

## Women 2030

### Report on Gender Assessment



The Kyrgyz Republic has undergone significant political and economic changes since 2000, and these changes have undoubtedly had an effect on gender equality outcomes. In 2010, Rosa Otunbayeva was appointed interim president, thereby becoming first female head of state of a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The number of women representatives in the country's parliament has also increased. Considerable attention has been paid to the development of gender equality policy since 2010, although implementation has remained slow.

Since Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991, declining employment opportunities for women has led to increasing difficulties in securing a livelihood or achieving meaningful participation fully in decision making. Cultural practices such as the kidnapping of brides and early marriage for girls persist, despite being increasingly challenged by women's rights non-government organizations. Yet progress can be seen in the passing of a new law in January 2013 which has the effect of equating the abduction of women for marriage with the act of kidnapping under the criminal code, with equivalent penalties.

The Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (2008) establishes the principle of gender equality. The constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, reformed in 2010, guarantees equal rights and opportunities to men and women and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. A national strategy on gender equality for implementation up to 2020 was adopted in June 2012. A government resolution in May 2012 established the National Council for Gender Development, chaired by the deputy prime minister. The council is an advisory body and comprises ministers, deputy ministers, and heads of the oblasts. Implementation of gender policy is coordinated by the gender unit of the Ministry of Labor and Social Development.

Progress has been made in increasing the number of women representatives in the national parliament, with women now making up 24% of its members. This can largely be attributed to 2007 electoral law amendments mandating that membership by either sex cannot fall below 30% of the total. Women make up less than 16% of the deputies of the local representative bodies, and the figures are particularly low in rural areas. Women comprise 40% of all civil servants, but tend to hold non-managerial positions and only in certain ministries and agencies. They hold only 25% of political positions. Women predominate in government offices connected with social policy—e.g., 71.6% of positions in the Ministry of Social Protection and 68.3% in the Ministry of Health, but only 20.3% at the Ministry of Transport and Communication and 29% at the Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>1</sup>

The labor force participation rates in 2010 were 52.3% for women and 76.6% for men<sup>2</sup>. The women's rate is lower than the average for low-income countries but higher than the regional average<sup>3</sup>. However, high rates of male and female labor migration complicate the labor picture. Time management studies show that men spend slightly more time per day in paid employment than women, but women spend three times longer on domestic work and twice as much time on childcare per day than men do. The deterioration of public services has been an important contributing factor to a lowering of economic activity rates for women. In urban areas, just under 30% of children are in preschool education, and the figure is only 6% in rural areas<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gender Analyses, Country Partnership Strategy: Kyrgyz Republic 2013-2017

<sup>2</sup> National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2011. Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2006-2010. Bishkek

<sup>3</sup> World Bank. Forthcoming. Kyrgyz Republic Gender Disparities in Endowments and Access to Economic Opportunities. Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup> Gender Analyses, Country Partnership Strategy: Kyrgyz Republic 2013-2017

In 2017 Kyrgyzstan adopted a new law "On Safeguarding and Protection Against Domestic Violence", a the product of three years of joint advocacy by women's CSOs of the country. The law improves protection measures for survivors and addresses implementation gaps in the previous domestic violence legislation.

## Methodology

Gender assessment was conducted during two periods: from May – July 2017 and November – December 2017, by Rural women's association "Alga" with the support of WECF International and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Netherlands and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Astana.

The survey was conducted in 10 communities of 3 Oblasts of Kyrgyzstan: Aravan raion (Osh oblast), Karakol town and Djety Oguz raion (Ysyk-Kul oblast), Alamedin and Ysyk-Ata raions (Chui oblast). Baseline assessment consisted of two parts: questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGD). In total 923 (643 women and 280 men) respondents participated in the survey, including 740 individually interviewed persons (489 of them women, 251 men) and 183 participants (154 women and 29 men) in 13 focus groups.

Before starting the fieldwork, "Alga" organized workshops for the selection and training of volunteer interviewers and focus group facilitators/assistants in each community. In all the communities, the interviewers were from the same Oblast as their respondents. The interviewers were trained how to conduct the survey through a thorough review of the questionnaire and the focus group questions, along with a detailed explanation of the interview protocol and interview before they faced the respondents.

Interviews using questionnaire were face-to-face interviews conducted by the trained volunteer interviewers. The respondents of these interviews were chosen randomly. Several interviews were conducted in the public places, but mainly they were conducted at home of the respondents. When more family members participated in the survey, the interviews were conducted with each family member individually. In average each interview took 45 minutes, and the focus group itself took 3 hours (with preparation for the discussion, introduction it took 4 hours).

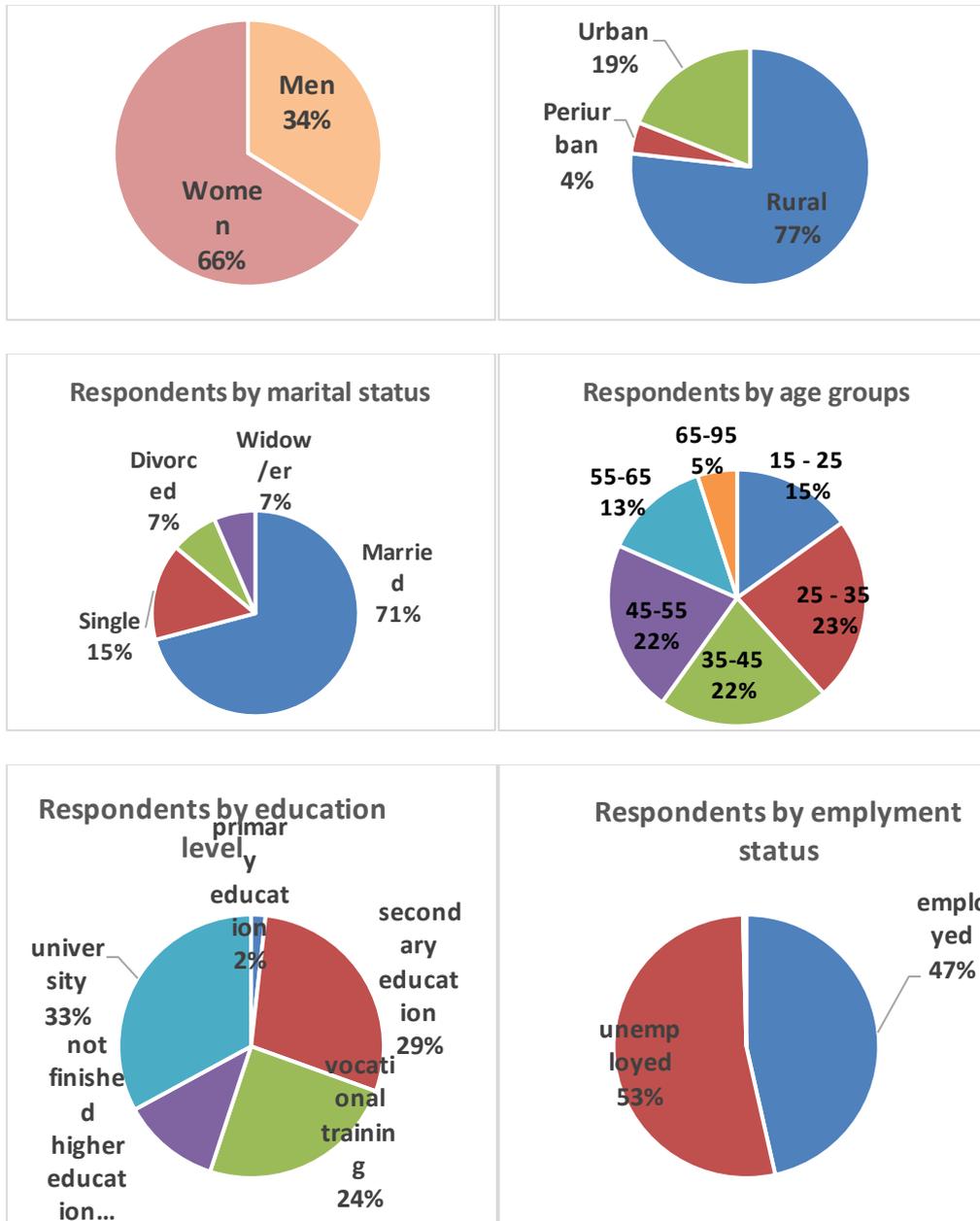
Focus groups contained between 8 and 12 people. The village volunteers invited to the FGD had an active role in their community's public life (nearly 60%). The groups were mixed, but in some occasions male and female respondents were divided in separated groups.

All survey respondents were provided with clear information about the project and the purpose of the survey with the guarantee of absolute confidentiality.

Some survey participants expected money for answering the questionnaire due to companies previously having offered them financial incentive in return for their participation in sociological studies. In general, the gender assessment ran smoothly. Women were very active in both the public discussions and during individual interviews, while men preferred individual interviews to focus group discussions. Actually, this proved that Kyrgyz women are more likely to be actively involved in social and volunteer activities than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, some women did not feel comfortable discussing the questions on sanitation and violence in family in the focus group discussions, though they answered the question

on sanitation in the questionnaire. The questions with rating scale (e.g. Question 2 in the questionnaire) were difficult for some respondents and the interviewers had to dedicate time to explain the scoring.

Figures X-Z summarize the main demographic characteristics (age, education, marital and employment status) of the interviewed population.

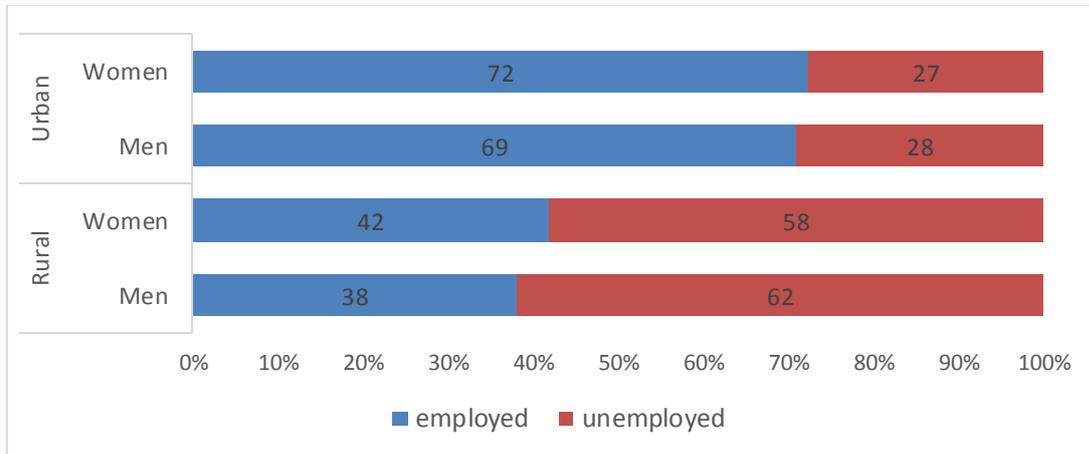


## Discussion – (Questionnaire and focus group discussions)

### General perception of living conditions

The interviews showed a gap between urban and rural areas: Respondents from rural regions, particularly women, are more likely to be dissatisfied with their living conditions in terms of economy, housing, energy, water and sanitation.

The questionnaire interviews showed a gap in employment rates (i.e. paid work) of around 30 % between urban and rural population, the gender gap was very small (<5%) and positive for women.



[Different circumstances influence the gender division on labor in Kyrgyzstan. In rural areas, it depends on the geographical proximity of villages to the capital or raion center, rural infrastructure and especially water supply infrastructure and employment opportunities, among other factors.]

Women from all three oblasts (Ysyk-Kul, Osh and Chui) work mostly in public sectors: education, social and health care. These jobs are financed from the state budget and characterized by lower-wages. Women also work at low-wage seasonal agricultural jobs, as there is the risk that hired work contracts do not adhere to the agreed wages. Alongside their employment, women are still responsible for housework (cooking, cleaning, washing and managing the heating of the household in winter months) and caring for children and elderly family members.

In rural areas, traditional labor division with men responsible for wage work and women for household activities still prevails in Chui and Osh oblasts. However, this is not a case in the Ysyk-Kul Oblast, as it was perceived as normal for women to work and men to take care of house and children, provided it secures a better financial situation for the family.

Cultural factors affect women’s employment. Women from Tajik and Turks ethnic groups are less economically active due to the close community, strong patriarchy, illiteracy or language issues (women do not speak Russian in Alamedin and Ysyk Ara raions of Chui Oblast).

Younger women are primarily responsible for household activities. In general, elderly women have fewer responsibilities at home because they have help from their grown-up children, daughters-in-law or grandchildren. Nevertheless, participants in focus group discussion in Karakol in Ysyk-Kul oblast think that elderly women have more responsibilities at home when their children and daughters-in-law are busy with paid work.

Women, employed or not, spend more time doing unpaid housework. The interviews in a FGD in Vinogradnoe village (Alamedin, Chui oblast) discussed the responsibilities of women and men in

households and calculated that women work around 12-14 hours per day, while men around 7 hours per day. They think that urban women have less unpaid working hours.

Corruption and nepotism influence women's employment prospects. Even in the private sector, friends and relatives of management have easier access to better-paid positions. Respondents from Alamedin in Chui Oblast reported that women without personal connections also work as empty boxes collectors, collectors of used tires and garbage cleaners.

Men's labor migration to Russia burdens women with the entirety of the household management, including housework, cattle breeding and crops cultivation and plant work. Under these circumstances, women are widely accepted as the head of household with control and responsibility for all domestic matters.

The infrastructure in rural areas greatly affects the overall quality of life and the gender division of labor among Kyrgyz population. FGD participants identified the water supply and sanitation infrastructure as a crucial issue and pointed out that their limited access to safe and sufficient water for consumption and agriculture compromises their livelihood and well-being. Additionally, poor water supply systems in rural areas broadens the gender gap in housework, as women have to cope with additional housework chores, such as the fetching and treating of water. Lack of a proper water supply and sanitation is also one of the main reasons for migration of population from rural areas (especially in Ysyk-Ata raion).

While both men and women Kyrgyz rural areas have access to resources, men are in charge of them. Men have access to and usually full control over all productive and natural resources. Women are engaged in work on the family's land and other property but only men can own it owing to the discriminatory inheritance laws. Only men have the ability to inherit property, and within families comprising solely of female descendents, the eventual beneficiary must still be male, e.g. grandson (Chui and Ysyk-Kul oblasts). Male descendants are a priori accepted as the only heirs (Aravan, Osh oblast).

Women's access to and control of household financial resources considerably depend on local sociocultural practices but also on women's engagement in paid work. Our interviewees in all three Oblasts (Chui, Ysyk-Kul and Osh) indicated that employed women in rural area have access to and some control over household's financial resources. They can participate in decision-making but cannot decide alone on the use of the resources, especially when it comes to significant purchases which requires consultation with either their husband or other family members. Unemployed women and women belonging to some religious and ethnic groups, such as Uzbek and Dungan (Aravan, Osh oblast and Karakol, Ysyk-Kul oblast), have neither control over household resources nor a voice in the decision on household spending. These women may earn some decision-making power over economic resources after years of dedication and contribution to their family's well-being (Aravan, Osh oblast).

Women in all 3 Oblasts direct most spending toward education, health and domestic needs, while men tend allocate money for the purchasing of equipment, techniques, cattle, etc. to increase revenues.

Young couples/families that live with their parents have limited access and control over household financial resources. Elders are in charge of household finances and control family's spending. Young participants of the FGD from Karakol (Ysyk Kul oblast) judge this not only to be fair, but also generally more favourable for all the family, as their parents are likely to be more experienced in dealing with family's finances.

Our FGD participants think that urban Kyrgyz women have more access to and control over economic and financial resources because they are more emancipated than rural women.

All the family have access to food but men are favoured. Our respondents In Alamedin (Chui Oblast) indicated that there is a tendency to reserve the better food and larger portions for the men in the family as they usually have more labor intensive jobs such as construction or agriculture.

Both the issue of scarce water resources resulting in limited access to water for both drinking and irrigation and the limited arable land for agricultural activities generated emotional discussion among the participants. They stressed the need for better infrastructure and improved water and land resource management.

### 3 Recognition of differentiated needs and interests of women and men regarding water and sanitation

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#### Questionnaire results:

In general, women's and men's responses were similar. While most women from urban region (93%) responded as saying they had access to decent sanitation and hygiene conditions and that were able to wash and change in privacy during the last menstrual period at home, one fourth of our rural female respondents judged (perceived) the sanitation and hygiene conditions at home to be unsatisfactory. Most women from both regions responded to have bad sanitation and hygiene conditions at work. Interestingly, 35 % of women from rural and 66% from urban regions either could not give a simple answer for this question or answered that they had never used the toilets at work (e.g. seasonal jobs), answering the question with "I don't know".

Only 4% of the urban and 12% of the rural respondents think that their daughters have decent sanitation and hygiene conditions at school and that they were able to wash and change in privacy in school during their last menstrual period. Most our respondents from rural area (61%) think they are inadequate?. Again, many were not aware of the sanitation and hygiene conditions within the schools: 54% respondents from urban and 27 % from rural areas.

The limited access to or even the complete absence of a safe water supply and adequate sanitation systems in Kyrgyz rural areas disproportionately affects the lives of women and girls. This is not only in how it creates the additional burden of collecting and treating water but also in regard to the serious health consequences related to the specific hygiene needs of women during menstruation period and pregnancy. Discussing these women's needs was not an easy question for our interviewees. Women felt uncomfortable to speak about their specific hygiene needs and related issues even though they were separated from male participants in separate groups. Some of our female interviewees from Karakol, (Ysyk-Kul oblast) said that they feel embarrassed by menstruation but they can not change that feeling. They are all aware of the detrimental consequences that a lack of water and inadequate access to toilets and showers can have on their health. Men are not concerned about the different needs of women and men regarding water and sanitation. The community does understand the specific hygiene needs of women and the necessity for improved water and sanitation facilities, but there have been no visible efforts to address these needs.

Our female interviewees opened up about their unpleasant experiences resulting from the lack water supply and sanitation. They brought to light that there is not only an absence of a domestic water supply and canalization infrastructure, but often there is even an absence of toilet facilities in public places (Aravan, Osh oblast). Public toilets or pit-latrines are not safe and often lack door-locks or even doors themselves. Standards within schools are just as substandard, with girls having to return home between classes to change pads or resorting to using the same pad throughout the whole day.

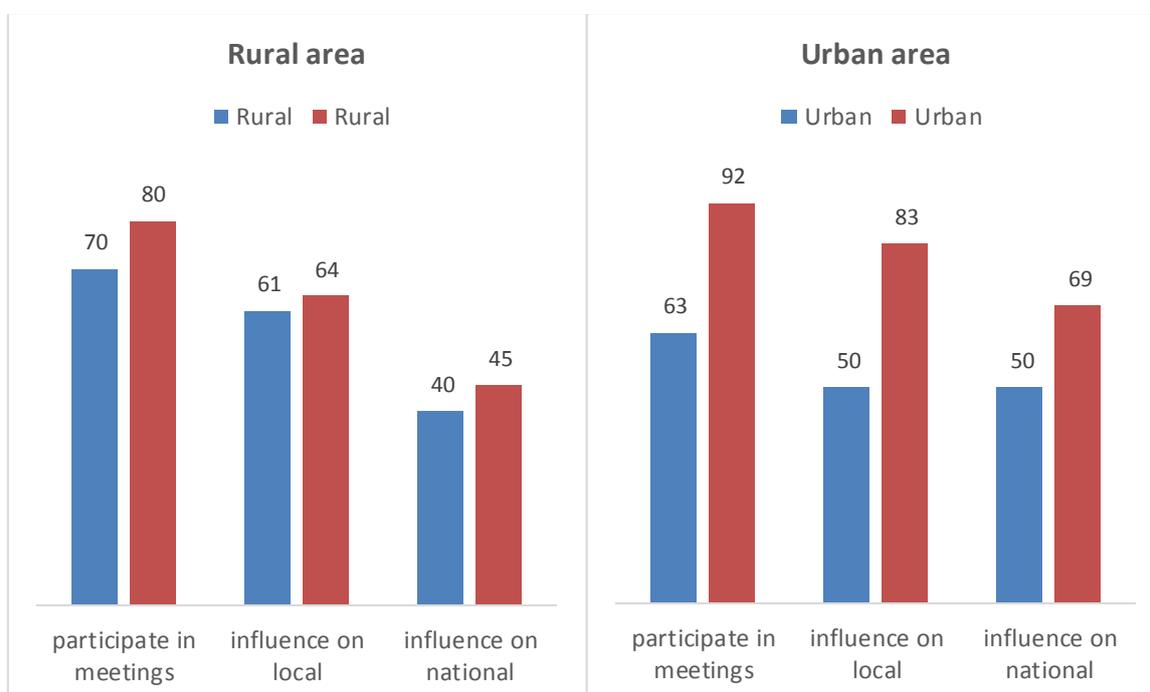
Sanitary conditions can vary greatly between neighbouring villages. Women from Maevka village reported no problems with their water supply and sanitation conditions. While in the nearby village Tendik, women have to bring fresh water from the neighbouring villages and have to cope with poor hygienic conditions, especially during the summer months.

Women engaged in seasonal field work face problems in discretely managing their menstruation periods as they lack private areas to change. Staying home is not an option as menstruation is a taboo topic. Some interviewees from Ysyk-Ata (Chui oblast) and Aravan (Osh oblast) shared that during Soviet time they had access to tents as private changing rooms with facilities to wash their hands. They are disappointed by the worsening conditions.

Commercial menstrual products are available in all shops and pharmacies, but the good quality products are often unaffordable for many women and girls. Therefore, many women use a piece of cloth instead of pads, which they can wash and reuse. Muslim women use piece of cloth for religious reasons, and so in these communities they do not purchase and sell any menstrual hygiene products (Ysyk-Ata, Chui oblast). Women from Ysyk-Kul and Chui oblasts that use commercial menstrual pads and stated that they often dispose their used pads via burning.

## Questionnaire results:

The questionnaire interviews showed that most women (i.e. 80% in rural and 92% in urban areas) are or think that women are engaged in community/neighborhood activities. A high percentage of women in urban regions think that Kyrgyz women have influence on political/decision-making processes on local (83%) and national levels (69%). These numbers are lower for the interviewed women from rural regions, but still 64 % of women think that they have influence on decision-making on local and 45% on national level. On the other hand, men remain unconvinced of the participation and influence of women on decision-making on all levels. Around half of urban male interviewees think that women have influence on political/decision-making processes. Our rural male interviewees think that women participate in community activities (70%), but less on decision-making processes on local (61%) and national level (40%).



While female respondents of questionnaire-based interviews think that they have decision-making power, especially on the community/neighborhood level and local level, all the FGD participants agreed that the decision-making power is predominately held by men and the influence of women is very limited.

The question of decision-making power of women within the family sphere is closely connected to their age, employment status or religious/customary norms and practices. The father or husband is usually considered the head of family and makes all major decisions. Elders, being men or women, have an important voice in family decisions because they “deserved” it through their dedication to the family over years. Especially the mother of husband has considerable authority in the family and over her daughter-in-law (Ysyk-Ata, Chui oblast). Youths, on the other hand, are often unwillingly subject to the family rules guided by the elder’s decisions (Karakol, Ysyk-Kul oblast). Employed women contribute to decision making within the household if she earns; the greater her income, the greater her influence

(Aravan, Osh oblast). In general, the families with working women and more educated families tend to be more equal in decision-making (Alamedin, Chui oblast).

Religious and customary practices have a powerful influence on women's lives in some ethnic groups. In Alamedin (Chui oblast, predominantly Muslim), religion does not allow women to participate in public life or in decision-making processes in general. Their religion dictates a certain dress code for women, so our young interviewees from Alamedin shared that they feel uncomfortable both when they have to dress according to their religious practices in the capital or when they do not dress traditionally in the villages where they live. Some youths from religious communities in the South (Aravan, Osh oblast) appear to resist oppressive expectations and deny the authority of their parents, believing that they are guided by Allah in all their decisions.

Men are more active in community meetings and public life. While their participation is most welcome and encouraged, women are often not informed about the community activities. Women from Aravan (Osh oblast) highlighted that the number of female activists who participate in public hearings or other local meetings has only been decreasing over the years. Among the most active female activists in rural areas are those of the age group 45 – 65 years in all three oblasts. Sometimes the citizens are not well informed about the local activities. The FGD participants from Ysyk-Ata (Chui oblast) shared that they had not been informed regarding a community public hearing held one month prior, and not even regarding the outcomes and decisions for the village's budget from this hearing.

Men hold the decision-making positions in economic and political spheres. Women participate in decision-making positions only in the social sphere, such as education and health care sectors, in which they are largely employed. In political sphere, women are underrepresented. Our interviewees felt responsible for that because, even when they have a chance to support a female political representative, they vote as their family heads tell them to, and not for a woman the majority of the time (Alamedin, Chui oblast; Aravan, Osh oblast).

Our FGD participants from the southern Oblast, which is considered more patriarchal, shared their experiences and discussed the issue of domestic violence openly. While in the northern Oblast, women spoke more indirectly, referring to the experience of their friends, neighborhood or relatives, but never saying that they experienced family violence themselves.

The most common types of domestic violence are emotional and economic forms. The most vulnerable are women, young or elder (Ysyk-Ata, Alamedin, Chui oblast). Men play a dominant role in Kyrgyz rural families and women are expected to obey them. Most women respect their husband's authority and over the years become desensitized to their husbands' yelling and humiliation (Aravan, Osh oblast). They even resort to finding excuses for their husbands' behavior (Ysyk-Ata, Chui oblast). Younger women are exposed to emotional abuse not only by men but also by their mothers-in-law (Alamedin, Chui oblast).

The fact is that although the community is aware of domestic violence, they remain silent on the issue. Our interviewees shared that neighbors do not intervene even when they hear or see the signs of physical abuse as it is considered a private, family matter (Alamedin, Chui oblast). Women often feel ashamed and guilty to share their experience of domestic abuse. Complaining about family violence is not socially acceptable. Divorce is not an option. A woman's own family may even ostracize her, if she begins such proceedings (Aravan, Osh oblast), this often means that the only option left is to stay with their abusive husband. It appears that husbands also resort to threats to coerce their partners into silence. A participant described one such case, when a woman filed an official complaint to the police regarding her husband's physical abuse. She was forced to retract complaint as her husband threatened to kill her sister (Alamedin, Chui oblast).

Religious or sociocultural norms and practices exacerbate discrimination and violence against women. In religious families, women are forced to wear religious clothing or hijabs and to make Namahz five times a day etc. (Ysyk-Ata, Chui oblast). Often, young people only have Islamic marriage (Nikah), without an additional legal civil marriage ceremony. This leaves women outside the protections of the law in case of divorce. This is in fact the exact intention behind avoiding the civil ceremony: if a man doesn't like his wife after a year of marriage, he can easily break off the religious marriage and leave her without any rights (Aravan, Osh oblast). Families, being religious or not, encourage or even force their daughters to get married because of social (i.e. religious or social obligation) or economic (i.e. as an economic survival strategy) reasons. The young women are obliged to accept all the conditions of marriage proposals. In some cases they are forced to leave school prematurely, involuntarily wear hijab, or, simply, to behave as the family of their husbands wants them to (Aravan, Osh oblast).

Poverty is also one of the drivers for violent behavior. If men are unemployed or face poverty-stricken conditions, they are likely to perpetrate violence. Women suggest that the frustration at their lack of income and subsequent substance abuse lies behind their violent behavior. Poverty triggers emotional abuse among youths too, with young people judging or bullying their peers because of the clothing they wear (Karakol, Ysyk-Kul oblast).

The major problem underpinning the violence in rural Kyrgyz families is the lacking knowledge regards their legal rights. Women are unaware of which institution is responsible for dealing with a domestic abuse complaint. Moreover, they are not willing to defend their rights and go against the customary

norms as they doubt that the legal authorities would protect them at all. In Aravan (Osh oblast), there is a “crisis center” in the building of the district administration where women can ask for a protection and seek refuge from abuse, but it is consistently underused. The dismissive / unresponsive response from local authorities is a major deterrent to women speaking out against domestic abuse. In that regard, a participant of a FDG in Aravan (Osh oblast) shared a story about young divorced mother’s migration to Russia for a job, leaving her two daughters (7 and 10 years old) with her parents. In the south of Kyrgyzstan, it is customary to send children to religious families to enable them to learn Islam, and the grandparents followed this custom with the two girls. During a visit to grandparents, the girls revealed that husband of their teacher sexually assaulted them on occasions. The grandmother took the girls to a gynecologist for assessment, this action was met with extreme disapproval from the community. To avoid unwanted publicity, the legal authority within the community dismissed the case brought forward suggesting that the girls invented the behavior.

## 6 Status of Men and Women in Law

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Women and men are materially equal in law but in reality the application of the laws is far from achieving this equality. Discrimination against women start at their birth owing to the traditional desire for a son rather than a daughter, (Aravan, Osh oblast). Tradition dictates that families celebrate the birth of a child with various rituals. The celebrations are subject to what the family can afford, in some cases a family’s budget can only cover the expense of hosting a small gathering of close relatives. Owing to these expenses families often begrudge the birth of a daughter.

Our female FGD participants do not feel protected by the law. They highlighted that women suffer legal inequality in regard to the areas of domestic violence, employment opportunity and access to economic resources.

Customary laws, such as early marriage, unregistered civil marriage, limited or no access to education and inheritance practices governing the access to economic resources continue to dictate women’s lives. In effect, these laws infringe women’s rights. To illustrate, a woman from Alamedin (Chui oblast) shared a story of a young Tajik girl from Vasyl’evka who was married at age 15. She gave birth when she was 16, and owing to the fact that the mother was then underage her child could not obtain a birth certificate.

Discriminatory customary laws govern the right of women in case of divorce. Our interviewees think that the current state of the law fails to protect them as all the power in the country is in the hands of men (Karakol, Ysyk-Kul oblast). Women are likely to stay in unwanted marriages, so as not to lose their rights in the household or child custody as these rights are typically vested in the husband. Additionally, men often register property, cars or equipment their parent’s or unmarried siblings’ name, so as to circumvent any rights their wife may have in this property upon divorce (Ysyk-Ata, Chui oblast). One participant explained that following a conflict with her husband’s family she faced eviction. Fearing she could lose her rights in and her contributions to the family property, the woman was forced to apologise despite her innocence in the matter, (Aravan, Osh oblast).

Polygamy is illegal in Kyrgyzstan but only on paper. Women may accept the status as a second or third wife to a wealthy man for economical or sociocultural reasons. Our interviewees think that wealthy officials and members of the parliament, who have several wives, have built a strong lobby to protect and promote polygamy unions. They further promote polygamy by exerting influencing on young or

divorced women, encouraging them to become the second or third wife of a Kyrgyz man rather than marry foreigners, such as Chinese or Turks.

Widespread corruption not only obstructs economic development of the villages but also hinders the application of law. A participant of FGD in Ysyk-Ata (Chui oblast) said that a wealthy farmer in his village built a farm and other facilities as sauna, big garden and kymyz camp. He built an irrigation channel for his properties from the water supply system of the village, in doing so he has the power to close off the water supply to the village when he requires. People protested and filed a complaint to the local government, yet the charge was unsuccessful owing to his prominent connections within the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Women in Kyrgyzstan are not aware of the Family Code and other actual laws which act to protect their rights and interests. Moreover, they fear that their request for legal protection could lead to family separation or emotional, economic and physical violence (Ysyk-Ata, Chui oblast). Our interviewees called for the publication of success stories from those who had successfully accessed legal protection, suggesting that this would motivate women to take more control over their lives (Aravan, Osh oblast). They also called upon the state to improve how it informs the public regards women's rights and its protection.

Vulnerable groups and the level of vulnerability vary within the Kyrgyz rural community depending on various social, cultural, economic and environmental factors. Poverty is a major contributor to vulnerability. Women and children, young families without access to land or income, female-headed households, households with many children, elders that do not contribute to income, single elders of the Russian-speaking population, and people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

Houses marketed at around \$20-25000 are unaffordable by Kyrgyz standards. Families with many children and elders, young families or divorced women do not have the means for such prices.

Divorced women or widows with children are highly vulnerable to poverty. It is very hard for them to get a social help from the state because of corruption in administration (Aravan, Osh oblast). These families suffer from health issues due to malnutrition and poor living conditions and their children are often constrained to work at early age. To illustrate, a FGD participant shared her own experience: her husband died and the family of her husband expelled her and her children from the home. She had to rent an apartment because her relatives lived in Uzbekistan. Her young children were compelled to work as the family faced extreme poverty.

Migrant workers usually send a part of their earnings to their families to provide them with decent living conditions (Karakol, Ysyk-Kul oblast). Nevertheless, in some villages, a man that sends money to his wife is considered weak, so he sends the money to his parents or relatives. Our interviewees told us that a child died of malnutrition and anemia because his father was sending the money to the sister, who then did not pass it to the mother of the child that was in need. It can emerge on their return from Russia, that husbands have found new wives.

Our FGD participants in Chui Oblast indicated female farmers as a vulnerable group. They have limited access to water supply for land irrigation because men in the village control water resources and decide on the priorities of water provision.

Persons with disabilities, as well as their families, have fewer work opportunities and are therefore vulnerable to poverty. They are also exposed to discriminatory behavior on part of the community and officials. A participant in FDG in Aravan (Osh oblast.) told us a story of a girl with a disability who was not even issued a birth certificate. She lived in a boarding school and she was an exemplary student. Nevertheless, she was forced to end her formal education due to her lack of personal documents. Moreover, upon leaving the boarding school she was left homeless. Public Fund "Mehr Shavkat" represented the girl, and helped her obtain formal documents and secure a donor to support her in her higher education.

### How can we further improve equality between women and men?

The participants were asked to rank possible initiatives which would improve equality between women and men in their community/neighborhood. The respondents from both the rural and urban regions identified introducing pre-school for children 3-5 years old and securing women's legal entitlement to official marriage/divorce papers as being the highest priorities.

