2

\*Melons and watermelons.

Source: Table based on figures obtained from the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics, Government of Uzbekistan.

**Table 6: Gross crops harvested in all categories of households (in thousands of tonnes)**

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
<b>Grain</b>								
Andijan	170.2	170.2	233.3	317.3	474.3	495.8	476.4	522.5
Khorezm	137.6	141.7	167.8	196.9	243.7	298.6	319.9	316.8
<b>Rice</b>								
Andijan	14.0	13.6	14.9	12.9	16.0	16.2	9.1	13.7
Khorezm	108.4	113.0	111.5	120.2	168.1	166.8	154.2	143.9
<b>Cotton</b>								
Andijan	356	367	333	346.0	315.9	330.4	260.7	331.8
Khorezm	278	357	312	304.7	290.0	323.7	216.9	290.0
<b>Potatoes</b>								
Andijan	25.0	38.8	39.4	27.4	50.7	78.7	66.1	53.9
Khorezm	12.1	17.5	19.4	27.6	28.0	28.3	28.4	30.8
<b>Vegetables</b>								
Andijan	399.8	372.0	367.9	374.2	392.7	371.3	317.4	332.7
Khorezm	146.0	137.1	142.5	140.1	144.1	145.3	153.2	163.5
<b>Melons and Watermelons</b>								
Andijan	31.1	16.3	15.6	17.7	15.7	7.3	10.1	8.9
Khorezm	68.7	50.0	54.2	42.6	42.8	45.2	47.8	41.5
<b>Hay of perennial herbs</b>								
Andijan	89.8	76.0	77.4	57.3	29.8	28.6	29.4	24.6
Khorezm	76.3	64.0	58.9	52.5	33.4	36.5	29.8	29.1
<b>Hay of annual herbs</b>								
Andijan	8.7	2.5	3.3	3.7	6.2	3.5	8.8	9.5
Khorezm	36.6	34.4	36.2	28.9	23.7	21.4	16.9	20.0
<b>Fruit and berries</b>								
Andijan	104.7	92.8	102.8	108.1	110.4	110.0	110.3	110.3
Khorezm	31.7	31.6	31.2	35.9	36.5	41.6	42.9	51.6
<b>Grapes</b>								
Andijan	29.4	17.5	20.2	27.3	21.0	22.9	11.5	11.0
Khorezm	11.2	10.5	9.0	11.6	8.2	12.4	10.2	11.3

Source: Table based on figures obtained from the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics, Government of Uzbekistan.

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