

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN TAJIKISTAN: NEW ROLES – NEW EXPECTATIONS.
Understanding the Challenges of School Participation in Tajikistan:
Why Do Girls Drop Out?

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ABSTRACT

GOZEL ARAZMEDOVA: Women and Girls in Tajikistan: New Roles – New Expectation
Understanding the Challenges of School Participation in Tajikistan
Why Do Girls Drop Out?
(Under the direction of Dr. Graeme B. Robertson)

Education is one of the most important elements in each child's personal development and preparation for adulthood. Girls' school participation remains an alarming issue in Tajikistan since its independence from Soviet Union in 1991, particularly in country's rural and remote areas. This thesis is based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources and different variable such as social, economic life of Tajik people and looks at the mechanism of young girls in Tajikistan dropping out of school and factors contributing to this issue. Further comparison analysis of families' attitude toward girls' education in Kyrgyz and Tajik families is provided. The answer found indicates that the primary reasons for girls to drop out of school in Tajikistan are poverty and the revival of patriarchal values. These factors put women and girls in a less valuable position and influences family's decision on which children to educate. However, in Kyrgyzstan the education of girls is prioritized in the family and seen as a key element in her financial independence.

Give a girl an education and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody.

Jane Austen

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABRD - Asian Bank of Reconstruction and Development

ADB — Asian Development Bank

CA- Central Asia

CARs — Central Asian Republics

CEDAW — (United Nations) Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

CIA – Counter Intelligence Agency

CIS — Commonwealth of Independent States

CL- Child Labor

COT –Constitution of Tajikistan

CPA- Comprehensive Peace Accord

CRC- Convention on the Rights of Child

ECD — Early Childhood Development

fSU — former Soviet Union

GDP — gross domestic product

GOK – Government of Kyrgyzstan

GOT – Government of Tajikistan

ICERD – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ICG- International Crisis Group

IOM — International Organization for Migration

IWPR – Institute on War and Peace Recording

LOE – Law on Education

MDG — Millennium Development Goal

MOERT – Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan

NCES – National Center for Educational Statistics

NEPC- Networks of Education Support Centers

NGOs of Tajikistan- Non-Governmental Organizations of Tajikistan

NPRS — National Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2003–2005

OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OSI – Open Society Institute

OSI – Open Society Institute

ROK – Republic of Kyrgyzstan

ROT - Republic of Tajikistan

ROU - Republic of Uzbekistan

SCST – State Committee on Statistics of Tajikistan

SU- Soviet Union

TASSR – Tajik Autonomous Soviet socialist Republic

TCW- Tajik Civil War

UDHR – Universal Declaration on Human Rights

UNDP — United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA — United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF — United Nations Children’s Fund

UNIFEM — United Nations Development Fund for Women

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics

UTO – United Tajik Opposition

VAW — Violence Against Women

WB- World Bank

WDEFA- World Declaration on Education For All

INTRODUCTION

To serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitments to basic education as it now exists. What is needed is an “expanded vision” that surpasses [...] conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices.
(World Declaration on Education for All, Article 2, UNESCO)

This paper investigates the educational system in post-Soviet Tajikistan and the dropout rate of girls in particular. It adds to the existing literature on the change of status of women and its impact on education for girls in Muslim societies. The paper expands the understanding of the mechanisms of school dropouts by demonstrating how different factors influence the dropout rate of girls between the ages of 13-17, particularly in rural areas. The paper has two main goals: first, to identify the reasons that girls of ages between 13-17 (middle school age) drop out of school and second, parents’ views of the value of basic education for female members of the family, especially in rural areas. I argue that though religious values contribute significantly to these views, they are not the main factor influencing girls to leave school permanently. I have evaluated this issue using different variables, such as country’s social and economic situation, religious values, and community traditions. My findings clearly demonstrate that changes in the social and economic lives of Tajik families influence families’ priorities in providing education to all members of the family, negatively affecting its female members in particular.

The first post-communism decade from 1991 to 2000 witnessed a massive change in Central Asian societies. The people of Tajikistan have experienced many challenges after they gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Economic crisis and civil war

have dramatically affected lives of Tajik people, leaving them citizens of one the poorest countries in the world. Sixty percent of Tajik people live under the poverty line with 17% of the population living on less than a dollar a day and 53% on less than two dollars a day (UNICEF, 2007). Along with changes within other institutions, the education system throughout the whole country also went through the changes that resulted in decline in school participation. Similarly to other developing countries, within Tajikistan there is a growing awareness of the gendered nature of transition, and women and girls are increasingly facing discrimination in access to education service (Falkingham, 2000). School enrollments have dropped by 20-21% and there is evidence of a growing gender gap (UNICEF, 2009). This issue is particularly alarming in rural areas of Tajikistan. According to UNICEF, 90% of boys and only 75% of girls in Tajikistan obtain the compulsory nine-year education with much lower extent of incomplete secondary school for girls in rural areas (UNICEF, 2009). The number of girls dropping school increases in higher grades (NGOs, 2006). A number of studies point out different factors influencing girls' dropouts.

The time frame of this thesis covers the period from 1991 to 2010. The period of gaining independence concurred with the transition to new social-economic, political changes in vital activities of the state, which was aggravated by civil war, major human casualties, economic and financial crisis, spiritual losses and sharp decline of living conditions of the Tajik population. This period particularly is known as the start of the changing status of women in Tajik society and the decline of secondary school attendance.

This thesis has five chapters analyzing the current position and role of Tajik girls in their family and society and the effects of this on their education. While this research focuses on the

whole country, it mostly concentrates on the western part of Tajikistan which was most affected by the civil war.

The first chapter outlines the methodology and data collection used, including an explanation of the educational structure in post-Soviet Tajikistan and the definition of dropouts provided by various sources.

The second chapter provides a description of the country's background and an introduction to the problems of decreasing the secondary school attendance in Tajikistan among girls. As root causes for this phenomenon, this paper indicates several social and economic changes. Economic poverty and the inability of parents to afford education, violence against women and girls experienced during civil war, the revival of patriarchal and Islamic values (conservative perception of the status of women and her role in the family and society that strengthened after independence), early marriages, labor migration, weak education and legislation system and poor state management are among main factors contributing in this issue.

The third chapter presents a summary of the Soviet legacy of the emancipation of women and the corresponding improvement in the level of education for Tajik women under Soviet rule. After independence, the government of Tajikistan has not been able to provide education to the same level as provided by the Soviet government. Though the Soviet education system was not ideal, it significantly raised the literacy rate of Tajik population from 4% to 93% (Falkingham, 2000, p.8). Overall, the Soviet system required every child to attend school and those who completed it successfully were encouraged to enter higher education. It guaranteed graduates work in their specialization upon completion.

The fourth chapter takes an in-depth look at the root causes for the declining school attendance described in the first chapter and thoroughly investigates each reason contributing to

the problem. My research indicates that although all the above-mentioned factors play a large role in girls' school dropout, by far the most significant are poverty and the revival of patriarchal values. Poor economic conditions and a lack of enforcement of legislation on compulsory children's education, coupled with the tendency to value sons over daughters, result in a situation in which girls are less likely than boys to go to school. Today, parents do not see the point of investing in girls' education, and therefore they prefer to support boys' education, because they are seen as future breadwinners. My research emphasizes that many of the poorest and least educated families, who know they will be unable to help their children gain skilled employment, have simply stopped sending them to school at all (Harris, 2006, p. 94). This is in spite of studies indicating that literacy for girls and women can also produce significant social, economic, and personal benefits, such as better personal and family health, fertility rate, economic participation and female empowerment (Bhandari&Smith, 1997). The high involvement of women and girls in household and agricultural work, the lack of communal infrastructure, and wide spread stereotypes on male and female roles only encourages school dropout and worsens the situation of girls' education. A recent survey found that 89% of boys aged 12-16 in rural areas were enrolled compared with 75% of girls; and in urban areas the enrollment rate was 90 % for boys compared with 80% of girls (Shabozov, 2007).

Women's roles in the public and private spheres achieved during the Soviet period appear to be changing from when they could get a formal employment and equally participated in all spheres of life. Current status of Tajik women and young girls is influenced both by the recent Soviet experience, with its strong emphasis on gender equality in the public sphere and traditional Tajik values with women playing a central role in the family. Despite it, this chapter also emphasizes though Tajikistan constitutionally a secular country, there has been revival of

Islamic practices since independence (Falkingham, 2000). Though there is no direct evidence that Islamic practices are impacting gender roles, there has been a marked withdrawal of women from political life.

Along with that, the behavior of women also experienced some changes. For example, an increasing number of young women, particularly outside the main cities, have begun to wear the *hijab* (Muslim headscarf). Multiple studies indicate the religion's impact on changing perceptions of the role of women and girls in Tajik society, education participation and gender inequality. But my findings have not reflected this model. It is true that Islam is far more evident than in the Soviet times, but this is largely because it no longer has to be practiced in secret (Harris, 2006, p.159). The results of my findings indicate that economic poverty, families limited resources together with patriarchal values negatively affect girls' school participation and only encourage dropouts. Though basic education is free in Tajikistan, parents still have to cover some expenses related to school, such textbooks, clothes, shoes, food and transportation. Therefore, most parents, especially in rural areas, are struggling to address the basic economic needs of their children rather than thinking of their intellectual development. In this case, the patriarchal values play a significant role as girls, unlike boys, are not seen as future breadwinners; therefore their education is not prioritized.

The final chapter contains a comparative analysis of the perspectives and viewpoints on the education of girls in Tajikistan with its neighboring country Kyrgyzstan. The chapter contains differences in valuing the education of female members in Tajik and Kyrgyz families. The main goal of this chapter is to see why two neighboring countries with similar historical backgrounds, practicing the same religion and experiencing economic hardship at the same level, have different views on girls' education. The issue of decline in school participation is relevant

to both countries and affects all levels of education. However, educational participation at the secondary level in Kyrgyzstan was not affected to the same point as in Tajikistan. While Kyrgyzstan experienced a decline of general education at the level of pre-school education, few changes took place in pre-school participation in Tajikistan. This is explained by Kyrgyz parents valuing secondary education as a necessary step for further accomplishment in higher education and formal employment. The key message of this chapter is to demonstrate that (as it is discussed in the previous chapter), though the main reason for school dropout in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is poverty, this issue is handled differently in Kyrgyzstan. Due to poverty that can put uneducated girls in a vulnerable position and traditions that make girls belong to another family after the marriage; encourage Kyrgyz families to educate female members for their future financial independence. For the same reasons such as financial inability to provide education to all children in the family and the status of daughters as temporary members, Tajik families keep girls out of school.

This chapter also looks into the historical background of Kyrgyz women and their role in the family. Findings demonstrate that the position of Kyrgyz women was highly valued and equal to men. It also greatly affected the values of current society. The current president of Kyrgyzstan, the first female president in Central Asia, may be evidence of this. Therefore, my findings demonstrate that women have relatively more power in Kyrgyzstan, as historically they participated in every aspect of community life more than Tajik women. At the same time, Kyrgyz society is more open to adopting Western values and reforms, whereas in Tajikistan the search for national identity has been very powerful, and changed people's idea of the position and role of women in the society.

The problem of diminishing school attendance for girls in Tajikistan is so serious that it is being tackled by the international community such as UN agencies. Additionally, it requires the equal participation of the Government of Tajikistan and society in finding solutions for school improvements and capacity building of school personnel (MOET, 2005). In order to avoid barriers facing the poor in accessing education, it is necessary to understand the factors causing high absence rates. As the Constitution of Tajikistan guarantees access to basic education for all, including girls (see legal appendix), this condition must remain a priority for the Government of Tajikistan.

CHAPTER I

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

METHOD AND DATA

The thesis highlights the different factors that serve as root causes for girls' school dropouts and family decisions about educational participation. The preparation of this thesis was based on a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources: reviews, publications, reports, skype interviews and case study analysis regarding the educational structure and problems of girls' dropouts in Tajikistan and the Central Asian region in general. Therefore, this thesis presents a consolidation of resource materials regarding the historical progress of education for girls in Tajikistan and reasons for its decline following independence.

It was a significant challenge to obtain accurate information and reliable data. Different sources report information that is often contradictory. For example, some sources list the rate of adult literacy in Tajikistan as of 2009 as 93% (UNESCO), others as 99.5% (CIA, Factbook) and literacy for women as 100% (World Bank). The same issue was faced when collecting data on government's educational expenditure. The Government of Tajikistan and the World Bank reported educational expenditures as 3.45%, Asian Development Bank as 2.9% and USAID

reports as 2.7% of country's GDP. To obtain the most reliable information of the best reliable information data on educational trends in Tajikistan and the region, a combination of different data sources was used, including statistical data available from the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programs' database, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Asian Development Bank, Asian Bank of Reconstruction and Development, local NGO reports, and also the state statistics of Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries (for full reports, see list of references). In cases of contradicting information and data, the most relevant information in relation to the issue was used.

EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE IN TAJIKISTAN

Secondary school is the core of education system of Tajikistan, comprising the whole period of compulsory education. Current eleven-year system of secondary education developed from the former Soviet system, which required all students to complete eight years of compulsory education and two years of either general secondary education or vocational/technical education. After ten years of compulsory education, students could enter university education. In 1993 Tajikistan, following the pattern of Russia extended the duration of basic education from ten years to eleven years and compulsory education from eight to nine years. The secondary school system is itself divided into three stages or phases of education, consisting of primary grades 1-4, compulsory secondary grades 5-9 and upper secondary grades 10-11. Children enter grade 1 at age 6 or 7 and graduate from grade 11 at the age of 17 or 18. Administratively, contemporary Tajik education system has changed very little from its Soviet

predecessor, i.e. it continues to be public. However, there are schools that have gone through the necessary steps to register as private or semi-private, which legally charges tuition.

Figure #1: Educational structure in Tajikistan

Level	Number of Institutions
Comprehensive (1-11 grades)	2.117
Elementary (1-4 grades)	667
Basic (1-9 grades)	841
Private	120
Vocational	72
Specialized professional (tekhnikum)	50
Higher education	38
Total	4.439

Source: UNESCO, 2007

THE DEFINITION OF DROPOUTS

In order to understand the problem of school dropouts, it is necessary to know who is considered a dropout. Though numerous definitions of dropouts appear in the educational literature, there is no census of defining the term. According to Aaron Pallas, dropping out can be viewed as a socially constructed category, thereby allowing for the possibility that students and their families may have a different perception of when, or even if, a student dropped out of school than the school staff as noted in administrative records. (Pallas, 2002 p. 315) Morrow's definition is the following:

A dropout is any student previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absences, who has not satisfied local standards for graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrolment in another state-licensed educational institution. A student death is not tallied as a dropout.

Different agencies and organizations may use different definitions of who is a dropout. International organizations working on the issue such UNPD, UNESCO, OECD, and the World Bank define the term differently in regards to each country. According to UNESCO, dropouts are defined as the proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled in a given grade at a given school who are no longer enrolled in the following school year (UNESCO, 2009). Therefore, there is no official definition of dropouts. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines a dropout as an individual who:

- 1. was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year (e.g., 1999-2000); and*
- 2. was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year (e.g., 2000-01); and*
- 3. has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved educational program; and*
- 4. does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved educational program (including correctional or health facility programs); temporary absence due to suspension or school-excused illness; or death.*

Traditional dictionaries such as The Oxford Dictionary provide us with the following definition of dropout:

I a person who has abandoned a course of study or who has rejected conventional society to pursue an alternative lifestyle

Cambridge Dictionary interprets the term as follows:

- a person who leaves school, college or university before finishing a course, or a person who lives in an unusual way (The Cambridge Dictionary)*

Regardless of the definition provided by different sources mentioned above, they all contain the same meaning related to the topic, i.e. leaving school before finishing a course; abandoning a course of study or not completing school.

CHAPTER II

THE SOVIET LEGACY- ORIGIN OF EMANCIPATION OR IRREPLACEABLE

LOSS...

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself.
It is a precondition for meeting the challenge
of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable
development and building good governance.”
(Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations)

Provision of education was one of the great achievements of the Soviet rule in Central Asia. Formal educational systems, from preschool to adult and political education, were expanded dramatically (Johnson, 2004 p. 30). Historically, the territory of the contemporary Republic of Tajikistan used to be under the home rule of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In 1924, as a result of national delimitation of the Soviet Central Asia it became a new state with autonomous rule. It was then called Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Tajik ASSR) and lasted until 1929. In the same year, it became Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic and joined USSR.

Tajikistan had a very low rate of literacy before it attracted the attention of the Soviets. Before 1920, formal education was available only to an elite minority of men, closely connected to aristocratic upper class Russians. Islamic madrasahs (Islamic schools), where a religious ideology was inculcated through Quranic study was offered as an alternative religious education to a large portion of the population.

The Soviet period was marked by sharp swings in both nationalities and educational policy in Central Asia and yet was unified by consistent efforts to build “new” or socialist nations in the region, especially in ways that would suppress any pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic identities (Johnson, 2004 p. 28). However, the introduction of the new system in Tajikistan was not easy. The subject of education was not welcomed by the native population. In the early stage of the Soviet education enforcement, some Islamic leaders showed resistance and as a sign of protest burnt schools and murdered teachers (CAR reports).

According to the first Soviet census, in 1926 the literacy rate was 4 % for Tajik men and 0.1 % for Tajik women in the territory of present-day Tajikistan (LOC, 1996). The soviet rule brought important social and economic changes in Tajikistan such as the establishment of a modern education system in Tajikistan and expansion of the state-governed school system. The Soviet education has created a population that is largely literate and multilingual and has bequeathed a reasonably well-developed stratum of professional educator and teachers (Heyneman&DeYoung, 2004 p. 32). The Soviet Constitution guaranteed free, universal, and multilingual education to the soviet citizens. The main goal was both to prepare young people for employment in the new state and to indoctrinate them in the Soviet ideology (Harris, 2006 p. 89).

By the time of independence, adult literacy was practically universal. Religion was completely banned from the schools, and most importantly, co-educational schools for boys and girls were introduced. School enrollment and completion rates for both boys and girls were very high, usually keeping almost all Tajik children in school at least through eighth grade (ICG, 2003). Education of women and girls under the Soviet rule was particularly successful. If in 1972 girls made up only 12 % of all students (Shorish, 1972), in 1989 the number of female students

in secondary school was 47 % (*Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura*, 1989). The Soviet system taught that men and women should participate equally in the workforce and girls should have the same rights as boys, especially in the matter of mobility and education. The right to a quality education was available to Tajiks in the most remote areas and in their native language, regardless of age, sex, or nationality.

Perhaps most significantly, the Soviet regime committed itself to the liberation of women and massive expansion of gender equity in education (Massell, 1974). Tajik women gained freedom under the Soviet rule. In pre-soviet Tajikistan, women were treated as servants and inferior to men and were banned from participation in social and political life. If they were lucky, girls would go to religious schools in the homes of female religious teachers or be forced into engagement or even marriage at the age of as early as 9. They were expected to know how to look after their husbands, children and house. The Soviets changed these attitudes towards women's participation by supporting women's emancipation and pulling women into public and industrial activities. Soviet women had 'economic equality,' and although this meant that they had the chance to study and work alongside men while retaining all the responsibilities of homemakers, female literacy approached male levels, maternity leave was introduced and women assumed positions of responsibility in middle-level administration as well as academia (Mayhew, 2007 p. 51). The constitution of the Soviet Union of 1977 not only gave legislative affiliation to the equal rights of men and women, but also provided for the creation of new opportunities for the sexes to achieve social equality, and for suitable ways to combine the occupational, familial/domestic, and maternal roles of women. (Gruzdeva&Chertikhina, p. 150).

An official Soviet ideology declared care for mothers and children. Although complete realization of this declaration was far from reality, much progress was made during the last decades of the Soviet era. Trying to involve women in material production and at the same time maintaining high fertility, the Soviet government paid special attention to the system of childcare, education, social protection, and health care for women (Suad&Najmabadi, 2003 p. 164). Women were encouraged to go on to higher education and work outside the home. Many families were encouraged to put their children in preschool so that mothers could join the work force. The opportunity for women to work in state enterprises had been actively encouraged by the widespread provision of both kindergarten and day-nurseries. For instance, in 1982 there were 1,498 kindergartens that covered 228,773 children (Sarkorova&Manzarshoeva, 2007). The Soviet government also created jobs for women, which provided equal opportunities. The propaganda, promotion of patriotism and the soviet ideology have played significant roles as well. The thirst for education was enormous, and every young soviet woman (equally to men) had a dream to obtain a higher education and contribute to the future of the country. This was relevant not only to people of the Soviet Tajik Republic but all other former Soviet republics in Central Asia.

The legacy of the Soviet Union meant that most children were enrolled in school at the time of Tajikistan's independence. In the Soviet period, everyone including girls, was required to attend school and eight years of compulsory education. Under the pressure of radically changed socioeconomic realities, Tajikistan has tried to take measures in education reform by the end of the 1990s. In general, Tajikistan inherited a relatively good education system from the Soviet era, but it crumbled with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the devastating civil war, and it may take years to rebuild. Moreover, since 1991, poverty, high unemployment, and the return of

older and more conservative social values have increased the pressure on women to not attend schools and to marry as early as possible, especially in rural communities (Sarkorova&Manzarshoeva, 2007). During the Soviet Union era, such cases were rare due to the freedom that the Soviet government granted to women. The declining standards are threatening to make Tajikistan one of the few countries where the new generation may lag behind their parents in education that was achieved in a span of three generations in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER III

COUNTRY BACKGROUND AND UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

Figure 1. Map of Tajikistan



Source: <http://wwp.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/asia/tajikistan/map.htm>

Education is the most important factor of saving
the nation and strengthening statehood.
(President of the Republic of Tajikistan, E.Sh. Rakhmonov)

Tajikistan, a landlocked country in Central Asia, is located in a “rough neighborhood” - surrounded by countries, that facing similar political and economic challenges. It borders China

to the east, Afghanistan to the south, and Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to the north. With its Capital in Dushanbe, Tajikistan is divided administratively into four regions (oblasts):- Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Oblast, Saghd Olbast, Khatlon Oblast and Rayons of Republican Subordination. The population of Tajikistan is about 8 million (7,487,489) and the vast majority of the people are ethnic Tajiks (World Bank, 2010). As the only country that encountered internal power struggles that led to civil war following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan remains a country in an almost constant state of national emergency.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

Economically, Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries in the world with 58%-60% of its population living under the poverty line (UNDP, 2010). Its economy is, in fact, the most deprived in Central Asia. Furthermore, Tajikistan is lacking in natural resources, such as oil, and experiences the constant pressure of a growing population and other demographic factors that contribute to its dire economy. Poor natural reserves have contributed to its civil war's almost non-restorable damage to the country's economic infrastructure. The majority of the population is concentrated in rural areas, thus making agriculture a mainstay of the Tajik economy, with the country's net material products coming from rural areas. Due to the high rate of poverty, lack of social protections, and poor natural recourses, income inequality in the country is high. Tajikistan's high Gini coefficient of .326 is on par with the Caucasus sub-regional average, and is in line with that of Kyrgyzstan (.30) and Kazakhstan (.33) (UNICEF, 2007). Moreover, Tajikistan's economic situation remains fragile due to weak governance, a high rate of unemployment and uneven implementation of structural reforms. Although its average annual economic growth is still lagging, the economy has managed to increase since 2000, rising each

year from a decline of 0.9% in 2000 to a growth rate of 7% in 2006, and finally to 7.8% in 2007 (UNICEF, 2007). However, in 2010 the economy declined to 5.5% (CIA, 2011). So, although Tajikistan has experienced steady economic growth since the late 1990s, more than half of the population continues to live on less than two dollars a day (UNICEF, 2007). Also, Tajikistan is extremely vulnerable in terms of being able to raise the financial means necessary to meet the demands of the education sector. Furthermore, as post-conflict country, its transition economy places a heavy burden of resource of mobilizations on the government of Tajikistan.

CIVIL WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON GENDER AND EDUCATION

Tajikistan has a multi-ethnic population with a large religious majority (90%) of Muslims, (CIA, 2011). Though ethnic and religious loyalties diminished sharply while Tajikistan was part of the Soviet Union, after 1991 such loyalties reemerged as political force and the influence of Islam has strengthened. In the early 1990s the forces that once held together the Soviet Union began to dissolve, and political competition and conflict began to escalate. Consequently, the nation has been submerged in an extreme power struggle amongst the various regional, political and religious groups. In 1992 the struggle for state power, inflamed by the ethnic framing of the economic situation and old grievances culminated in a violent civil war. A multi-layered civil war arose between ex-communists on the one hand and a coalition of ‘democrats’ and Islamists on the other (Sheldelin, 2007, page 3). The conflict ended in 1997 with the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord between the government and the United Tajik Opposition. This bloody conflict claimed the lives of at least 50,000 men, orphaned 55,000 children, and widowed 20,000 women (Falkingham,

2000). Many people were forced to leave their communities and houses and at least 600,000 people were displaced internally (Falkingham, 2000).

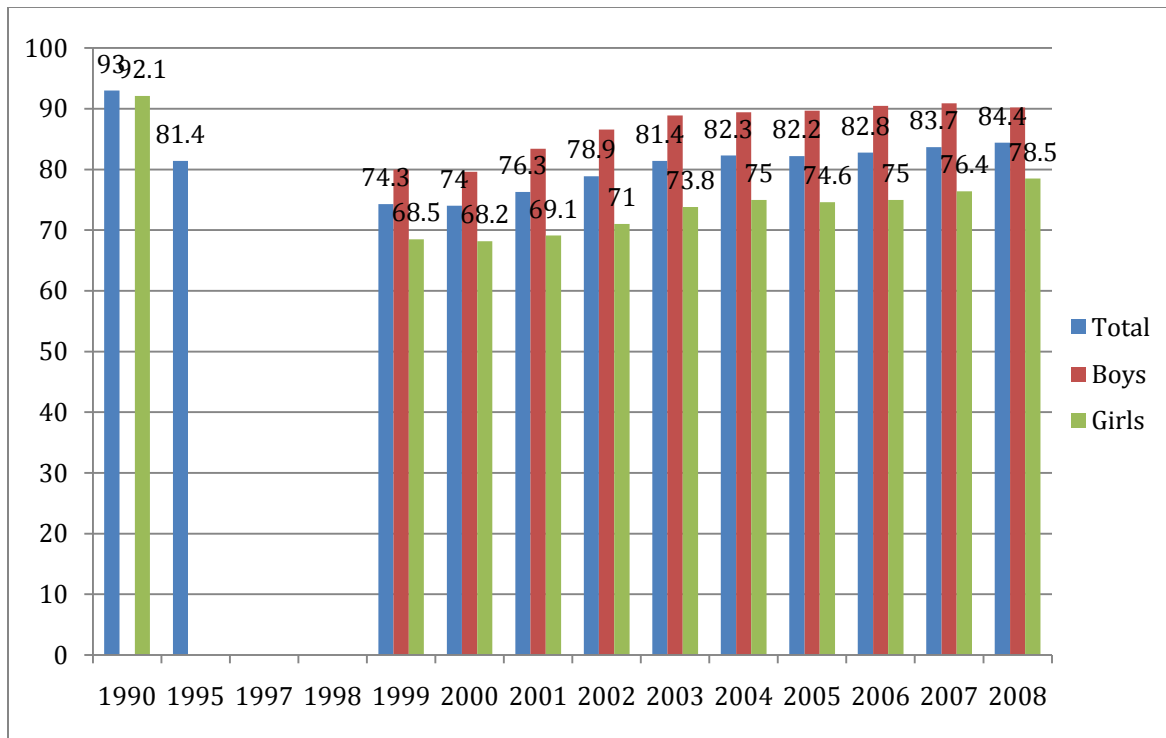
Civil war has a strong impact on gender relations in Tajikistan. The gender gap is feasible in all spheres of life, such as economic, political, cultural, and family. The consequences of civil war is that 20 000 women lost their husbands i.e. protectors and breadwinners (Kuvatova, 2001, p. 130). Widowed women and those whose husbands became labor migrants had to take over the household responsibilities and do jobs that were traditionally determined as male i.e. agricultural work. While increased violence has impacted all Tajik people, women and girls have suffered the most from various types of gender violence during and following civil war. Apart from the general worsening of the plight of women that is expected during any war, women and teenage girls were especially targeted by Islamists during the conflict. Islamic behavior and dress code were brutally enforced on women. Combatants, regardless of the party they fought for, have perceived the European dress code as a reason for harassment and kidnapping. Rape was commonly used by both sides of the conflict and many young girls were kidnapped and raped (Harris, 2006, p.83). The fear of parents for their daughters to become a subject for harassments on the streets remained even during post-conflict period. This feeling of insecurity was spike in dropout rates, where parents simply kept their daughters at home, which limited the mobility and access to education for girls (Falkingham, 2000).

The civil war irreplaceably damaged the political, economic and national infrastructure of Tajikistan. The most significant damage can be seen in the country's industry and school systems. During the war, school enrollment and attendance declined dramatically because many schools were either destroyed or it was no longer safe for young children to attend school in war

operation zones. The quality and quantity of educational facilities that had already been diminished in the first years of independence were severely affected by the conflict and worsening of the infrastructure due to funding cutoffs for education. Because many schools in Tajikistan were destroyed, many teachers left the affected regions. Although, more recently the number of schools has begun to grow again, many schools (about 460 (UNICEF, 2007)), especially in rural areas, have been left with limited facilities and staff. This reduction continues to radically impact secondary school attendance, for girls especially, throughout the country, particularly in the rural and remote areas of Tajikistan.

A clearer picture of the decline of school participation and its effect on girls can be seen in the figure #3. The table provides us with the level of the school participation affected by civil war, and shows a decline in school attendance. It is evident that girls remain the majority of pupils who drop out of school.

Figure #3: Percentage of school participation of children of age 7-15 in secondary school



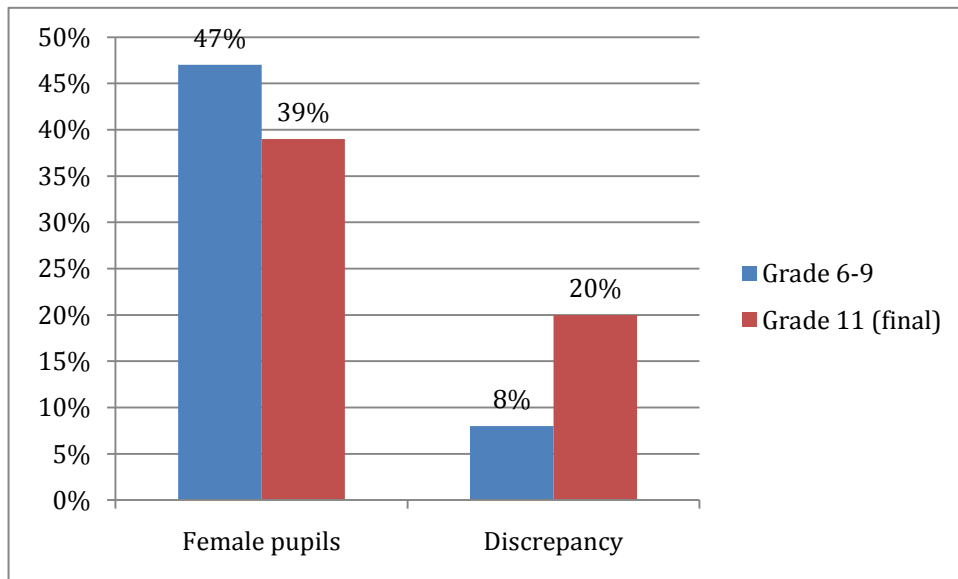
Source: World Bank 2009. Country Profile, Gender Disaggregated Data Profile and World Bank 2010 - Education Statistics. Note: data for the period of 1997-98 is not available.

The chart above also demonstrates that by the end of the Soviet period, school enrollment in secondary education was 93%, and adult literacy was also above 90% (UNICEF, 2002). However, by the late 90s, which was the period of a transition, changes in the political sphere dramatically affected the secondary school participation. According to international organizations, larger number of girls and children from poorer families dropped out of school after the transition (Falkingham, 2007.) The highest point of decline in girls' school attendance took place during the civil war and continued for the next few years after the conflict ended.

TODAY'S SITUATION

The picture of school participation does not look attractive. My findings show the dropouts rates for girls increase in the upper grades. The risk of girls' dropping out in upper grades is much higher than in lower grades. Figure #4 demonstrates that if in grade 7 in secondary school girls make up to 47% of pupils, in grade 11 they make only 39%. In primary school, the difference in the number of boys and girls is 4 percentage points. In grades 6-9 this discrepancy is already 6 up to 10 percentage points. In senior grades, the difference between girls and boys is 20-21 percentage points (NGOs). It is important to note these records do not include unregistered kids such as those born to unregistered couples or children whose parents changed their place of residence but did not get registration with local authorities.

Figure #4: Percentage of girls' school attendance by grades



Source: Tajikistan, Shadow Report on the Realization of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by Non-governmental Organizations of Tajikistan 2006

**THE REACTION OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE
GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE**

One out of five schools was destroyed during Tajikistan's six-year civil war. At the war's end, Tajikistan began to rebuild its damaged education system, facing the traditional challenges of access, equity and quality but also the challenges of redesigning schools to meet the needs of the Tajik nation state with its severe need for social cohesion and labor market prospects (UNICEF, 2007). It has been more than ten years since the end of the war. Though secondary education in Tajikistan is mandatory until grade nine (age fifteen) out of twelve, most of the local partnership organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and NGO's working on education in Tajikistan, especially those working in the rural context, underline the fact that many girls at the age of 13-17 drop out of school for variety of reasons.

The current government claims high literacy rates and reports that Tajikistan has reached 92% school enrollment rate (SCST, 2007). However this should not be taken as valid due to the wide difference between the official statistics and reality. Independent experts such as Vladimir Briller agree that this factor does not reflect the actual situation of education in the country (Briller, 2007). They think, that the main reason for this problem is the weakness of the educational system overall and the lack of competent, professional teaching staff.

The Tajik Government has initiated a number of reforms to improve the current state of things in education and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) developed by UNDP in 2000. Goal two of the MDG "aims to achieve universal primary education by 2015, ensuring that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling" (UNDP, MDGs). Nevertheless, even though Tajikistan is attempting to make good progress and achieve international targets in Early Childhood Education and gender equality in secondary education levels, it is unlikely that Tajikistan meets Goal two of MDG.

The issue of girls' dropping out concerns international organizations present in the country. To recognize the seriousness of the problem, in 2004 a two-day conference on education and determining ways to improve the situation of girls' education in Tajikistan was held in Dushanbe. During the conference, the head of the UNICEF office in Tajikistan, Yukie Mokou commented on the worsening of the education quality in Tajikistan and underlined the seriousness of the situation: "Tajikistan used to enjoy high achievements in education for both girls and boys. Unfortunately, this situation is changing, and that is very alarming because we hear that approximately 20 % of girls do not complete the nine-year compulsory education" (AI, 2009). It is apparent that the situation with girls' education in Tajikistan has attracted international attention and programs for improving education for girls have been implemented since post-war period. However, is the presence of international organizations enough to address the problem? How successful is the implementation of their programs? Do these organizations receive support from the government? How open is the government of Tajikistan is with NGOs on the ground? And what are the challenges that NGOs deal with in implementing education projects?

Certainly, since the end of the bloody civil war, the government has made attempts to improve the country's fragile education system. The government of Tajikistan is aware of the existing problem of the insufficient quality of education and has adopted the National Strategy for Development of Education (2006-2015). This strategy focuses on improving the financial expectedness in order to balance budget appropriations with national policies, the quality of education, equitable access, community participation and physical infrastructure. Though reforms are just beginning to show positive results, the country's constant state of national emergency slows the progress, and there is little done towards its actual implementation. For

example, there have been cases in which central authorities have been repeatedly informed by NGOs about the increasing number of children leaving schools in rural areas. In response, the only measure that has been taken from the government was the distribution of warning letters to the local authorities (AI, 2009). However, these warning letters have neither power nor effect.

SUMMARY

Along with the above mentioned factors, diminished values of education for women and economic problems have increased the numbers of illiterate girls with no employment prospects outside the home. Traditional beliefs about education might put Tajik society into a risk of a massive decline in intellectual development if the issue of education is not addressed seriously from the economic and social perspective by both the Tajik government and international non-government groups (Sarkorova&Manzarshoeva, 2007). Therefore, it is important to understand if the problem of girls' education is a national priority. Assuming it were a national priority, what strategic plans would the government of Tajikistan implement in order to achieve the goals of The National Strategy for Development of Education? Or is it a program that is adopted under external pressures or to increase the number of potential workers in the country? Is there potential to accomplish the program by 2015?

CHAPTER IV

KEY ISSUES SURROUNDING SCHOOL DROPOUTS

In-depth Look into the problem

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right.... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.”

(Kofi Annan. Former Secretary-General of the United Nations)

There are several reasons contributing to the high dropout rates for girls. The decline of school participation for girls began during the five-year civil war (1992-1997), when the violence against women increased. During this period, women and girls became subject to pernicious forms of violence, including rape, torture, and verbal abuse. Consequently, many girls discontinued their education, which led to the dramatic decline of literacy level among members of the young generation. Increasing poverty put people in a position in which families do not now have the means to cover the expenses related to school attendance (including clothes, and shoes, textbooks, transportation and food). Additionally, parents are frequently asked to contribute money to other projects such as school repair or the purchase of school furniture. Although general education is free, because of low salaries and irregular payments, teachers have

resorted to charging pupils for textbooks and other services to supplement their salaries (Kattan&Burnett, 2004). In rural areas, the absence of school and the lack of transportation are seen as additional factors influencing parents' decision to keep girls work at home or in the farm field until they get married. On the other hand, my findings show that girls living in urban areas with easy access to schools also drop out of schools predictably. The reason lies in a public perception that women's main functions are as mother and wife. The society sees the role of women as having healthy children and raising them well in one-dimensional terms (Kabilova, 2011). Families, especially in rural areas, do not see the need to support and invest in girls' education, simply because girls are expected to marry and leave the household, and educated girls are less valued as brides. In the following sections, I will provide a broader explanation of the above-mentioned factors affecting girls' dropout rates in secondary schools.

LACK OF STATE SUPPORT AND POOR MANAGEMENT

The economic crisis that broke in the beginning of the market reforms in all countries of the region resulted in cuts of budget expenditures in the social sector, and education was no exception. Tajikistan spends 3.5 % of its gross domestic product on education (NHDR, 2008-09). The share of education in the public budget is much lower today, compared to the 20% that was in 1991 (UNICEF 2002). In comparison to other Central Asian countries, it is considered a steady number; however in absolute values, the means earmarked for education in Tajikistan are modest. According to UNICEF official data, the largest percentage – 77% – of the total expenditure is spent on primary and secondary education; the size of this allocation is larger than most other countries in the region, which tend to spend about 60% on basic education. Although officially 73% of its total expenditure on education is allocated to personnel costs, teachers'

salaries still remain excruciatingly low (UNICEF, 2007). Few resources are allocated for school infrastructure improvement, new school equipment and teachers trainings. On the other hand, as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Tajik Government has initiated reforms in order to address and improve current issues in education. Officially, the government claims its main objectives in the sector of education are to guarantee access to basic education for everyone and to balance student ratios in secondary education; improve the rise of the quality of education; and improve enrollment ratios in primary and secondary education, particularly by increasing attendance by girls and children from poor families (GOT, 2002). However, education sector still requires many changes and efforts to make sufficient improvements.

The tendency for girls to leave school before completing compulsory secondary education must be examined as part of the disintegrating education system. It is difficult to attract new personnel when teachers receive very low salaries and educational programs are outdated. The highest salary they can get is less than \$20 a month, which is not enough, especially when they are often the only breadwinner in the family (Kabilova, 2011). This certainly affects the quality of education and teachers.

Since the end of the civil war, the government of Tajikistan has initiated a five-year plan for education reform, adopted a Law on Education in 2004, and introduced financing schemes in a limited number of pilot secondary schools. However, the overall condition of the educational infrastructure remains weak, and the needs of the schools are also poorly understood and quantified.

In terms of legislative context, the government of Tajikistan made commitments to improve the educational structure and advance access to education. Since independence, the state

has signed and ratified a number of international legislation in the area of human rights and right to education. These treaties require the government to protect its people, to respect and address their needs, and to fulfill human rights of those under its jurisdiction. These treaties also make Tajikistan legally responsible for providing access to free education for every child regardless of gender or age. However, there seems to be little to no enforcement of the policy. Both, international and domestic law standards include the right to education. Correspondingly, Tajikistan must provide equal opportunity for girls. Education is free in the state educational establishments, and Article 41 of the Constitution of Tajikistan specifically states that everyone shall have the rights to basic general education. On the international level, the right to education is protected by article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC), article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and article and article 5 of International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Simultaneously, education appears to be basic human rights and necessary in implementing other rights.

The government's insufficient attention to the quality of secondary education seriously concerns international organizations. They also see the system of school enrollment and further the system of weak auditing as one of the problems in this sphere. The system of school administration lacks an effective system to keep track of children dropping out of schools. The current system of auditing cannot fix or handle the real problems behind the school dropouts. Local district authorities are registering all children at birth as enrolled in school. As a

consequence, the official level of school aged children enrolling in school is higher and this number comes up to 89.1% (AI, 2009).

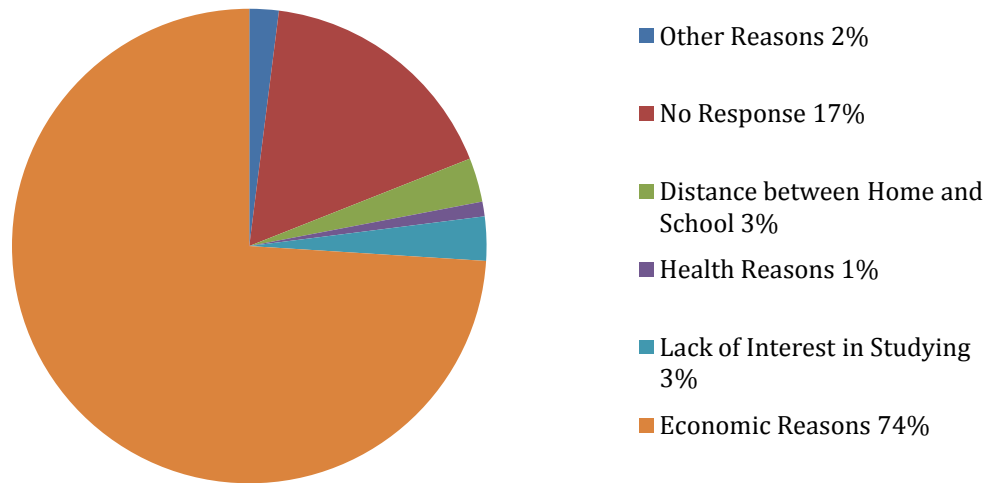
ECONOMIC REASONS

UNESCO states that poverty is one of the most pervasive sources of disadvantage in education in Asia, as the cost of schooling competes with other basic needs such as healthcare and food. Since the end of civil war, progress has been made, yet as noted earlier, a very significant number of people remain in poverty (UNESCO 2010). Tajikistan's overall economic situation influences the state's ability to provide good education and parents' ability to afford education for their children. The country's educational policy requires every child to participate in school. Education participation is influenced by many factors, such as family, community factors, school factors and economic outcomes. The above-mentioned economic factors are considered to be among the main factors influencing school dropouts.

Tajikistan is the poorest of the former Soviet republics, with 76% of its child population living under the poverty line of \$2.15 a day (UNICEF 2006). The country's GDP dropped 60%, and "damage to the economy was estimated at \$7 billion" (Briller, 2007). Agriculture is the main industry in Tajikistan; and the main income for the majority of families in rural areas comes from agricultural work.

Figure #5

Factors Contributing to School Dropouts in Tajikistan (girls and boys)



Source: *UNICEF. Education for Some More Than Others (2007)*

Poverty is one of the dominant factors contributing to girls' school dropout rates. Several international organizations and local NGOs working on school dropout rates, such as Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC), Open Society Institute (OSI), UNICEF and "Pulse" Educational Reform Support Unit, have done numerous surveys and research studies on this issue. Many of the surveys are based on individual answers provided by children. Most of them concluded that economic burden is the main reason causing dropouts. This type of surveys proves that in most cases children drop out of school under the pressure of other factors rather than out of their own will (see factors chart: lack of interest in studying).

Figure #5 demonstrates that according to UNICEF survey, 74% of respondents indicated economic reasons as a primary reason to dropping out of school. Families' financial resources play the most important role in determining children's educational attainment. In relation to

gender gap, girls are expected to be only housewives (khonashin), 'staying at home,' in the future, so many think they would not benefit from education (Whitsel 2009, p.30). Although education is free in Tajikistan, informal payments and bribes have become requirements for study in most schools. The reduced capacity of the government to fund the educational system has impacted families' costs of schooling. Parents are asked to make financial contribution to schools for various reasons, such as to repair school buildings or to supplement teachers' salaries. The cost of educational necessities such as notebooks, pens, and uniforms relative to household incomes has increased to a point where they influence parents' decisions about children's educational participation (Whitsel, 2009 p. 108). This forces poorer families to make a choice whether to feed their children or purchase school necessities and keep them in school. This is a big change from the Soviet system of education, when school supplies were fully provided by school free of charge.

LABOR MIGRATION

Among other problems, Tajikistan is also facing the issue of massive labor migration. The majority of Tajik families in rural areas experience poor economic conditions and high rate of unemployment. The gender structure of labor migration from Tajikistan is characterized by the predominance of males, 85% of total labor migrants (Mughal, 2007). The outward labor migration that surged in 1994-95 after the consequences of civil war and collapse of previous government and the transition to a market economy resulted in economic hardship and a high level of unemployment among youth. Many husbands and fathers had to migrate to other countries for work due to poverty and a high rate of unemployment. Therefore, there is huge tendency for young male members of the family to go abroad for employment opportunities.

Agriculture is the main industry in Tajikistan. The main income of families in rural areas also comes from agricultural work. Labor migration feminized the sector of agriculture. The migration of the male population has impacted lives, duties and responsibilities for the wives left behind. As men increasingly seek jobs away from farms, women have become more responsible for working on the land. About 44% of women from migrant households are episodically involved in the work of male family members (ADB, 2006). Due to long-lasting absence of the husband for months and years, the wife is not only raising children, looking after the elderly and performing her traditional duty as a caregiver, but she is also responsible for budget and household maintenance, family farm fields and animals. In families with one parent child, labor is used on a large scale, including girls. Tajik women and children have to work hard by doing agricultural seasonal work during spring, summer and fall. Therefore, labor migration is one of the reasons why children intend to drop out of schools when they are old enough to help supplement their household incomes.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND CHILD LABOR

The majority of families in both rural and urban areas does not have financial resources to send children to school and need to employ their productive resources to support the family. The effects of unemployment and poor economic conditions devastated the educated population and forced children to become involved in earning money for the family at an early age. Cases of parents with limited resources relying on their children's labor in order to survive difficult times are not rare. Unemployment in the country is so high that it does not leave any opportunity for the younger generation to get a formal employment. The United Nations Children's Agency estimates that there are 5,000 children working the streets and markets of Tajik cities to help

their families (UNICEF, 2007). Ten percent of children in Tajikistan aged 5 to 14 years are involved in child labor (UNDP, 2005). The type of work that children perform in order to earn money is mostly menial and differs from urban to rural areas. Urban children are less likely to be involved in labor (8%) than rural children (11%) (UNDP, 2005). In urban areas children usually offer to wash cars or work in the street markets pushing carts or selling plastic bags. In rural areas children are more involved in agricultural work. Especially during seasonal farm work, a decline in school participation is observed. Though schools do not shut down during picking season, more children miss school during cotton harvesting seasons.

Child labor is prohibited by local and international laws such as article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC). Tajikistan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Child and in 2006 (Eurasianet, 2009). The Ministry of Education prohibits all departments of national education and *hokumats* (local governments) from recruiting students for cotton-picking. In addition to that, Article 26 of the Law “On Education” (UDHR) strictly prohibits the recruitment of students for all kinds of agricultural work. Nevertheless, children are still taken to the fields. In most cases children are threatened by teachers or local officials to be expelled if they do not go to pick up cotton. The lack of enforcement of the legislation on child labor in cotton picking seem beneficial to the government since the cotton industry accounts for 60% of agricultural outputs and supports 75% of the rural population (ILRF, 2007).

Different roles of male and female children in the society influence family decisions about education. Since the job market promises greater chances for men than women, parents are more likely to keep boys in school than girls. In societies like Tajik, families take care of older members of the family, and parents intend to educate children who will take the role of future

breadwinner and who have greater chances of finding a well-paying job (Buchmann, 2000). It is important also to mention that in rural areas both boys and girls contribute equally to family farms; however, daughters, unlike sons, are expected to perform more household duties in the home. This diminishes the time that girls could spend attending school and makes it more difficult to attend school. As a result, more children and girls in particular, are missing out on education.

REVIVAL OF PATRIARCHAL AND ISLAMIC STEREOTYPES:

Over the past decade, significant research has proven what many have known for a long time: women are critical to economic development, active civil society, and good governance, especially in developing countries (Coleman 2004 p. 80). The current situation of modern Tajik women and young girls is influenced both by the recent Soviet experience, with its strong emphasis on gender equality in the public sphere, and traditional Tajik values with women playing a central role in the private sphere of the family. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union Tajikistan supported the nationalism and identity policy. There has been a marked withdrawal of women from political life, and the balance between women's roles in the public and private spheres (which had been achieved during the Soviet Union period) is changing.

There is also a growing tendency for men to impose their view of Islamic norms on women, which has resulted in a huge change in women's clothing. The condition and status of women in rural areas, who greatly depend on men, and the power relationships established between the sexes to the disadvantage of women, have not kept up with socio-economic trends. Economic and political transition has also resulted in the discontinuation of many of the state structures and benefits that supported women in combining their reproductive and productive

roles. There is huge lack of social protection, maternal benefits are abolished or not paid at all, state allowances for children have been abolished, and many nurseries and kindergartens have been closed. Increasing charges for health and education mean that family finances are coming under even greater pressure, and there is evidence that a gender-gap is opening up in post-primary school education (Falkingham, 2000). Due to closure of some of the old large state enterprises, the numbers of job losses and unemployment have increased. On this basis, the meaning of women's domestic responsibilities has been changed, which puts at a risk many advances that were made with regard to gender equality prior independence.

Civil war has also contributed to a serious change in the lives and behaviors of young girls. Along with their security, their educational needs have changed as well. Chances to attend school have been reduced drastically. Even though parents claim that poverty is number one reason to keep their daughters out of school, there are certainly differing expectations attached to each sex. This can be demonstrated by the fact that sons from similar backgrounds are allowed to continue on to higher education.

The biggest changes seen in the post-Soviet view of women's role in the family have affected young female members of the family the most. Now Tajik female children are considered as only temporary members of their own family, and upon marriage women became members of their husband's family. Traditionally, a girl's father takes care of her until she gets married, and then he passes the responsibility to her husband. Once she has left the family home, her parents may be unwilling to take her back if she has problems with her husband or his family. Parents see less value in educating girls, as educated girls are not attractive for marriage. An educated girl might want to continue education or seek employment. Therefore, parents feel

that it is important to prepare girls for their future roles as *kelins* (daughters-in-law) and mothers. In addition, after receiving basic literacy and numeracy skills in primary school, they see no point in continuing to learn things that would be of little use in the future, since the vast majority would not enter formal employment (Harris, 2006 p.90).

The status of newly married daughter-in-laws within the family is also very low. The only way to elevate this status is through childbearing, preferably bearing sons who would become permanent members of the household. Mothers-in-law usually refuse to allow their *kelins* to enter the workplace or continue studying because they are expected to provide domestic services. This is another reason why uneducated girls are more valued, because they will have less interest in getting a job outside the home (Harris, 2006 p. 97). Because most couples marry by the traditional ritual *nikah* (marriage blessed by God) without registration at Civil Status Registration Office (ZAGS), their marriage has no power or evidence. Therefore, they have no right to any property of the family. Moreover, it makes it easy to divorce a Tajik wife by only repeating the word “*Talaq*” three times. According to *Shariat*, it is considered divorce. The practice of existing polygamy contributes to shifting values of women in the public and private sphere.

The lack of education is a distinct disadvantage, for example in cases when a husband leaves for another woman. Once divorced, Tajik women have very hard time being accepted back into their parent’s house or remarrying, which puts these uneducated women into greater financial insecurity.

EARLY MARRIAGES

The practice of forced and early marriages was common and considered traditional in Tajikistan. The highest number of early marriages was registered during the civil war (1992-1997), when the practice has been more common. During Soviet era, the government tried to control this phenomenon; however, today there is little done to tackle this issue. Even though the government makes efforts to improve the status of women, it prefers not to intervene in the way families deal with their daughters.

There are three main reasons for the frequency of early marriages in Tajikistan. First, the violence that took place during the civil war forced parents to marry their daughters off at an early age as a protective mechanism from rape. Second, following independence, the revival of Islam and propaganda of so-called traditional values of virginity and protection of young girls changed women's role in Islamic society and caused competition among young girls, especially in rural areas. Third, poverty and migration have made parents to force their daughters to marry early. Young girls may be regarded as an economic burden; one less daughter is one less mouth to feed (UNICEF, 2001)

Cultural patterns of early marriages make progress in education difficult to achieve. The issue of early marriage is among the key barriers to girls' school participation in Tajikistan. These early marriages contribute to the large number of girls drop out of school, most commonly in rural areas of Tajikistan. This phenomenon is more relevant to girls leaving schools at upper grades. The education of girls is discouraged, largely because educated brides are not desired. For poorer families, education is not recognized as an investment because they perceive that a girl's education will only benefit her husband's household, and not her parents. Moreover, some

parents think that education undermines cultural practices and teaches the girls to reject tradition; they believe that girls do not need an education for their roles as wives and mothers.

While early marriage does not require leaving school, the attitudes of parents and spouses in Tajik society mean that it often does. Married girls are expected to follow traditions, stay home and undertake household and childcare duties. This often means that her husband and his family are less likely to let the wife continue schooling. The implementations of new domestic and spousal duties in a new house, early pregnancy, health issues and many other relevant factors drive many girls from school before they complete a full course of education.

Besides its negative impact on school participation, the practice of early and forced marriages deprives them of education and compromises their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future wellbeing of their family and society. It also causes health issues such as complications and even death in pregnancy and childbirth of wives too young to safely bear children (UNICEF, 2001).

Tajikistan's legislation criminalizes early marriages. The amendment to the law made in January 2011 changes the minimum legal age for marriage from 17 to 18 (RFRL, 2010). Under the Tajikistan Criminal Code, parents' or guardians' giving in marriage a girl who has not reached marriage age can be punished with correctional labor for up to two years, restriction of freedom for two years, or confinement for six months (Thomas, 2009, p.11). Yet this does not stop parents from forcing their daughters to marry. Early marriage increases dropout rates making a significant impact on future generations and communities as a whole. There is evidence suggesting that children of young uneducated mothers are less likely to have good start

to their education, do well in class or continue beyond the minimum schooling. Their daughters are especially likely to drop out, marry young and begin the cycle again (Bayisenge, 2010).

“NO HIJABS” POLICY

According to *Shariat* law, women and girls must not show their body or hair to anyone except their husband. In early 2000, the *hijab* way of tying the scarf was seen more each year and becoming the latest fashion. Wearing *hijab* was clearly a demonstration of an Islamic identity that previously had not been felt necessary before (Jonson, 2006 page 159). The “no *hijabs*” school policy seems to be one of the primary reasons why girls are not attending school in religious families. Many religious parents refuse to let their girls go to school if they are not wearing *ryumol* or *hijab*. Because the radical political interpretations of Islam were spreading, the question of allowing wearing *hijabs* to schools became an inflammatory topic of debate. In October 2005, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan decided to ban the wearing of *hijabs* in all secular schools and expel those who do not comply with the law. This action was considered by religious Tajik families as not only a form of disrespect, but also a violation of their beliefs. As a sign of protest; they do not allow their daughters to go to school.

ISLAM AND EDUCATION

The meaning of Islam continues to be renegotiated. Unfortunately, Islam today is associated with terrorism, oppression of women and gender discrimination. Much scrutiny is given to the impact of Islam on women, often as evidence of a deep cultural rift between the West and conservative Muslim societies (Coleman 2004, p. 86). Islam has a particular influence on a Tajik society; however, religion cannot be the foundation for violation of the principle of

secular governance (Sheldelin, 2007, p. 4). In Tajikistan, the meaning of Islam is related to opposition to the country's Soviet past and the Westernization of post-Soviet Tajikistan. Since 2001, there has been a revival of Islamic values in the country. Popular discontent and frustration with the corruption of the secular Rakhmonov regime made many people take Islam as an alternative (Jonson, 2006 page 159). The popular opinion about the role of Islam in political life was split among people, as noted by Abazov (2006):

“The government and majority of population believed that religion should be a private matter, separate from the state and should not interfere with politics. A smaller group believed that Islam should be an integral part of the state and that religion should play much bigger role in the political system” (pg. 83).

It is true that religion is fundamental in the construction of identity, and Islam played a significant role in the establishment of the national identity of Tajikistan. Nevertheless, the meaning of Islam in Tajik identity is different; it has been constructed in an effort to legitimize the Republic of Tajikistan as a nation state (Harris, 2006 p.13). Tajiks consider Islam as part of their identity, something that defines them both to themselves and to the outside world (Harris, 2006 p.159).

The predominant religion in Tajikistan is Islam. About 85 % of the population is Sunni Muslim and with 5 % is Ismaili, a branch of the Shi'a sect of Islam mostly concentrated in Gorno-Badakhshon Oblast. Tajikistan has always been in search of a national identity, but since independence there has been a revival of religious practice, mostly in rural areas of the country where female education has been a serious concern. There is a large number of new mosques and few full-time institutions where girls can get Islamic education; girls are also taught religion at

home by their parents. More religious and conservative families tend to send their girls to religious rather than secular schools. As a result of female Islamic education, the number of young girls willing to cover their head with headscarves due to traditional or religious beliefs is increasing in Tajikistan.

There are many people who think that religion is the main contributing factor to the changing role of women and girls in Central Asia. One can argue that the nationalist policies implemented after independence increased the role of religion in governance and in society. However, the extent of Islam's influence on girls' education is debatable. My findings show that Islam has been an evident negative influence on the position of women; however, I did not find a major impact of religion on girls' school participation. For a better understanding of the context of religion and education, it is important to mention that Tajik people remained Islamic even under the Soviet rule. Thus, if Islam has been a principal reason for girls dropping out of school, why did Tajik children enjoy the right to education under Soviet rule? It is true that Soviets have changed Tajik society from purely religious to secular. The impact of Islam is now more evident than in Soviet times, but this is largely because it no longer has to be practiced in secret. Islam was banned in the public context, but honored in the private. Recently, official Soviet and many earlier Western sources stress the decline of Islamic beliefs and practices, but other sources recognize their power and persistence (Bennigsen&Wimbush, 1986a). My findings demonstrate that the impact of religion on the status and role of Tajik women is great. It shifted the primary role of women to "staying at home" and excluded them from the political sphere of the society. However, it is unclear if there is serious religious resurgence in Tajik society. In relation to girls' school dropout rates, my findings demonstrate that Islam and religious practices are not the main cause of the decline in school participation for girls, but rather one of many causes. On a general

scale, the revival of patriarchal and Islamic stereotypes comes next after the main factors influencing school dropout rates: poverty, widespread unemployment and low living standards.

SUMMARY

The breakup of the Soviet Union, the change of the political, economic and social infrastructure of Tajikistan, the five-year civil war and the revival of patriarchal and Islamic stereotypes have impacted the quality of schools and the educational system in general. This chapter has discussed different factors contributing to the rate of girls dropping out from secondary schools in Tajikistan. There several reasons forcing young Tajik girls to leave school before finishing their compulsory education. The lack of communal infrastructure, widespread stereotypes on male and female roles in Tajik society and high engagement of women and girls in domestic and agricultural work all encourages girls to drop out, worsening the situation of girls' participation in education. A recent survey found that 89 % of boys aged 12-16 in rural areas were enrolled compared with 75 % of girls; and in urban areas the enrollment rate was 90 % for boys compared with 80 % of girls (Shabozov, 2007).

According to the Institute of War and Peace Reporting the government makes efforts to improve the status of women, but it stops short of intervening in the way families deal with their daughters. In order to provide equal education to girls, it is important to understand social and gender dynamics that can cause restrictions. Good education is one of the most important factors can help girls better know their rights, become more financially independent and overcome any type of gender-based discrimination in the family and the society as a whole.

Clearly, all the factors are interrelated and it is not possible to single out one reason that influences girls to drop out. For example, economic poverty makes families prioritize boy's

education because of traditional values, and thus boys grow become breadwinners and look after the family. At the same time, patriarchal and religious stereotypes put women in a position where they are only seen as mothers and caretakers of the household, leaving no power to make their own choices in any aspect of their life. This chapter also discussed how the improved position of women and girls in Soviet Tajikistan has shifted to a more conservative role and impacted girls' school attendance in particular. As a result, Tajik women no longer enjoy equal civil rights to men, participating in the labor force and political sphere as they used to do under the Soviet rule (Falkingham, 2000). Women also have become the first to lose jobs. It is estimated that 70 % of the unemployed citizens of post-Communist states are women (Suad&Najmabadi, 2003, p. 174). At the same time, the growth in family poverty and the lack of pre-school facilities and massive labor migration of male population have resulted in a situation where women are overburdened with unpaid household labor and are detached from social life (Shabozov, 2007). Additionally, religious discourse around feminine gender ideals suggests that they should not be employed outside the home, but since the numbers of both female-headed households and single women are rapidly increasing, more and more women are forced to make their own livings (Harris, 2006 p 97).

Early marriage as a consequence of traditions additionally contributes in girls' school dropouts in Tajikistan. This became a common practice after the independence. Violence against women and girls experienced during civil war, economic hardship that families face in order to feed their children, the value of virginity and protection of girls only add up to traditional values of early marriages. Most often, in upper grades girls drop out of school because they are forced to marry.

Most parents in rural areas who are struggling with poverty have no other choice but keep their children out of school. As a result of traditional values, if the family has to choose which of their children to educate, the priority is given to boys. This is because boys are seen as future breadwinners and education will contribute into their potential employment, whereas girls are not expected to become formally employed, but instead to stay home and take care of the family and household. Although basic education is officially free in Tajikistan, pupils are still asked to contribute money for many other reasons (school repair, textbook, school furniture, etc.). Therefore, families' financial resources play the most important role in determining children's educational attainment. For poor families, especially in rural areas, it is more important to address basic needs such as food and clothing rather than thinking about the intellectual development and educational achievements of their children.

CHAPTER V

TAJIKISTAN vs KYRGYZSTAN

SIMILAR PROBLEM DIFFERENT APPROACH

“If you educate a boy, you educate a man.
If you educate a girl, you educate a family.
And a family passes on what it learns
to the next generation”
(proverb)

POST-SOVIET SHOCK AND ITS OUTCOMES

In 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in the establishment of five new Central Asian nations – Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Under the communist regime, all the Soviet Republics were isolated from the political, economic, social and cultural influence of the West. For that reason, none of the Central Asian states have realized their full potential for democratic change during the first decade of independence (Gleason, 2003). Still relatively politically and economically isolated, with regional cooperation blemished by rivalries and border disputes, the post-Soviet period in Central Asia has been characterized by chaos and uncertainty. Unlike the Baltic States, prior to independence, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan had no democratic history and no contact with the external world. Moreover, the nature of political transition in all countries in this region is still unclear. In general, they all have had serious, if not unprecedented, inter-ethnic challenges in

which each nation has had to reestablish the legitimacy of its own historical traditions (Heyneman&DeYoung, 2004 p. 5).

As a reaction against their Soviet experience and against Westernization, the collapse of the Soviet system led to the reassertion of patriarchal legacies such as the oppression of women, child labor, and clan-based and religious feuding (OSI, 2002). These changes have shifted the role of women in Tajik society and have impacted girls' school participation in all Central Asian countries. Tajikistan has been no exception. Many current issues with girls' education and the role of women in Tajikistan today are applicable to all other countries in the region. However, due to space limitation and time constraints I will focus on a comparative analysis between two neighboring countries - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The reason I chose Kyrgyzstan is to determine what factors have contributed to the dropout rates in these two countries. I emphasize the differences in valuing education for female members in Tajik and Kyrgyz families despite the above-mentioned similarities between these two countries. Why has Kyrgyzstan, though not ideal, been more successful at providing access to education for girls in contrast to Tajikistan? This chapter provides evidence of a difference between girls' school participation in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and a difference in the attitude of families toward the education

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have many similarities and differences. Tajikistan, like Kyrgyzstan, has had continuing battles against religious fundamentalists. The most recent *Nations in Transit* report, which provides a classification of countries in terms of their relationship to democracy, civil society, and a market economy, classifies Tajikistan among the "least advanced, despotic" states, and Kyrgyzstan as a state in the "middle, but moving

downwards” (OSI). Both countries shared the same heritage of being under the Soviet regime. Moreover, they were closely intertwined by common links of history and culture. Neither of these countries has ever existed as a separate state before joining the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the early twentieth century. Both countries’ economic, social and political infrastructure was very much influenced by the Russian model and Russia still plays a role as a political and economic model for both of the countries.

The Soviet period had a powerful transformational effect on these countries, with the educational system playing a central role in its economic development, as well as the construction of distinctive and relatively stable and legitimate national identities for Tajik people (Johnson, 2004 p. 32). The literacy rate and quality of education in both countries were also elevated under the Soviet rule. In the late 1980s, education expenditures experienced a rapid decline in almost all Soviet republics, rolling back some of the achievements that the sector enjoyed during the previous sixty years. The education systems in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were severely affected by political, economic and social changes following their independence. Economically and practically, it became impossible to sustain the state-funded education achieved during the Soviet Union.

The role of education will determine the future of Central Asian societies, the governments’ continued commitment in the region to adaptation toward international norms and practices, and the ability of the peoples of the region to continue to support broad social and political change despite the economic deprivation and social inequality that followed the collapse of the USSR, (Heyneman&DeYoung, 2004 p. 5). Political and economic transition during the first decade after independence (1990-2000) has put the quality of education at risk, leaving a

majority of youth with little or no chance of finding work. As a consequence, issues related to access and equality in education have become more prominent, putting women and girls more under threat, particularly in rural areas.

NGO'S INVOLVEMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

It is important to mention that these countries remain largely authoritarian, cautiously moving toward changes in education such as curriculum revisions and emphasis of nationalist agendas. On the other hand, the lack of capacity to decentralize and de-bureaucratize, and to implement educational reforms leave them unresponsive. These reforms include the presence of the external organizations in Tajikistan. Such organizations as the World Bank and USAID are working to improve the quality of education in Tajikistan. The NGO sector is slowly growing and gaining pace and experience, but it is not enough to make a necessary impact.

SCHOOL PARTICIPATION: – DIFFERENT PATTERNS TO THE SAME PROBLEMS

The availability of schools differs significantly across regions in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The entire generation is at risk because they are young, poorly educated, and ill-equipped to strengthen democracy and build civil societies, and they are facing education cuts made by those who lack the expertise to make the fundamental changes in education to meet the demands of modern democracies within a market economy. As a consequence, the previously high literacy rate sharply declined since independence, school enrollment rates continue to fall, and student dropout rates are rising in both republics.

Figure #6: Enrollment by Grade Levels in Kyrgyzstan

	Preschool	Grades 1-4	Grades 5-9	Grades 10-11	Total Grades 1-11	Higher Education
1991/92	190,100	...*	...*	...*	...*	...*
1992/93	143,200	367,000	458,500	114,000	939,500	38,414
1993/94	92,200	378,900	454,400	101,000	934,300	38,384
1994/95	58,900	386,200	460,800	97,800	944,800	39,902
1995/96	46,100	471,900	402,900	95,900	970,700	47,416
1996/97	47,300	475,800	425,000	105,400	1,006,200	53,102
1997/98	46,100	472,100	446,700	121,100	1,039,900	63,498
1998/99	46,600	470,700	467,500	140,400	1,078,600	75,196
1999/00	45,000	464,393	478,273	153,611	1,096,277	88,924
2000/01	...*	456,000	555,190	99,004	1,110,468	...*
2001/02	...*	451,900	553,844	106,991	1,112,735	...*

*data not available

Source: Michael Mertaugh. 2004. Education in Central Asia, with Particular Reference to the Kyrgyz Republic, p. 163

The biggest changes in school participation in Kyrgyzstan took place during the first decade after independence. Figure #6 enables us to look closely at the changes in school enrollment in Kyrgyzstan and shows that in the 1990s, the level of secondary school enrollment was less affected than preschool and higher education. The table demonstrates the disparities between each sector during the first decade after independence. Though both systems were affected by sudden political changes, and the school participation was affected in both countries, Kyrgyzstan experienced a fast recovery in the late 1990s; however, the rate of progress in enrollment has been uneven. Schools have been less available in the mountain and southern oblasts than in the northern area around the largest city and capital, Bishkek, where the population is more ethnically diverse (Heyneman&DeYoung, 2004 p.140). Figure #6 further demonstrates an initial decline in grades five through nine and a rapid recovery in the later years of the decade. This is very interesting to observe because it contradicts secondary school

enrollment in Tajikistan. The level of education most effected in Tajikistan was secondary school, and the findings show that preschool enrollment in Tajikistan was less effected than secondary school enrollment.¹ The decline in preschool enrollment is a result of parents thinking preschool is less important than secondary education as complete secondary education means a move to a higher education. The decline in higher education is tied directly to the financial inability of most Kyrgyz families to afford the unofficial bribes required for college entry. In 2002, the number of enrolled children was higher than in 1992. According to 2005 reports of the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan, a net enrollment rate in primary education is 96.6%, including 97.7% for boys and 95.6% for girls. Participation in secondary education is 86.7%, including 85.4% for boys and 88.5% for girls (MOEK, 2005).

In 2010, 49.6% of boys and 50.4% of girls were in secondary schools. The dropout rate in Kyrgyzstan is relatively high, 10-12%. Interestingly, boys drop out of school at double the rate of girls. The primary reason for students drop out is economic hardship. Children have to seek employment in order to contribute to their family's budget (GOK, 2010 p.111). The gender of dropouts varies geographically. In the northern regions, more boys drop out of school, but in the south, girls are more likely to drop out. In the southern regions, dropping out is connected to early marriages and higher value of traditional female labor in agriculture (growing and processing of tobacco). In the northern regions, the population is more oriented toward animal husbandry and requires more of male workforce contribution.

ECONOMY AND EDUCATION

¹ The paper investigates school participation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan during the period of independence through 2010. I believe recent ethnic tensions that took place in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 effected school participation; however this paper does not investigate or provide information on these events.

The bloody five-year civil war crippled development in the post-independence period in Tajikistan. Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have experienced terrible economic crises due to the loss of traditional markets and budgetary subsidies from Moscow. Without any strategic plans to maintain the existing educational structure, these countries failed to provide sufficient financial support to the educational sector of the government. When we look at the differences these countries' education participation, we must look at their economic situations as well. Though both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are considered fairly poor countries, the total education expenditure of Kyrgyzstan adds up to 6.6% (World Bank), where as in Tajikistan it is only 3.5% (World Bank). The economic crisis significantly increased unemployment and the inequity of income and worsened the living standards. The political element of education is reflected in the degrees to which both governments have been willing to embrace changes aimed at stimulating freedom of thought. However, the Kyrgyz government is more liberal and has been more willing to accept diversity in education, including in the non-state education sector (Heyneman&DeYoung, 2004 p.140).

GENDER EQUALITY – A FAMILY APPROACH TO GIRLS' EDUCATION: IS THE KYRGYZ FAMILY A MODEL FOR TAJIKISTAN?

In terms of gender issues, discrimination against Kyrgyz women still remains high. Women in both countries are most affected by worsening economic situations because they lose their jobs before men. Although laws in both countries declare gender equality and provide both women and men with equal rights, findings demonstrate that more Kyrgyz women are participating in all sectors of employment, in professions and in universities. Kyrgyz women achieved much by being involved in law, accounting, banking, medicine, and in the fast-

developing non-commercial sector. There are also a relatively large number of Kyrgyz women in key positions in the government. Roza Otunbayeva, the current president of Kyrgyzstan and a product of Soviet era education, embodies the advancement of Kyrgyz women in contrast to Tajik women.

The situation with the education system in both countries requires immediate attention and serious domestic and international assistance. The international development consultant Zumrat Salmorbekova sees at least one difference: the broader societal view on girls' education in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is different, specifically the different measures people in these countries take in order to deal with poverty. Families residing in Bishkek and other urban centers will do their best to educate all children for their future economic independence. This perception is more common to the capital and the areas with populations with more ethnically diverse or where an international community is concentrated (i.e. the northern part of Kyrgyzstan). At the same time, families in more rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the north of the country, also value the education of girls; in contrast, Tajik girls are expected to remain at home and implement domestic duties. Because a Tajik girl will be supported by her husband and not expected to seek a formal employment, parents do not see the purpose of educating girls.

In contrast to Tajik children, about 95% of Kyrgyz children aged seven to sixteen years attend secondary school (UNIFEM, 2005). Traditionally, family property and material possessions go to sons and girls do not inherit anything. To promote their economic independence, Kyrgyz families give preference to is given to girls' education over boys. Boys are expected to take care of elderly parents, support the families and make money (UNIFEM, 2005). Families prioritize the education of girls to boys due to the following perception: Parents

see girls as vulnerable members of the family because they will marry someone and leave the household. That means losing support of her parents. A girl will be growing into mothers and wives, who will have to support her children and herself. For that reason, it is very important to educate girls, so that at the end of the day she can support her own children even if something happens to her husband or she is left alone (Salmorbekova, 2010). Kyrgyz parents accept the outcomes of these traditions and therefore try to prepare their girls for future independence. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the position of a daughter-in-law in Tajikistan is also very low as well. Tajik girls, like those in Kyrgyzstan, do not inherit any of the family property or possessions. However, the way that Tajik families respond to this tradition is different. In other words, by cutting off a girl's education, a Tajik family puts her into even a lower position, making her more vulnerable and financially dependent on her husband and his family. The situation gets worse for girls who are left without parents or never marry. According to traditions, she has to move in with the eldest sibling and adjust to the new family. Since, girls are not usually educated or employed, their position is very low in such households. They are expected to perform more domestic duties than the direct family members.

This phenomenon is especially interesting to observe, because these countries share the same historical background of the Soviet regime, practically border each other, practice the same religion, have similar culture and traditions, and yet have different attitudes toward the education of girls and their role in the society. Although both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan experienced changes in social development and infrastructure under the Soviet rule, they both had very significantly different historical backgrounds before the Soviets occupied these territories. Nevertheless, after the Soviet Union broke up, these countries followed slightly different patterns in social development.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A WOMAN...

The equality issues trouble each country. In Tajikistan, what it means to be a woman has changed over the past decade. Reconstruction of nationalism and religious customs, which became commonplace after independence, changed the behavior of women in the family and society and prioritized men over women to a degree that was not evident in Soviet society. Although Kyrgyzstan created a nationalism policy along with other newly independent republics, its impact on women has not been that strong, compared to Tajikistan. Women in Kyrgyz society have been respected and had have enjoyed relative equality. Girls' educational status in Kyrgyzstan is not ideal, but it is better than in Tajikistan. In my opinion, this is connected to the higher position of Kyrgyz women in the society compared to Tajik women.

What is the reason for the noticeable gap between Kyrgyz and Tajik girls? Why is education of girls in Kyrgyz families taken more serious than in Tajik families, even though they are neighboring countries and share a similar culture and religion? Why have Kyrgyz women taken a higher position in their society? In order to answer these questions and better understand the difficulties, I think it is important to look at the historical, cultural, social and political factors that played important roles in determining why they have become such a mobilized force.

One of the reasons Kyrgyz women and girls are treated relatively different lies in the historical background of the Kyrgyzstan. Historically, Kyrgyz people led more a nomadic way of life, moving from one place to another in search of food and water. The hardship of nomadic pastoralism in Kyrgyz meant that every member of the family had to rely on one another, which allowed for equality and responsibility for women. Participation in animal rearing, horseback riding and hunting was historically equal between men and women (Bashiri, 1996). This, I argue,

has led to a higher level of gender equality between men and women. Kyrgyz men used to leave their families during certain seasons and hunt in the mountains for long periods of time. Thus, women were left as head of their households and had to take care of their family. For women, being oppressed and controlled by men would not help in taking care of the household. Women needed to be competent and confident in order to participate in economic activities. The image of women's active participation in the household work was more common in Kyrgyzstan.

Soviet authorities built upon this foundation, improving political representation of women by providing them with a high level of state-financed education that elevated the Kyrgyz people's literacy rate to 99.7% % today (UNESCO, 2008). During the Soviet period, the implementation of ideological programs to promote equality between men and women in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan enhanced the status of Kyrgyz of women within society as a whole (Bashiri, 1996).

Unlike its northern neighbor, Tajikistan had an urban culture, and many of its cities were famous as centers of Muslim scholarship. Historically, Tajik people were settled and women did not have much autonomy. Therefore, in Kyrgyz families, women traditionally had more power and a role as decision makers compared to women in Tajik families (Mamutalieva, 2011). Another reason why women are seen in different roles in these neighboring countries is the level of Islamism. Tajikistan has been regarded as more a religious and conservative country, whereas Kyrgyzstan is more liberal and secular. Moreover, the spread of the Russian Orthodox Christianity is another example of the Russian influence over Kyrgyzstan. The previous constitution of 1993 and current constitution of 2010 both proclaim Kyrgyzstan as a secular state. Although the Kyrgyz government provides all rights for religious practice, in reality it

strictly controls religious practice in the country. In order to meet Western standards in education development, Kyrgyzstan signed a new Religious Law on January 12th, 2009 (COK), strengthening government control over religion.

The Constitution of Tajikistan provides freedom of religion and respects the right of people to practice religion. Similarly to Kyrgyzstan, in practice the government of Tajikistan monitors activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming political or supporting “extremist tendencies,” but the term “secular state” is seen as government basis against religion. However, Tajikistan’s policy of active secularism to limit religious practice is less successful due to the large presence of Islamic extremists in the country. The geographic location of Tajikistan is another indicator. Religious extremism boils in Afghanistan with the Taliban influence growing in the border of Tajik villages. Due to its strategic position in the north of a war-torn country for the past thirty years, Tajikistan is considered more religious and more vulnerable to extremist groups and Muslim terrorist organizations from neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan.

SUMMARY

Thorough understanding of the similarities and differences between these neighboring countries is needed in order to review and understand the potential for educational development in Tajikistan. The historical and cultural backgrounds of the areas include traditional values about women’s participation in social and political activities. This chapter discussed that although the status of women in the Central Asian region has been progressively promoted, there remains a significant gap between Kyrgyz and Tajik family views of girls’ education and the status of women in the family. In contrast to Tajik families, Kyrgyz families encourage girls’ education to help provide her with financial independence. Though both nations have similar

cultures and traditions, the parental and societal expectations of girls differ from one another. These expectations are related to many other aspects of life, such as the position and role of women and girls in the family and society.

Measures aimed at correcting and managing current gender inequality, such as microcredit programs, the establishment of women's self-help groups and the introduction of flexible working conditions for women, are fundamental to resolving this issue. Forging new dynamics between the sexes and public awareness programs of gender inequality is vital in changing the state standards of education for boys and girls.

This chapter also demonstrated different ways of responding to poverty in each society. As discussed above, the poverty rate is high in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and poverty puts pressure on both countries; however, the nations have different approaches to the problem. Families in both countries surely care about the future of their children; however, they respond to the challenges differently. As one way of reacting to poverty, families in Kyrgyzstan try to educate girls for their future financial independence. In Tajikistan, girls are kept home by poverty, a lack of potential employment opportunities and inability to cover the financial costs associated with education.

CONCLUSION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, all newly independent states have been concentrating on many aspects of development such as democratization and rebuilding the government, creating free markets, recapturing the economy and strengthening national security. Unfortunately, the education of girls has not been a priority for any of the states in Central Asia, and Tajikistan is no exception. Since Soviet policy prohibited the practice of religion and traditions, after the independence, the government used freedom of religion as a key principal in its politics. Religion became the unifying identity that distinguished new regimes and reintroduced core values (Salimova, 2008).

Today, the education system of Tajikistan is in a difficult situation. In comparison to other developing countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, the education system in Tajikistan is still considered to be of good quality. However, the gender gap and education inequality continue to grow, negatively effecting school participation and increasing the dropout rate for girls. Moreover, increasing poverty, insecurity and deteriorating educational infrastructure are key obstacles for providing equal access to education for girls and boys.

It is sad to notice that young Tajik women and girls, particularly in rural areas, face significant difficulties in participating in secondary education. This growing trend can be attributed to the last decade's education reforms, religious and patriarchal revival, and socio-economic changes in the region (Salimova, 2008). My findings clearly demonstrate that the major challenge is be a change in families' social and economic situation. Girls between ages of

13-17 tend to discontinue going to school for many reasons and the discrepancy between boys and girls in schools make up to 20-21% (NGOs). The issue of girls' dropout rates is especially alarming, because the government's attempt to improve education is not efficient enough to make a difference.

Growing poverty has put over 60 % of Tajik people under the poverty line. More and more Tajiks families consider keeping girls at home rather than sending them to school. Though basic education in Tajikistan is provided for free, most families in both urban and rural areas basically do not have any means to cover expenses related to school participation (clothes, shoes, textbooks, food and transportation).

After gaining independence, Tajikistan started the process of building a juridical, democratic and secular state with a market economy. During the past 20 years Tajikistan has signed and ratified number of international law in the area of human rights. On a domestic level, the Constitution of Tajikistan has several articles on basic education. Article 41 specifically states that everyone shall have the rights to basic general education. Education is free in state educational establishments.

The right to education is protected by article 26 of UDHR. Articles 13 and 14 of ICESCR, articles 28 and 29 of CRC, article 10 of CEDAW and article 5 of ICERD. Simultaneously, education appears to be one of the fundamental human rights and necessary achieving other rights, playing a crucial role in expanding the rights and opportunities for women and girls. It enables economically and socially vulnerable adults and children to come out of poverty and provides means and opportunities to fully participate in social life.

The revival of cultural and religious norms, which influence the overall role and status of women, contributes significantly to school dropout rates. Successes achieved during the Soviet

era in terms of emancipation seem to have disappeared after independence. The practice of conservative Islam and the revival of old traditions have created stereotypes about the role and responsibilities of women in society. For example, the discourse suggests that women's place is in the home and once girls reach puberty they should not interact with non-relative males and should be prepared for an obedient married life. (Salimova, 2008). Because young girls are not secure in the society, some parents prefer to have their daughters married in order to be protected and safe. Early marriages and financial dependence on their husbands further reduce girls' opportunities to gain an education, since in-laws have nothing to gain by allowing their *kelins* to study or work (Harris, 2006, p. 100). This negatively effects girls' personal development and deprives them from future educational and career opportunities.

In order to encourage Tajik parents to let their children attend schools, it is necessary to take a different approach. A number of international development organizations and domestic NGOs lobby and promote their interests in education, suggesting changes in legislative norms. It is important that the government of Tajikistan understands that the gender gap in education will have a long-term impact on the country's economic and social situations. For this reason, they must take immediate action. It is first necessary to start working with the whole family, parents in particular. It is necessary to change their mentality by explaining them that by prohibiting their daughters from getting an education, they, they are affecting their children's future. It is important for parents to understand only educated women and girls are able create healthy families, strengthen their social status and contribute to the general development of the country.

There a famous proverb: "If you educate a boy, you educate a man; if you educate a girl you educate a family." Education is not only about livelihood and technical skills but more importantly it provides social connectedness or aptitude, which enables one to access key

resources to alleviate poverty (Bayisenge, 2010 p. 7). Educated women and girls are more likely to be informed and knowledgeable about their rights and make decisions for themselves.

I join many other people who think that educating girls boosts development the most. Educating women, especially young girls, yields higher returns than educating men. In low-income countries, investing in primary and secondary education tends to pay off more than investing at secondary and higher educational levels, and girls are concentrated at lower levels of the education system than boys. So thus closing the gender gap in the early years of schooling is a better strategy than promoting other educational reforms that allow the gender gap to remain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is well known that equal rights to education for both men and women are key elements of basic human rights. As my studies demonstrate, in this particular area of social life, there are gender stereotypes that promote discrimination against women and girls. In order for women and girls to fully implement their right to education, it is necessary to have fair political, social, and economic conditions for social commitment to achieve gender and legal equality. Gender equality is absolutely important in achieving freedom and independence in decision-making in all spheres of their lives, including education. Both international and domestic law standards include the right to education. Correspondingly, these legal standards must provide equal opportunity for girls. In order to address the problem and prevent an educational crisis in the future, Tajikistan will need active participation of both the international community and their local governments. Tajikistan enjoyed high literacy rates of almost 100 % during the Soviet era. There is a literate and educated pool of human resources in the country. If these recommendations can be implemented, perhaps the dream of literacy and the promise of education as a right for all Tajiks can again become a reality in Tajikistan:

1. International organization should explore different avenues to evaluate the accuracy of reported figures by governments that provide weak and unreliable statistics.
2. The Tajik government should make basic improvements in the conditions of schools and teachers, including in rural and remote areas. They should ensure pre-service and in-service training for pedagogic staff, and training of personnel in the education system.

3. The enforcement of current laws and adoption of the new legislative norms are very important in order to enforce 11 years of compulsory education.
4. Special programs are needed to educate parents on the importance of girls' education and its potential impacts on their future.
5. School should increase the number of subjects that involve learning special skills for girls (sewing, knitting, carpet making etc skills that would help them further in live to makes sources for livelihood encourage their participation).
6. The government should increase the number of libraries and books and provide access for children throughout the country.
7. The government should provide free transportation for children living in remote areas and far from schools.
8. In order to address and respect religious beliefs, separate schools for female and male children must be provided in rural areas.
9. The government must adopt legislative norms to abolish child labor in farm fields.
10. The government should demonstrate opportunities for women by increasing their representation in the political, economic and social spheres of the country.

EXPANSION OF THIS STUDY FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The level and dynamics of the change of the status of women and girls in Tajikistan can be more effectively measured in many different ways. Further study would give an opportunity to more closely observe the position of women and girls in the family and in society and to account for other factors contributing to the problem throughout the whole region and ways to improve it. Examples of such studies could be regulatory laws on the secondary education compulsory and legislation implementation; new reforms in educational infrastructure and their outcomes can be questions for the future research. For example, in Tajikistan, the completion of nine years of secondary education is compulsory and required by law. Today, there are discussions and strong recommendations from NGOs to legalize 11 years of compulsory education with particular interest in girls' participation in school. It would also be an interesting topic for future research to compare the situation with girls' education based on demographic, geographic, ethnic and cultural factors and issues of education in each country in Central Asia. This study can also be improved by including other relevant indicators of decline in girls' school participation, such as the amount of financial support from external sources, educational background of parents, and the mortality rate of girls between ages of 13-17. Because male children are valued more in society and family, it is possible that girls' health care is not addressed to the necessary level it should be, creating morbidity that disallows girls from attending school in the upper grades.

LEGAL APPENDIX

Constitution of Tajikistan 1994

Статья 41.

Каждый имеет право на образование. Общее основное образования обязательно. Государство гарантирует общее основное обязательное бесплатное образование в государственных учебных заведениях.

Каждый в рамках определенных законом может получить бесплатное общее среднее, начальное, профессиональное, среднее профессиональное и высшее профессиональное образование в государственных учебных заведениях(в редакции Закона РТ от 22.06.2003 г.)

Другие формы получения образования определяются законом.

Universal Declaration on Human Rights

Article 26.

- (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. Tajikistan is required, under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognize the right of everyone to education.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Article 13

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:

- (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
- (c) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
- (d) Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education;
- (e) The development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

4. No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph I of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 14

Each State Party to the present Covenant which, at the time of becoming a Party, has not been able to secure in its metropolitan territory or other territories under its jurisdiction compulsory primary education, free of charge, undertakes, within two years, to work out and adopt a detailed plan of action for the progressive implementation, within a reasonable number of years, to be fixed in the plan, of the principle of compulsory education free of charge for all.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
- (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
- (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
- (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Article 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- (a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;
- (b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
- (c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;
- (d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
- (e) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;

- (f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
- (g) The same Opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
- (h) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

Article 5

In compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in article 2 of this Convention, States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:

- (a) The right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice;
- (b) The right to security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by government officials or by any individual group or institution;
- (c) Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections-to vote and to stand for election-on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service;
- (d) Other civil rights, in particular:
 - (i) The right to freedom of movement and residence within the border of the State;
 - (ii) The right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's country;
 - (iii) The right to nationality;
 - (iv) The right to marriage and choice of spouse;
 - (v) The right to own property alone as well as in association with others;
 - (vi) The right to inherit;
 - (vii) The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
 - (viii) The right to freedom of opinion and expression;
 - (ix) The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association;
- (e) Economic, social and cultural rights, in particular:
 - (i) The rights to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for equal work, to just and favourable remuneration;
 - (ii) The right to form and join trade unions;
 - (iii) The right to housing;
 - (iv) The right to public health, medical care, social security and social services;
 - (v) The right to education and training;
 - (vi) The right to equal participation in cultural activities;
- (f) The right of access to any place or service intended for use by the general public, such as transport hotels, restaurants, cafes, theatres and parks.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Article 5

In compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in article 2 of this Convention, States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:

- (a) The right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice;

- (b) The right to security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by government officials or by any individual group or institution;
- (c) Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections-to vote and to stand for election-on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service;
- (d) Other civil rights, in particular:
 - (i) The right to freedom of movement and residence within the border of the State;
 - (ii) The right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's country;
 - (iii) The right to nationality;
 - (iv) The right to marriage and choice of spouse;
 - (v) The right to own property alone as well as in association with others;
 - (vi) The right to inherit;
 - (vii) The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
 - (viii) The right to freedom of opinion and expression;
 - (ix) The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association;
- (e) Economic, social and cultural rights, in particular:
 - (i) The rights to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for equal work, to just and favourable remuneration;
 - (ii) The right to form and join trade unions;
 - (iii) The right to housing;
 - (iv) The right to public health, medical care, social security and social services;
 - (v) The right to education and training;
 - (vi) The right to equal participation in cultural activities;
- (f) The right of access to any place or service intended for use by the general public, such as transport hotels, restaurants, cafes, theatres and parks

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