

**World Bank
Counterpart Consortium Kyrgyzstan**

Consultations with the Poor

**Participatory Poverty Assessment in the Kyrgyz Republic
For the World Development Report 2000/01**

**NATIONAL SYNTHESIS REPORT
THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**



Bishkek, August 1999

The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent.

Preface

This study is part of a global research effort entitled *Consultations with the Poor*, designed to inform the *World Development Report 2000/1 on Poverty and Development*. The research involved poor people in twenty-three countries around the world. The effort also included two comprehensive reviews of Participatory Poverty Assessments completed in recent years by the World Bank and other agencies. Deepa Narayan, Principal Social Development Specialist in the World Bank's Poverty Group, initiated and led the research effort.

The global *Consultations with the Poor* is unique in two respects. It is the first large scale comparative research effort using participatory methods to focus on the voices of the poor. It is also the first time that the World Development Report is drawing on participatory research in a systematic fashion. Much has been learned in this process about how to conduct Participatory Poverty Assessments on a major scale across countries so that they have policy relevance. Findings from the country studies are already being used at the national level, and the methodology developed by the study team is already being adopted by many others.

We want to congratulate the network of 23 country research teams who mobilized at such short notice and completed the studies within six months. We also want to thank Deepa Narayan and her team: Patti Petesch, Consultant, provided overall coordination; Meera Kaul Shah, Consultant, provided methodological guidance; Ulrike Erhardt provided administrative assistance; and the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex provided advisory support. More than a hundred colleagues within the World Bank also contributed greatly by identifying and supporting the local research teams. Anis Dani and Nora Dudwick helped to adapt the study methodology and provide guidance to the research teams from Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The study would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), numerous departments within the World Bank, the Swedish International Development Agency, John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and several NGOs.

The completion of these studies in a way is just the beginning. We must now ensure that the findings lead to follow-up action to make a difference in the lives of the poor.

Michael Walton
Director, Poverty Group &
Chief Economist, Human Development

Ravi Kanbur
Director,
World Development Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
1. Summary of Main Trends and Conclusions	
1.1. Poverty: Well-Being Definition and Trends.....	14
1.2. Priorities of the Poor.....	15
1.3. Institutional Analysis.....	15
1.4. Summary of Gender Issues.....	16
1.5. Summary and Conclusions.....	17
2. Background	
2.1. Purpose of the Study	19
2.2. Methods and Procedure.....	19
2.3. Overall Process of the Study.....	20
2.4. Selection of Informants for Focus Group Discussions and Individual Interviews...	20
2.5. Schedule of Fieldwork.....	21
2.6. Selection of Sites.....	22
2.7. Main Geographic and Social Characteristics of Sites.....	23
2.8. Number of Groups and Individuals Studied by Site.....	31
Table 2.9 (a): Number of Focus Groups by Site.....	31
Table 2.9 (b): Number of Focus Group Participants by Site.....	32
Table 2.9 (c): Number of Individual Informants.....	32
3. Perception of Poverty: Well Being Definition and Trends	
3.1. Local Terminology and Definition of Well-Being.....	33
3.2. Cause and Effect Analysis.....	44
3.3. Safety Guarantees.....	53
3.4. Opportunities, Social and Economic Mobility.....	57
3.5. Social Exclusion.....	61
3.6. Social Cohesion, Conflict, and Crime.....	62
3.7. Coping Strategies.....	67
4. Priorities of the Poor	
4.1. Problems Common for Rural and Urban Areas.....	71
4.2. Problems and Priorities of the Urban Poor.....	77
4.3. Priorities of the Rural Poor.....	78
4.4. Recent Changes in Problems and Priorities.....	83
5. Institutional Analysis	
5.1. Institutional Profile of the Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.....	85
5.2. Institutions that Play an Important Role in Lives of People.....	88
5.3. Assessment of Local Institutions.....	93
5.4. Control and Influence over Institutions.....	99
5.5. Coping with Crisis.....	101
6. Gender Relations	
6.1. Changes in Position of Women as Compared with the Soviet Past.....	107
6.2. Responsibilities of Men and Women Within the Household.....	109

6.3. Responsibilities of Women on a Community Level.....	114
6.4. Participation of Men and Women in Decision Making on a Household Level.....	115
6.5. Participation of Men and Women in Decision Making on a Community Level...	116
6.6. Abuse of Women’s Rights on a Household Level.....	117
6.7. Abuse of Women’s Rights on a Community Level.....	118
6.8. Women’s Perception of their Increased/Decreased Power.....	120
7. Conclusions and Observations.....	124
Annexes	
Annex I. Summary Results on Well-Being.....	130
Annex II. Summary Results on Priorities of the Poor.....	140
Annex III. Summary Results on Institutional Analysis.....	144
Annex IV. Figure 1. Location of Kyrgyzstan among Asian countries.....	146
Figure 2. Map of Kyrgyzstan with Sites Studied.....	147

Executive Summary

Background

The participatory poverty assessment in the Kyrgyz Republic, *Consultations with the Poor*, is a part of a larger 23-country study initiated by the World Bank.¹ Its purpose is to enable poor people to contribute their experiences with the *World Development Report 2000/01* (WDR). Using participatory and qualitative methods, the study goes beyond economic measures of well-being to highlight poverty's multidimensional aspects. Data was gathered in the field by local research teams without being filtered through the lens of outside experts.

The qualitative study on the perceptions of the poor was conducted in the Kyrgyz Republic between March 15 and May 15, 1999. The study was conducted in nine sites in the three poorest oblasts of the country, Naryn, Jalal-Abad and Talas, as well as in the capital city of Bishkek.² Building upon the country's local capacity, fifteen researchers from the national NGO, Counterpart-Kyrgyzstan, were trained in participatory poverty assessment methodology. PPA methodology is not just a tool for assisting outsiders to learn more about the realities of the poor, but also a process which enables poor people to reflect upon and analyze with other members of their community relevant issues affecting their daily lives. As a participatory method, PPA also has the potential to encourage problem-solving at the local level.

Through the assistance of grassroots NGO affiliates, the team of researchers conducted field interviews and focus groups with a total of 1,100 people. Approximately 100 people in each community took part in the study. They were either self-selected or were asked to participate, depending on the circumstances. Although they do not constitute a representative sample, the study found that their views demonstrated considerable consensus and consistency. Upon completion of interviews and focus groups at each site, the research team presented its findings to the community for further discussion and feedback. The Country Synthesis Report, which summarizes findings from all the sites, will be presented to the government, donor community, academic community, and others in July 1999.

The study gathered information on four sets of issues:

- (1) **Well-being and trends over time** (including security, risk, vulnerability, exclusion, opportunity, and crime and conflict),
- (2) **Priority problems and concerns** (including unemployment, wage arrears, asset depletion, status of social services and other entitlements, access to productive resources and economic opportunities),
- (3) **Institutional analysis** (including institutional responsibility for maintenance of social assets and delivery of social services; information about functions, entitlements from, and rules set by public institutions; trust, confidence, and evaluations of the effectiveness of different institutions, including government, NGO, informal, and market institutions), and
- (4) **Changes in gender relations** at the household and community levels.

¹ The global study is being managed by the Poverty Group in PREM at the World Bank and is led by Deepa Narayan, Principal Social Development Specialist. The Kyrgyz Study was implemented by ECSSD's Social Scientist, Nora Dudwick, and Kathleen Kuehnast, consulting social scientist.

² The three regional sites were selected based upon the "Update on Poverty in the Kyrgyz Republic," February, 1999.

Summary of Findings

Participants' perceptions about well-being, and trends over time

Informants of all regions believe that the incidence and depth of poverty has increased substantially in the past ten years. Informants stated that during the Soviet period there was no category such as “the very rich.” The proportion of “rich” was much smaller than now, the “middle class” was much larger, and the “poor” accounted for a very small percentage of population. The participants believe that relations between people exemplified the Soviet ideology of egalitarianism. This ideology constrained people from earning more than others or openly displaying wealth.

The criteria for being labeled “rich” have significantly changed in the past several years. In the past, the primary characteristics of the “rich” included: power, prestigious jobs, powerful relatives and important connections. Among the current criteria that characterize the “rich,” informants listed: money, livestock, private firms, two-story houses, foreign cars, hired workers and servants. For the rural informants, livestock, land, agricultural equipment, and the ability to hire workers constitute the main criteria of wealth today. Many informants labeled the “extreme poor” as slaves (“kul” in Kyrgyz; “raby” in Russian), with the implication that they have become enslaved by rich masters.

An 18-year old informant of At Bashi village in Naryn Oblast said that most members of her community are somehow or other involved in trade: the wealthy go to Russia and buy high quality clothes and food there for re-sale, less wealthy traders go to China for goods of lower quality, average women traders go to Bishkek, and the poorest of the traders buy small items in the town of Naryn and re-sell in their home village.

Most informants agree that during the Soviet period, the vast majority of people were “middle class.” Currently, the size of the “middle class” is decreasing. Formerly, this category was represented by white-collar workers and professionals (teachers, doctors, civil servants, and others), who had permanent jobs, stable wages, houses, and the ability to provide their children with a university education. The middle class was characterized by the informants as a guarantor of stability in society, and that its absence, in their opinion, causes increased social tension and creates preconditions for social unrest. With this in mind, informants often emphasized peace and tolerance as the top priorities in their daily lives.

“Those who don’t feel sorry about collapse of the Soviet Union have no heart, but those who think that it may be restored have no brain.”
(An elderly informant from At Bashi village, Naryn region)

The Soviet times appear to be synonymous with a sense of well-being, while post-Soviet times represent ill-being. This viewpoint was shared by a majority of the informants. The informants identified that one of the most definitive differences between the Soviet and Post-Soviet situation is that now there is a total lack of permanent jobs. In addition to people attempting to piecemeal making a living, the delays in the small pensions due to some families are at least three to six months delayed.

Inequality has increased; the gap between the rich and the poor is widening at a rapid rate. According to the informants, the market economy is good for the rich and bad for the

poor. The ability to pay for educational and health services is another important difference between the rich and poor. Many families are not prepared, nor do they have the savings, to pay for these formerly no-cost social services. In that education and health is highly valued, many informants feel quite hopeless about their current predicament.

“Poverty is also caused by the lack of law and order and the lack of equality. It looks like laws are written for the poor only, and the rich do whatever they please. People aren’t equal. The rich and the poor don’t like each other and don’t associate with each other.”

(A 22-year old man from Kok Yangak town, Jalal Abad region)

“It’s very difficult to gain wealth by honest work. Usually, people make their fortune by dishonest means. For instance, there are several two-story houses in our village. Their owners have high positions in the region center and in the capital city. My family and I work from morning till night, and what we earn by such hard work is just enough to have decent living standards. This hard manual work costs us our health.”

(A 44-year old woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Urmaral village, Bakay Ata district of Talas region)

The privatization of the collective farms and state industries is given by the participants as one of the key reasons for poverty today. The participants also noted that no one was prepared for the economic transition, since during the Soviet period everyone was guaranteed a job, as well as timely payment of pensions and benefits.

Participant’s perceptions of the causes of poverty

Poverty, according to the informants, has been caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union; privatization of collective farms and state industries; misdirected agrarian policy; unemployment; unfavorable tax law; high prices; lack of agricultural equipment; lack of sales markets; failure to pay pensions and social benefits in a timely manner; natural disasters; undeveloped banking system; and inadequate law enforcement mechanisms. In addition, the informants named alcoholism, ignorance, inability of people to solve their own problems, laziness, lack of basic knowledge in business or agribusiness and previous history of poverty in the family as other factors contributing to the incidence of poverty.

According to the informants of Naryn region, among the causes of poverty are a lack of arable land, severe climate, and the residents’ lack of aptitude for trade. Naryn is located in a high mountainous region, where winter is long and severe, arable land is scarce, and very few kinds of agricultural products can be grown. According to Naryn informants, transition to the market economy has been very difficult for them, because they have no history of the market and trading.

In the Talas region, the participants identified the causes of poverty as unemployment and wage arrears, lack of electricity, and the inadequate performance of customs offices on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border. Residents of Talas region have been selling their agricultural products in the town of Taraz (Jambul region of the neighboring Kazakhstan) for the last fifty years. Currently, there is a lack of awareness among the local residents about customs requirements, such as the requirement to provide quality certificates for food transported across the border. Another problem that participants perceived as related to their poverty is the

customs officers' abuse of their power (bribery). As a result, many people can not go to the market of Taraz. In the village of Beisheke, the inadequate and costly power supply was given as the primary problem facing the poor. This problem is especially important since most of the community members use electric heaters in winter.

The three sites of Jalal Abad region proved to be different than other sites studied. For example, Kok Yangak (Suzak district) was a town of miners supported and supplied with high quality products and goods directly from Moscow. Currently, the infrastructure of the town has collapsed, and in January 1999, the town was transferred to the administrative supervision of Suzak district. Residents of Kok Yangak believe that the primary reason of their current poverty is the collapse of the USSR that entailed liquidation of companies, isolation, lack of law and order, growing crime rate, divorces, and drug problems.

Since 1990, the village of Achy (Suzak district of Jalal Abad region) has been devastated by landslides and mudslides. In 1994, 10 families were killed by a landslide. Following this disaster, it was decided to move the village. Some of the residents built new houses in the valley, but others returned to the mountains. Since natural disasters present a constant threat for Achy, informants from this community believe that their poverty is caused primarily by repeated mudslides and landslides and the need to move to other areas where conditions are inadequate for livestock herding, thus they must switch their livelihood from herding to agriculture.

Tash Bulak village (Bazak Korgon district of Jalal Abad region) suffers from lack of drinking water and very high taxes on non-irrigated, barren land. The village is also populated by refugees from Tajikistan who believe that their poverty is caused by not only being war refugees, but also by natural disasters, lack of drinking water, infertile land, and a severe climate. Among effects of poverty, the informants of this site named hunger which, in their opinion, is a real threat for 95% of the community, and diseases which have become more frequent in the past ten years.

Among the poor in the capital city of Bishkek many live in newly created districts (e.g., Archa Beishik) that have been constructed and are now populated by migrants from rural areas. These districts have the worst infrastructure in the city. Basic facilities such as water pipeline, electric power line, schools, shops, and health care centers are either absent or in disrepair. Roads are in very poor condition, and public transportation is inadequate or non-existent. Informants of these Bishkek sites do not participate in public life of the town, because most of them live in newly constructed districts and are not officially registered as permanent resident of Bishkek. Even though these people live in a town with a developed network of institutions, their access to the institutions is limited. Most of these people have left their home villages and thus lost their access to land and possibility to do agricultural work; having moved to the town with many educational institutions, they can not afford university education. Many of the poor of Bishkek belong neither to the rural or urban areas, and have neither land nor educational opportunities. Many of them work in the informal sector for very low wages, sell goods in the streets, and do a variety of work that does not require special qualification.

Priorities of the poor

The most acute problems for the urban and rural poor are unemployment or the lack of steady employment, wage and pension arrears, land distribution problems, lack of access to education, and unavailability of credit. For most of the informants, the lack of cash is also

a critical issue. Unemployment is seen as one of the main factors contributing to social isolation of the poor. In general, the informants see no way out of the current crisis.

“Poverty is caused by poor crops, unemployment, and lack of money. As a result, people steal, rob, and even kill.”

(Middle-aged men from Kenesh village, Talas region)

“I’ve been working in this mine for 27 years and I had some property, but sold it all when they stopped paying us. All we have in our house now are 2 beds with mattresses, and my wife and son are hungry all the time”.

(Volodya, a 47 year old miner, Kok Yangak town of Jalal Abad region)

The lack of drinking water is a major priority of the urban and rural poor. Water channels built in the Soviet times are in serious disrepair, and most residents of the rural areas suffer from lack of drinking water. People have to retrieve water from local springs or rivers near their villages. In the urban areas, the water is not supplied to the new districts, so people have to go a long distance to retrieve their daily water needs.

“Our problem is water, both drinking and irrigation. There is no water for people, no water for animals. We were lucky to have a rainy month. We use snow water and rainwater, and the animals drink out of puddles. Irrigation water would not be supplied until June.”

(Focus group from Tash Bulak, Jalal-Abad Oblast)

“There is no drinking water. We use rainwater or buy water at 30 som per ton. We had to sell our cattle and sheep to build a house. The land here is bad, and we have to weed many times. There is no irrigation water, and irrigation service costs 60 som per hectare of land.”

(Aidana apa, Achy, Jalal-Abad Oblast)

“We did have such problems in the past, too, but they were resolved by the collective farms. For instance, it was the responsibility of collective farm to supply drinking water to people, so they could work and didn’t have to think about these things.”

(A middle-aged woman from Achy, Jalal-Abad Oblast)

High taxes are another problem for the rural and urban informants. According to many of the poor, taxes are one of the factors that undermine well-being and hinder their attempts to cope with the crisis.

“It has been 12 years since we first began to ask the authorities to alter our land tax to reflect our situation. For example, our land is not irrigated, except on the paper. It used to be irrigated more than ten years ago, when it belonged to a herding farm. But there is no farm, no irrigation water, no drinking water, even -- yet we still have to pay taxes as if this land is irrigated. The rate of the tax for irrigated land is three times as high as for non-irrigated.”

(A young man from the village of Tash Bulak, Jalal-Abad Oblast)

The unavailability of credits and loans is one of the priorities often listed by the urban and rural poor. Lending institutions do exist, but there is a lack of information on how to obtain a loan, how to complete the forms, and what documents need to be submitted in support of

application for a loan. To collect all the necessary documents requires money, since the forms and services are not provided free of charge. This is a major impediment for many of the poor, not to mention the problem of bribes.

“I received a loan of 36,000 *som*. To get it, I had to give a 5,000-*som* bribe to that official.”
(An elderly man from the town of Kok Yangak)

Social problems such as alcoholism, divorce, petty crime, and domestic abuse have become priority issues of the poor, as they perceive that the incidence of each problem has increased. Alcoholism is also viewed as both a cause and an effect of poverty. Results of the study show that the rural poor often have no cash to buy alcohol, so they buy on credit and repay when the crop is harvested, so they often end up without enough harvest for their families. The constant use by the poor of poor quality, home-made alcoholic drinks also affects their health.

“Young healthy guys are wandering about doing nothing all winter long, because they only have seasonal work. They do work in spring, summer, and winter, when we sow, make hay, and harvest the crop, but the rest of the time they just drink vodka.”
(A woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Ak Kiya, Naryn Oblast)

“Because of unemployment, young people drink to excess, commit crimes, rape women, and steal livestock.”
Focus group member from Ak Kiya village

The excessive money spent on traditional ceremonies is viewed as a major problem by both rural and urban poor. In spite of their poverty, poor families will borrow money in order to butcher a horse for *ash* (funeral ritual). A horse costs 6,000-7,000 *som*. Huge sums of money are also spent on wedding ceremonies. Parents of the bridegroom must pay *kalym* (payment to parents of the bride for raising a good daughter), and parents of the bride provide *sep* (dowry) in the amount of 5,000-10,000 *som*, depending on wealth of the family.

“The Kyrgyz have a saying: *Tuugandyn topuragy altyn*” (literally--relatives are the most expensive people in the world”).
(An elderly man from Urmalar, Talas Oblast)

In Naryn region, if a wealthy person dies, several horses must be butchered, and if a poor person dies, at least one horse must be butchered as part of funeral ceremony. This tradition has been followed by the Kyrgyz for several centuries and was observed even in the Soviet times. Failure to butcher a horse is viewed as disgrace, so the poor borrow a lot of money to buy a horse, and then have difficulty repaying the debt. Currently, a horse costs 7,000 *som* or more. People spend about 25,000 *som* on the burial of their close relatives, and then 25,000 to 30,000 *som* is spent on the mourning ceremonies, so it takes 50,000-55,000 *som* to bury a relative. Guests invited for the ceremony have to stay in the houses of neighbors and be offered dinner there, which is about 3,000 *som* per house.”
(A 56-year old woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Ak Kiya village, Naryn Oblast)

The problem of educating children has become quite acute for the poor during the transition. The high prices and shortages of training manuals and the constant need for parents to contribute money to meet the needs of the school (heating, buses, teachers' salaries, books, supplies, etc.) were mentioned by both the rural and urban poor.

"We only have a primary school. After the fourth grade, our children have to go to other schools. The schools are far away, there is no bus service, so the kids have to walk, and it's very difficult for them, especially in winter, because it's cold. Some children just don't attend school in winter."
(Kiemeddin, a man from Achy, Jalal-Abad Oblast)

"We give free textbooks to the poor children, and have the weak children sit next to the electric heater. Children don't eat at school, and at home they have bread and tea diet. These children don't know how fruit or candies taste. During my classes, I see pale and thin faces of these children, and it makes me feel very sad."
(A teacher from Tash Bulak, Jalal Abad Oblast)

"When our children were small, it was easier to take care of them. Now they need to go to school, which means -- they need clothes, and shoes, and school supplies. We don't have enough money, so only two of our children, two sons, attend school, and our daughters stay at home, because they have no shoes and the school is located very far from here, 6 kilometers. The boys walk this distance. Occasionally, some driver would pity them and give them a free ride."
(An elderly woman from Tash Bulak, Jalal Abad Oblast)

Inadequate or non-existent all-season roads are also listed as a primary problem for both rural and urban informants. For the urban poor, who tend to live on the outskirts of town, access roads to main arteries are poorly maintained. The cost of such transportation often exceeds their daily income. In the rural regions, the cost and availability of year-around transport is a major impediment to schools, markets, medical clinics, and administrative centers.

"Roads are awful here, and there's no transportation. People contribute 15-20 *som* from time to time and repair the road, but it only lasts till the first rain or mudslide."
Focus group, Ak Kiya village

Many perceive the problems of the poor are directly related to the inadequate support from local authorities. According to the informants, local authorities are aware of the problems faced by the communities, but they are also hampered due to inadequate funding from the government. The informants also correlate corruption at the local level with the serious problem of pension and benefit arrears.

"Corruption is one of the most important causes of poverty. The corrupt officials delay payment of our pensions and social benefits, because they use the money and profiteer on it."
(A 65-year old man from Kok Yangak, Jalal Abad region)

Many of the informants assess their ability to cope with the crisis as very low and thus primarily rely on outside support (support of relatives, humanitarian aid, charities, governmental support, and connections). Others who are more active are coping by

involvement in retail trade; seasonal work (such as construction and remodeling of houses); agricultural work with or without further sale of agricultural products; livestock herding; work in other countries (thus, some people from the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan go to the neighboring Kazakhstan to grow tobacco or work for the wealthy Kazakh farmers); hired work for more wealthy community members; and artisan work (production of traditional crafts, embroideries, and knitwear).

“Yesterday wholesale traders came to buy our potatoes. My daughter-in-law wanted to sell five sacks to buy shoes for children, but my son didn’t let her do so, because, if we sell too much, there will be nothing to plant. I think both my son and my daughter-in-law were right: children need shoes for spring, but we also need potatoes to plant. Here’s what poverty effects are like.”

(A 64-year old poor woman from Kenesh village, Talas district of Talas region)

Priority problems of the Urban Poor include: infrastructural issues (poorly lit streets, high electricity bills), high prices of for food and clothing, the growing crime rate, unemployment, wage arrears, and the unavailability of loans.

Priority problems of the Rural Poor are primarily focused around agricultural issues, these include: lack of agricultural equipment and spare parts, high prices for fuel, lack of arable land, land tax is too high, lack of quality water for drinking, irrigation problems, lack of sales market for agricultural products, inadequate power supply, poor roads (few all-season roads), inadequate healthcare, poor educational opportunities of children, lack of entertainment or recreation opportunities for children, alcoholism of men, especially youth, lack of information, and natural disasters (floods, landslides, earthquakes, and mudslides).

“There are no fertilizers, and the soil is getting more and more barren. There are no chemicals against weeds, so we have lots of weeds and lose much of our crops in this way.”
There are no medicines for the animals, so many of them die, and some of them have infectious diseases that can also affect humans.”

(An elderly man, Uchkun, Naryn Oblast)

Institutional analysis

Informants perceive government as the institution that may and must resolve all problems, distribute property, protect the society, and promote unifying ideologies. “Real power” in the country is viewed as that of the power of the government. Even so, social self-governance plays an important part in resolution of economic, social, and cultural problems; however, further development of local self-governance is hindered by hierarchical structure of the administrative system. Many of the informants have no experience of dealing with formal institutions, do not know how necessary information can be obtained and what mechanisms can be used to make formal institutions attend to their problems.

The majority of informants are unhappy with the performance of local institutions. People feel as if they have little influence over these institutions. In the overall assessment, the participants said that authoritarian state officials do not follow the principles of equity and fairness. Despite all the resolutions, decrees, and instruction developed by the government, performance of such officials is still greatly affected by their family ties, personal connections, and bribery. Access is quite limited for the people who have no personal relations with the officials and cannot afford bribes.

“The post office employees make us buy old newspapers when we come to receive our pensions. If we don’t take the newspapers, they subtract their price from our pensions anyway.”
(An elderly man from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

Resolution of the infrastructure-related problems is seen by the participants to be the responsibility of the government and local authorities. But due to their current lack of funding, some of the local communities are attempting to resolve problems on their own. However, such infrastructure problems, such as the lack of drinking and irrigation water and inadequate roads may only be resolved if financial assistance is given for the purchase of construction materials and equipment.

Schools were assessed by the informants as the most important institution because they provide education, food and important opportunities to their children. Solving the problems confronting schools, such as wage arrears of teachers, lack of books, furniture, visual aids, inadequate heating in the winter, and leaky roofs, were considered paramount as a means of improving the quality of life for the communities.

When ranking informal support systems, the informants gave the highest ranking to their parents, then to relatives, friends, and neighbors. The responses of the informants show that economic support from their parents, relatives, and friends, though important, do not make a major difference in their economic situation.

Communities do use informal institutions as a means of resolving their problems. Many of the communities, especially those in the South, widely employ the *ashar* method which involves community participation in building projects, such as schools, mosques, and houses. Not only the Kyrgyz, but also other ethnic groups participate in *razha* – a contribution made by all community members for a *toi* (life cycle celebrations) or a funeral. Usually, *razha* is higher in the case of a celebration than a funeral, because a greater number of people participate in *razha* in the former case. The amount of *razha* is the same for all people who live in the same street or are members of the same family.

The non-governmental organizations that have appeared in the local towns and villages over the last several years are perceived as a positive force. According to the informants, these groups mobilize local community members and call attention of the authorities to the concrete problems that need resolution. These activities have made people more confident about the capacity of individuals to cope with the current crises.

Gender Relations

Most of the participants of the study think that gender problems do exist in their communities. The informants believe that these problems have become more acute as the result of the difficult economic times and also the shift in social values. The situation of women is particularly difficult, in that they are expected to do the housework, raise the children, care for the elderly, as well as earn a living. Although such expectations were also true in the Soviet period, participants explained that there were many more social and institutional supports in place, such as daycare programs, regular salaries, benefits for each child, and free health and educational services.

“Responsibilities of women on a household level are higher now than they were in the past. Women raise children. In the past, Young Pioneer League, the school, and the society as a whole were of help in this process. Now, men earn very little, and women have to somehow feed their family members, find clothes and footwear for everybody, and preserve the family.”
(Older poor man from the village of Kenesh, Talas region)

In many instances, women are the sole wage earner in the family. As a result of these women working outside the home or outside the community, women may have freedom, but they also pay less attention to the children, which leaves their unemployed husbands the responsibility of the care of the children and the housework. Thus, problems within the marriage have also increased, for as one older women remarked, *Echtemk e tappagan erkek suuk korunup kalat eken* (A man who does not earn money gets on people’s nerves).

“On a family level, whoever earns the money is the head of the household. Women traders who make good money are the head of their families, that’s for sure.”
(A 45-year old man from Tash Bulak village, Jalal Abad region)

According to many of the informants, women have better adapted to the changes; women feel the urgency of feeding and clothing their children more than men; and they have been more willing to sell goods at the market. In the informants’ opinion, men are quite frustrated by their loss of the status as primary income earners, and do not want to undertake any of the household responsibilities traditionally considered to be female. The informants from one group of older poor men (At Bashi, Naryn) explained that some of them do help their wives, but they are afraid that people would see them do the laundry or sweep the floor, because then they will be mocked. Older poor women (At Bashi, Naryn) described the situation now as *Ayaldar azar bazarda, erkektek kazanda*, “women are at the market and men are in the kitchen.” There is a general perception that men are not as successful as women in trading activities, in part, because their earnings are more likely to be spent on vodka.

“The unemployed men are frustrated, because they no longer can play the part of family providers and protectors. They live on the money made by their wives, and feel humiliated because of that. Suicides among young men have become more frequent.”
(An elderly woman from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

During the last eight years of independence, women have become less active in the political life of the country. Because of the demands of household survival, women have little time to publicly express themselves, much less to protect their interests. According to the study participants, parliamentary legislation on the political rights and powers of women is limited to purely declarative statements, even though issues related to such rights and powers penetrate all fields of public life. Political rights and powers should allow women of the Kyrgyz Republic to improve not only their lives, but also the lives of their children and the society as a whole. Therefore, relevant agencies need to provide concrete guarantees of women’s participation in legal and political life regulated by adequate legislation on state agencies and electoral system.

Schoolchildren expressed concerned about the abduction of girls for marriage and believe that it is an example of violation of women’s rights.

Freshmen at Arabaev University in Bishkek, whose opinions were surveyed in the course of the study, said: “Prostitution is a growing problem among young women, especially students who explain it by the need to earn money for education” (annual tuition fee is 2,500 *som* to \$1,000).

With limited household resources, informants indicated in a number of instances that boys are being chosen, instead of girls, to attend school.

“We don’t have enough money, so only the two our boys attend school, and the three girls don’t. I am really afraid that they will be illiterate.”
(A 30-year mother of five, Tash-Bulak village, Jalal Abad region)

Most focus group discussants acknowledged that domestic violence is not unusual at the household level. Both men and women concurred that when domestic violence does occur, there is an attitude in the community that the individual deserved to be beaten.

According to Shirin, a 44-year old informant from Urmara village (Talas region), men of her community beat their wives every now and then, refer to the proverb *eri bar ayal tayak jeit, maly bar ayal kuiruk jeit* (a married woman gets beaten just like a woman who has livestock gets meat). Men can beat their wives for disobedience or out of jealousy.

“Very few women go to the health care center if they get beaten by their husbands. If there is an apparent trace of beating on a woman’s face, she would rather invent some story than admit that she was abused.”
Gulsara, an informant from Uchkun village, Naryn region

Consultations with the Poor

Synthesis Country Report

Kyrgyzstan

Work on this report would not be possible without support and valuable information received from a great number of individuals and organizations. The authors are particularly grateful to a number of local and international organizations which have kindly shared their great practical experience, statistical data, and research results.

In Bishkek such organizations are the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Kyrgyz Republic, Counterpart Consortium, Constructor Community NGO, elementary school of *Archa Beishik* district; In Naryn region -- the Center for Support of Non-Governmental Organizations of Naryn Region, *Janyl Myrza* NGO, *Chynar Bak* NGO, head of the state administration of At Bashi district, secondary school of Uchkun village, head of Ak Kiya village community, and head of block management committee of At Bashi village; in Talas region -- state administration of Talas region, *Ajar* NGO, heads of the Urmalar, Beisheke, and Kenesh village communities; in Jalal Abad region -- state administration of Jalal Abad region, head of Tash Bulak village community, *Save the Town* NGO, and *Nurjamal* NGO. The study team is particularly grateful to Ainura Niyazalieva who was of great help with mapping design report formatting.

List of Study Team Members

#	Name	Position
1.	Janna Rysakova	Project coordinator in Kyrgyzstan
2.	Mariam Edilova	Talas region team leader
3.	Lira Tantabaeva	Talas region team member
4.	Esenkan Osmonaliev	Talas region team member
5.	Bakhtiyar Abdykadyrov	Talas region team member
6.	Gulnara Bakieva	Jalal Abad region team leader
7.	Nurmamat Saparbaev	Jalal Abad region team member
8.	Kunduz Ukubaeva	Jalal Abad region team member
9.	Takhir Hamdamov	Jalal Abad region team member
10.	Nurdin Satarov	Naryn region team leader
11.	Janyl Abdyralieva	Naryn region team member
12.	Turdububu Shamuratova	Naryn region team member
13.	Sagyn Kaimova	Naryn region team member

1. Summary of Main Trends and Conclusions

1.1. Poverty: Well-Being Definition and Trends

This study has revealed that Kyrgyz citizens understand well-being primarily as their ability to satisfy the material and spiritual needs; stability on a family and society level. Ill-being is understood as “bad life”, “shortages”, i.e., lack of ability to satisfy one’s needs, primarily material ones.

Transition to the market economy brought about the distinction between social groups which are defined by informants as “rich,” “middle class”, and “poor.” The categories of “very rich” and “very poor” can be added to this list, but they are not very numerous. According to the informants, most people live in poverty while middle class accounts for about one-third of the society, and there are very few rich people.

This study supports the results earlier received by the World Bank and the National Committee on Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic. According to the materials of these two organizations, the poorest regions of Kyrgyzstan are Naryn, Jalal Abad, and Talas region.

Poverty is caused by many different factors, which can be broken down into two broad categories: objective and subjective factors. Among objective causes of poverty informants named unemployment, inadequate legal environment, inflation, misdirected agrarian policy, and other factors that are somehow or other related to state policy. Drastic change in the role played by the government in the informants’ lives and failure of the authorities of all levels to attend to the problems of the poor is viewed by many of the informants as one of the main causes of poverty. Another objective cause of poverty named by informants of Jalal Abad region is series of natural disasters that have affected the area (landslides, mudslides).

Subjective causes of poverty, or the factors that have to do with the attitude of the poor, are laziness, lack of initiative, inferiority complex, indifference, and ignorance. Thus, informants of Naryn region mentioned lack of aptitude for trade as one of the causes of poverty (aptitude for trade is not as typical of the Kyrgyz as it is of the neighboring nations, for example, the Uzbek). Apparently, poor health and disability of individuals may cause their poverty, too.

The main effects of poverty were also discussed in the course of the study. Poverty has negative effects both for individuals (such as health problems, malnutrition, lack of clothes, growing crime rate, suicide, prostitution, family quarrels and divorces, social exclusion) and for the society as a whole (depletion of the genetic pool of the nation, decrease in human resources and, according to some of the informants, increased social tension and possibility of conflict between the rich and the poor). Such a conflict, according to the informants, may be caused by a decrease in the proportion of middle class and an increase in the proportion of poor, and the ability of only very few current middle class representatives to improve their situation and become rich in the future.

The possibility of coping with the current difficulties without outside support is assessed by the informants as very low. People still hope to receive some outside support (government assistance, support of relatives, humanitarian aid, support from international and local charities). More mobile people take certain steps to improve their situation, such as engaging in seasonal work, retail trade, agricultural work, livestock herding, and do hired work for the rich. Lack of starting capital, need to do all work manually, and cheap labor, according to the informants, make their work worthless.

1.2. Priorities of the Poor

The transition period aggravated the problems that existed in the country at the beginning of transition, and brought about new problems for people of Kyrgyzstan. The current economic crisis caused further aggravation of these problems. Most of the problems are caused by objective factors, such as introduction of free prices, privatisation, geographic features of the area, inadequate legal environment, loss of sales markets, and undeveloped banking system.

Other problems are caused by subjective reasons, such as misdirected staffing policy, lack of basic knowledge in the field of business and agribusiness, and the inability of people to resolve their problems.

These unresolved problems result in mass poverty, increased social exclusion and social tension.

The difficult economic situation, the decline in the living standards, and a great difference between standards of living of the rich and the poor bring about certain distrust to the reform policy that is under way in the country. The situation is being further aggravated by increased marginalisation, great numbers of refugees, beggars, and homeless people, a growing crime rate, natural disasters, the lack of political stability in the neighboring country of Tajikistan, and the war between the NATO and Yugoslavia.

The problems can be divided into two categories: problems common for all regions of Kyrgyzstan and region- and group-specific problems. Unemployment, high prices of food and clothes, lack of a sales markets, wage and pension arrears, deteriorating infrastructure both in the rural and in the urban areas, unavailability of loans, and unfavourable tax laws for businesses are the problems which are experienced nation-wide.

Among the problems that are faced by particular towns and villages and hinder their development the informants mentioned the absence of production companies, an undeveloped agrarian system, inadequate local legislation, a lack of initiative on the part of local authorities, a lack of information on the changes taking place in the country, citizens' ignorance of their rights, unfair distribution of production facilities, natural disasters, and ethnic tension. According to the informants, resolution of these problems will improve standards of living in the country. Many of these problems could and should be resolved by the government, but there are also issues which people are ready to resolve themselves if favourable conditions are created for it (for example, if loans on beneficial conditions are issued, and a more favourable tax policy is introduced).

1.3. Institutional Analysis

Institutions of Kyrgyzstan have undergone serious changes during the period of transition. Many of the old institutions and institutional structures no longer exist, and new ones have been formed.

Such new governance institutions as governors, *akims* (heads of state administration offices), and *aiyl okmotu* (village councils) have appeared on the political arena. These three institutions represent three levels of power on a local level. However, the legal environment for these institutions is still not fully developed, and the financial basis of their activities is still not absolutely clear; therefore, these institutions do not use their full capacity of regional governance. Difficulties that people experience when trying to access these institutions cause a certain distrust to them among the general public.

The attitude of the informants towards the central governance institutions is contradictory. Within the past five years a negative attitude towards certain parliament members and politicians has developed. There is the opinion that the parliament members' way of living and professional performance have negative effects for the society.

Closure of factories and downsizing of the companies that still function causes unemployment. The more mobile part of the population is adjusting to the new economic situation. As a result of their activities, a social group of business people has appeared in the country. A small group of people has gained wealth in the course of privatisation. These people have acquired property and now start private businesses, including production companies that use local raw materials and have sales markets for their products within the country. Service companies, private shops, beauty salons, cafes, restaurants, clinics, schools, and hotels are developing quite actively, but the prices that they charge are too high for the less wealthy part of the society.

The Social Fund and Social Service of the Kyrgyz Republic is undertaking initiatives aimed at social protection of the poor. Activities of these two institutions are viewed positively or negatively, depending on the social group. The most vulnerable groups protest against some of the measures taken to support them, such as payment of pensions and social benefits in-kind, by food.

Education and health care institutions have changed as well. The general public disapproves of the growing number of paid education establishments because their increased number means further limitation of access to education for the poor.

The informants were quite critical of the tax inspection office, which may be explained by misdirected tax policy and high tax rates. Both the poor and the rich appear to be unhappy with the tax inspection office.

Another feature of the transition is a variety of opinions represented in the mass media. There are private newspapers, TV and radio stations. The institution of the media is particularly important in public opinion building. However, access of the poor to the information provided by the media is limited.

In the post-Soviet time, reliance on informal institutions, such as parents, relatives, friends, councils of the elderly, mosques, and others, has increased dramatically. These institutions are accessible and reliable, even though the efficiency of their support is often assessed by the informants as low.

Institutions of a new type that have recently appeared in Kyrgyzstan are non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The number of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan is one of the greatest in the Central Asia. Women's NGOs are particularly well developed. The general public views the NGOs positively.

The image of international organizations among the general public is also positive. The support provided by international organizations to the poor brings about trust to the organizations and hope for better life.

1.4. Summary of Gender Issues

Economic crisis results in a high supply in the labor market and unemployment both among men and among women. The number of unemployed women in Kyrgyzstan is growing, and women

account for the majority of the unemployed (61%). There is high representation of women in the industries where wages are low and the average salary of women is lower than that of men. The economic crisis becomes a heavy burden for the women who work both within and outside their households.

Urban women traders face difficulties such as the poor purchasing power of people, lack of sales markets, and an increased customs taxes that prevent people from the neighboring countries from trade with Kyrgyzstan.

Many of the rural residents understand their poor psychological and economic adjustment to privatisation, and are nostalgic about the Soviet past. Their ideas of work are based on the principles of collectivism which were in place both in the Soviet times and before it.

Many informants receive financial support only from their parents, and thus are economically dependent on them. Few people think that the government is likely to provide support.

Women's responsibilities on a household level have increased, while their responsibilities on a community level have decreased. Women no longer play the key role in decision making, and women's opinions only matter for their husbands, which, however, is not always the case.

The responsibilities of men and their role in the society have increased, while women no longer participate in social life because they are overloaded with work within the household and outside it. The rural way of living is quite patriarchal: men are viewed as heads of their families, and decisions on a community and even household level are often made without women's participation.

Women have always been and still are discriminated against. The study has shown that many women have never heard of international documents on human rights. The women have heard of *Ayalzat* government initiative, but it has not affected their lives in any way.

Economic and spiritual crisis provokes conflicts on a family and society level. The number of divorces has increased, and their primary reasons now are husbands' alcoholism and tendency to physically abuse wives.

1.5. Summary and Conclusions

The results of the study lead to the following conclusions.

The hardships of transition experienced by the informants from the sites surveyed are common for people of all former Soviet Republics. The informants define well-being not only as material wealth, but also as peace, tolerance between people, and absence of natural disasters.

The informants suggest three categories of households by well-being criteria: "rich," "middle class," and "poor."

Among the causes of poverty the informants name objective factors such as lack of governmental support to the people who try to find their way out of the crisis situation, and subjective factors, such as their peers' lack of desire and to change their lives to the better.

In the sites studied there are many problems that are caused by the overall economic crisis in the country: unemployment, high prices, a legal environment unfavourable to the poor, and a lack of

adequate conditions for development of lending institutions. There are also site-specific problems, such as lack of agricultural equipment and fuel, inadequate irrigation system, absence of sales markets for agricultural products, and unfair distribution of land.

In the sites surveyed the informants mentioned poor performance of such formal institutions as the community leaders and village council, schools, health care centers, and post offices, which, due to inadequate funding, can not function effectively. The informants were critical of these institutions.

Some people in the sites surveyed are trying to improve their situation without outside support. They create public and non-governmental organizations, participate in such informal institutions as *aksakal sotu* (courts of the elderly) and *Choro* (organizations of youth for the protection of public order); however, lack of experience and, in some cases, inefficient organization of the activities of these informal institutions result in their inadequacy.

According to informants, in the difficult times they rely on their neighbors and parents, rather than formal institutions such as the community leader or the village council, because the formal institutions do not pay due attention to problems of the poor.

Gender relations on a community level have changed significantly within the past several years. Responsibilities of women on a household level have increased, and now resolution of the problems caused by unemployment is primarily women's responsibility. Responsibilities of women on a community level, on the contrary, have decreased, even though some of the women try to resolve social problems by creating non-governmental organizations. Generally, due to the local mentality, women of the communities surveyed do not play an important role in decision making. Both in urban and in rural areas women's rights are abused both on a household and on a community level.

In the opinion of the study team, poverty problem in the communities surveyed in the course of the study can be resolved if problems faced by the residents are further assessed and prioritised for each village/town, site-specific poverty alleviation projects are developed, legal environment and performance of local formal institutions is improved, and informal institutions, such as non-governmental organizations, courts of the elderly, and youth organizations for protection of public order, are further strengthened and supported by loans.

2. Background

2.1. Purpose of the Study

Consultations with the Poor is a study of poverty and social development. It is based on the experience, priorities, reflections, and recommendations of the poor men and women.

The purpose of the study is to obtain information about perception of local poverty by the poor themselves. The study allows a vast number of the poor who live in Kyrgyzstan to express their opinions which may be helpful for development of WDR 2000/01. The poor act as experts on the following issues covered by the study:

- Well-being definition and trends;
- Priorities of the poor;
- Institutional analysis; and
- Gender relations.

This work is done in accordance with the practice of WDR established in 1980 and 1990 and aimed at preparing reports on poverty every ten years.

The study strengthened the local capacity of qualitative research. 13 local experts who have been trained and gained a valuable experience in implementation of this kind of research participated in the study.

The final synthesis report will be made available for local public and private institutions. The study team hopes that it will increase awareness of poverty issues and allow to establish partnership for future work.

2.2. Methods and Procedure

1. Ranking

The method was used for:

- identifying different categories of households by well-being criteria;
- identifying criteria of well-being based on which households are divided into categories;
- identifying the proportion of households or individuals in each category.

2. Evaluation

The method was used to identify the proportion of individuals and/or households that belong to each of the well-being categories. Haricot seeds were used as counters. Flipcharts, markers, cards of different colours, pencils, and scissors were used in the course of the evaluation sessions.

3. Trend Analysis

The method was used to track changes that have taken place in the community, and the informants' perception of the future development of their community. Diagrams and graphs were developed in the course of the trend analysis sessions.

4. Cause and Effect Analysis

Cause and effect analysis (or development of diagrams) was used in the course of the discussion of the causes and effects of poverty. This method allowed visualisation of the relations between the various causes and effects of poverty and trains of events. This visual analysis allowed discussions of possible solutions of the problems faced by the poor, and the effects of such solutions. Cards of different colours, markers, and flipcharts were used in the course of the cause and effect analysis sessions.

5. Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Focus group discussions were used to discuss and analyse risks, safety, vulnerability, social and economic mobility, access, social exclusion, social tolerance, disorder, and conflicts.

6. Individual Case Study

Individual case studies were represented by semi-structured interviews held with individual informants. In the course of the interviews, means of income were analysed, and some of the facts and results received in the course of focus group discussions were quoted.

In addition to the above methods, the following PRA techniques were used:

- development of pie diagrams of costs and revenues;
- development of matrices of seasonal calendars of work and diseases
- mapping;
- time lines; and
- development of historic matrices of the community.

2.3. Overall Process of the Study

The process of data collection, analysis, and synthesis of information for *Consultations with the Poor* project had the following stages:

Study teams were recruited, had an orientation and received training on the study themes, methods, and reporting formats.

Data on the well-being of the poor and other study themes was collected by study teams from the community members/focus groups and analysed

The information received from focus groups/communities was synthesised by the study teams in site reports. Information contained in the site reports was presented to the respective communities for verification of the results and support of the local development process. Site reports, written in accordance with reporting format requirements, were submitted by study teams to the Secretariat of the Study of the World Bank.

Information contained in different site reports was synthesised into the Kyrgyzstan country report which will be made available for local public, private, and civil leaders.

2.4. Selection of Informants for Focus Group Discussions and Individual Interviews

The informants were selected for participation in focus group discussions and individual interviews in consultation with:

1. leaders of the local self-governance;
2. chairmen of block management committees;
3. leaders of local non-governmental organizations;
4. leaders of the communities; and
5. the poor themselves.

2.5. Schedule of Fieldwork

Date	Activity
17-18 March 1999	Study in Bishkek
20-25 March 1999	Study of the first round of sites: At Bashi village of Naryn region, Beisheke village of Talas region, and Kok Yangak town of Jalal Abad region
26 March – 1 April 1999	Study of the second round of sites: Ak Kiya village of Naryn region, Urmaral village of Talas region, and Achy village of Jalal Abad region
2-8 April 1999	Study of the third round of sites: Uchkun village of Naryn region, Kenesh village of Talas region, and Tash Bulak village of Jalal Abad region
12 April -- 2 May 1999	Draft country report

2.6. Selection of Sites

Three regions of Kyrgyzstan which, in the assessment of the World Bank, are the poorest in the country, were selected for the study. Two of the regions -- Talas and Naryn -- are in the north of Kyrgyzstan, and one region -- Jalal Abad -- is in the south.

The following criteria were used in the process of selection of sites:

- location of sales markets;
- location of roads;
- population (big, medium, and small villages);
- poverty level;
- existence of non-governmental organizations which could support the study team in the process of selection of informants; and
- urban/rural area of the site.

Jalal Abad Region

Kok Yangak is a little town that is dying. Its companies and factories are closed, and its mine is on the verge of closure. Eighty-five percent of the population of Kok Yangak is unemployed. The level of poverty is high.

Achy village, which used to belong to a prosperous sheep-herding collective farm, has suffered from series of landslides within the past 10 years. Several people were killed by the disasters and, by Government resolution, it was decided to move people out of the dangerous area. The government, as well as the residents themselves, incurred significant costs in the process of moving.

Tash Bulak village was founded by the residents of the mountainous villages of Bazar Korgon district who had to move from the areas affected by landslides in 1987. There is no infrastructure in the village and its residents suffer from a lack of drinking and irrigation water. Ninety-five percent of the residents of Tash Bulak are unemployed.

Naryn Region

Although Ak Kiya village is no more than 20 kilometres from the town of Naryn, the poor roads and inadequate transportation make it difficult for residents to get to the town. The population of the village is small compared to other villages of the region. Despite its location near the town of Naryn, the village is one of the poorest in the region. *Baigazak*, a non-governmental organization, functions in the village and representatives from *Baigazak* helped the study team to select informants for the study.

Bashi village is 45 kilometres from the town of Naryn. The village has the status of an administrative center of the district. A permanent road connects it with the towns of Naryn and Bishkek, which are the main sales markets, and with neighboring China. The population of the village is rather large, compared to other villages of the region. *Chynar Bak* and *Ak Bairak*, non-governmental organizations, function in the village.

Uchkun village is located between the town of Naryn and the village of Baetovo, along the road connecting Naryn and Baetovo. The size of the village is average for the Naryn region. Uchkun is one of the most remote villages in Naryn. Members of the *Janyl Myrza* non-governmental organization operating in the village helped the study team with selection of informants.

Talas Region

Beisheke village is 60 kilometres to the west of the town of Talas, the administrative center of the region, and 18 kilometres to the south-east of Kyzyl Adyr, the administrative center of Kara Buura district. In Soviet times, the village belonged to one of the wealthiest collective farms. As a result of privatisation, the village has become one of the poorest. The village is located far from sales markets located in the town of Taraz in the neighboring country of Kazakhstan and the town of Talas. The infrastructure of the village is undeveloped. There is a non-governmental organization, *Ajar*, that assists the poor in their attempts to obtain micro-credits.

Urmal village is one of the five villages governed by the *Kyzyl Oktyabr* village council of Bakai Ata district. All of the five villages are located some 60 kilometres to the south-west of Talas, far from the main road. In Soviet times, the village of Urmal was viewed as lacking future prospects and it was planned to join it with the neighboring villages. Therefore, development of infrastructure in Urmal was deemed unnecessary. Currently, undeveloped infrastructure is one of the reasons for the mass poverty in the village.

Kenesh village is located 50 kilometres to the east of the town of Talas, along the road between Talas and Suusamy. In the Soviet times, it was planned to move the village and construct a water

reservoir in its place. Undeveloped infrastructure and the privatisation of state property resulted in the poverty for more than 50% of the village residents.

2.7. Main Geographic and Social Characteristics of Sites

Achy is a mountainous village 50 kilometres from the town of Jalal Abad, the center of Jalal Abad region. The village is located at an altitude of 1100 metres above sea level; it is composed of 10 small villages scattered around the canyons. Each of the villages has a beautiful folk name, simple and at the same time very precise. The different sites of the village are not farther than 5-6 kilometres from one another. For administrative purposes, Achy village is considered a subject of Kyzyl Tuu *aiyl okmotu* (village council). In Soviet times, the village belonged to a very rich collective farm that specialised in sheep breeding. The farm owned as many as 66,000 sheep, and most of the village residents were herders. The village had three secondary and three elementary schools, a big shop, a post office, a clinic, and other institutions. The herders were often visited by *avtolavka* (lit. - “mobile shop,” a truck from which food, clothes, and other goods were sold). Most of the men in the village were sheep herders and their wives were milkmaids.

The town of Kok Yangak is located in 30 kilometres from Jalal Abad, the central town of the region. The town is located in a mountain village. In the past, it used to be a prosperous little town where 80% of the residents worked as miners. Other institutions that were functional in the town during Soviet times were the *Profile* factory, a clothes factory, dry-cleaning facilities, a service company, an everyday service complex (*bytkombinat*), recreational facilities, a branch of state insurance company, and a clinic. The community was multi-national: it accommodated many experts from various regions of the Soviet Union. In general, the town fell under the category of “Moscow-supported;” in other words, it was supplied from the central USSR budget rather than the budget of Kyrgyz SSR. The weather in the region is quite severe. There is not much arable land around the town, so people can only grow potatoes, raspberries, strawberries, and some wheat. A few households in the suburbs have some cattle. According to the official statistics, the population of the town is 15,000 people, but the residents themselves believe that it has recently decreased to 10,000 or even 8,000. Most of the people permanently residing in the town are pensioners and schoolchildren whose parents leave them with relatives and go to other regions to earn an income.

The village of Tash-Bulak is a newly created settlement that is located 22 km from the regional center, 3 km from the main road, and 8 km from the district center in Bazar-Korgon. The village appeared as a result of a natural disaster that occurred in Bazar-Korgon district in 1987. Land slides in the mountains forced inhabitants of the Kainar village to move to a new place – Tash-Bulak. Two children died in the natural disaster and livestock, sheep, and houses were covered by earth. The local authority evacuated people and provided them with transport. Those who suffered received loans amounting to 3 000 soms in cash for the construction of new houses. People started to destroy their houses in order to take the slate, window frames, doorframes, and bricks with them. Residents from one village were spread out into different places. The new village Tash-Bulak was founded on the hilly, windy naturally irrigated land where winters are very cold and summers are extremely hot. The inhabitants of the new village decided to give to it the name of a village that was destroyed. To date about 600 people (70 families) that moved from different places live in the village of Tash-Bulak,. There are also 48 refugees (7 families) from Tadjikistan in the village.

During the Soviet period the land belonged to a livestock-industrial complex. Consequently, the Chairman of the above unit, Nikolai Tan, was the person who initially took care of the inhabitants

of the newly created village. He provided them with drinking water, installed electricity, provided work for those who were able to work, and rationally distributed plots of land. After the collapse of the Soviet Union their situation became much worse. The village is located in the hills. The land is not irrigated and not fertile. It is extremely hot in summer, cold in winter and there is a constant wind. There are very few trees in the village and bad conditions for growing vegetables and fruits. People grow mainly wheat, haricot beans, sunflowers and hay for livestock. The average altitude of the hill is about 300 meters above sea level. People of different age live in the village: some families have representatives of all three generations. Only Kyrgyz people live in the village – the refugees from Tadjikistan also belong to the Kyrgyz ethnic group.

Of all the residents, two or three work at the local four-grade school, one woman works at the medical service center, one person was assigned as head of the village, and three or four work in the village of Akman. The rest are unemployed. All of them consider themselves Muslim. The families are large with many children. The women have from three to seven children. There is only one four-grade school in the village. There is no transport, no shop, and the medical service center is located 6 kilometres away at the center of the village self-governance authority. There is an electricity network so the citizens have the ability to watch TV on two channels: one from Uzbekistan and one from Kyrgyzstan. There are no newspapers or radio.

In addition to land cultivation, the residents are involved in sheep and cattle breeding. They sell their agricultural products, such as wheat, sunflowers, haricot beans and melons along the long Bishkek-Osh road. Because of the lack of agricultural equipment they cultivate the land manually. All of them work in the fields: men, women and children. Sometimes men leave to go to other villages or cities to get work there until the harvest ripens. In summer they prepare wood to heat their houses. They can not afford to buy coal because it is very expensive. They make heating stuff from dry manure and timber.

The village of Ak Kiya is 20 kilometres from the town of Naryn. There are 132 households in the village and its population is 617 people (297 women and 320 men). There are two World War II veterans, 15 *hero mothers* (mothers of more than 10 children), 27 orphans (3 of whom have neither father nor mother), 16 people with disabilities of the second category, and 3 people with disabilities of the first category. Currently, there are three official categories of disability; this classification was introduced in the Soviet times and is still in place. The categories are: 1) first category -- people who are not capable of work and need assisted living; their pensions are about 700 *som* a month; 2) second category -- people who do not need assisted living but have lost their capacity to work; their pensions are about 300 *som* a month; 3) third category -- people who have partially lost their capacity to work and can do easy work; their pension is 30% of the amount of salary. There are as many as 37 women that qualify as mothers with many children. According to an elderly informant, the village was founded by a man named Baigazak, the great-grandfather of the current inhabitants. Therefore, all of the people in the village belong to the same family.

Most of the village residents herd cattle, sheep and horses, and grow wheat, barley, and grass for hay. There is a road between the town of Naryn and the village. Within the village, roads are basically non-existent so when it rains, the spaces between houses turn into mud and people cannot get from one house to another without getting dirty. The village used to belong to a collective farm in the Soviet times and, according to the informants, it was one of the poorest collective farms, though quality of life was still better than it is now. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all collective farm properties were privatised and divided among the members. The collective farm used to own 10 big *kosharas* (barns). These barns were dismantled for construction materials by residents of Ak Kiya and other villages. Community members are unhappy about this deconstruction, because it has created another obstacle to development of

their farms. Irrigation water used to be taken from the Naryn river by pump. Currently the pump is also dismantled and does not function, so an irrigation channel is being used for watering plants; the channel needs annual repair. Drinking water is also a problem, because there is no adequate system of water supply. The water that the residents of the village drink is being taken from natural springs. The residents load their donkeys and horses with water, or carry it themselves using a special device for water carrying. The road between Ak Kiya village and the town of Naryn has not been asphalted. Because it goes through a mountainous pass, when it rains, cars cannot pass through the mud. When entering the village, the study team saw some people on horseback: they were transporting firewood. The firewood is collected in the mountains where people cut bushes to use the wood for heating. Horses are the basic means of transportation in the village though some households do not have horses. They are used to transport milk to the town for sale, to herd cattle, and to go visit friends or relatives. The Kyrgyz traditionally consider a horse one of the most important domestic animals. Four households in Ak Kiya have cars. There is a daily bus service between the town of Naryn, administrative center of Naryn region, and two villages located next to Ak Kiya. The bus passes Ak Kiya, so Ak Kiya residents can use it. There are buildings for a village council, a school, a clinic, a shop, and a *klub* (an institution which holds cultural events and public education programmes in the rural area). According to the residents, there are also such institutions as a head of the community, a tax inspector, a *moldo* (mullah) and an *aksakacourt* (court of the elderly). There is also a fortune teller/clairvoyant (in Kyrgyz -- *kozu achyk*, literally -- the one with eyes open); to whom a visit costs 5-10 *som*.

The village of At Bashi is located 45 kilometres from Naryn. At Bashi district borders China in the south and Naryn district in the north. It is a high altitude area and has a continental climate with temperature extremes from 35-40 degrees Celsius above zero in the summer to 35-40 degrees Celsius below zero in the winter. The population of the district is 12,287 people. The district is agricultural; its residents grow wheat, barley, and grass. In Soviet times, the staple of the area was food grain, primarily barley. There was no need to grow wheat then because flour was provided from other regions and from the town of Naryn. In the basin of the Ak Sai River in At Bashi district there are pastures where all the livestock from Naryn and At Bashi districts used to be herded in Soviet times. There was a lot of livestock in the area in the past. In addition, there was a brick factory, a bakery, three secondary schools, two kindergartens, a vocational school, an outpatient clinic, a *dom kultury* (an institution holding cultural events and public education programmes in the rural area, also known as *klub*), a cinema, and an orphanage. Currently the vocational school is closed for lack of funding and the only institution that is still functional is the kindergarten.

According to the head of village self-governance, there are 3069 households in the village. Some of the community members have no land of their own: they have been offered land plots in the remote areas, but refused to take them because they were inconvenient. Due to the lack of arable land, many households are currently facing a very difficult situation. The village has one main street and two or three other streets which are parallel to the main one. Most of the formal institutions are located on the main street. The streets are poorly maintained: they are not divided into the street proper and the sidewalk, and due to the number of livestock, the streets are covered with manure. Although the main street is asphalted, the other streets are not, so they are very muddy when it rains.

In post-Soviet times, business people constructed three markets, but currently only two of them are functional. On weekdays there are no more than 7 to 8 traders there, and they sell small items and food. On Sundays, the biggest livestock market in the region is open and visited by people from both the Naryn region and Bishkek and even the neighboring country of Kazakhstan.

Because residents of the village are in a very difficult situation, they sell their animals at a very low price and people buy the animals to re-sell in Bishkek and Kazakhstan.

People in the streets are dressed in old clothes. The residents wear new clothes or clothes of better quality on holidays, when visiting friends and relatives, or when attending community meetings. The clothes of people are also dusty due to the dusty roads. The study team noticed patches on the clothes and footwear of people. State institutions are in a better condition than the rest of the village; their offices are two- or three-storied buildings. There are a lot of old trees in the streets which were planted in the Soviet times. Private houses look shabby. Even the houses located on the main street of the village have not been whitewashed for a long time. They have thatched or clay roofs, small windows, and are dark inside. There is a bus station in the village where people stay while waiting for buses or taxis. There are a lot of private taxis: those who have cars try to earn some money offering their services as drivers. The community is multi-ethnic with as many as 18 nationalities represented.

The village of Uchkun is located 60 km from the city of Naryn, the regional center, and 65 km from the village of Baetovo, the center of the Ak-Talin district, along the Naryn-Baetovo road. The village is average in size as compared to other villages of Naryn region. Most of the houses were built during the Soviet period in the 1960s. There are shabby houses, not whitewashed on the outside, which are mainly the houses of the poor. In the courtyards, there is usually a tent for cattle and two constructions. One of the constructions is a house designed for living in (as a rule, it consists of 3 to 4 rooms), the second is a “vremyanka.” A “vremyanka” is a small building consisting of 1 or 2 rooms. It is built as temporary housing for the family during the construction of the house. As a rule, building a house takes about 1 to 3 years, depending on the financial resources of the family. Upon completion of construction, the family moves to the new house and the “vremyanka” is used as subsidiary premises for various purposes, i.e. a storage room for excess products, items, and tools or a workshop, etc. This is how things were during the Soviet period. Today, most people live in their houses only in summer, because heating the house requires a lot of coal or, if the house is heated with electricity, it incurs high electricity costs. In winter, people move into their “vremyankas” and live there with 5 to 10 others.

People are dressed mainly in old winter clothes – old winter coats – some of which have patched clothing. Typical shoes for rural citizens are old high shoes, which are also patched. We saw children in the street who had sports shoes with rubber soles. One boy had shoes with their soles cracked in two and his bare toes were visible, despite the cold.

According to informants, the village is 5 meters to below sea level. If they were above sea level, they would be paid additional amounts to their pensions, social benefits, and salaries like the neighboring village, where people get paid additionally although the informants say they are in the same predicament. It gets as hot as 35 degrees Centigrade above zero in summer and in winter the temperature drops as low as 40 degrees below zero. Winters here last about 5 months. It starts snowing in November and it may snow until April. In autumn and spring it often rains and sometimes snows. Because it gets quite hot in summer, they grow wheat, and in some districts it is possible to grow fruit and vegetables. The village consists of 500 households with 2500 citizens. The citizens are primarily involved in agriculture: cattle-breeding and land cultivation. They grow wheat, grass, and barley.

There are only Kyrgyz living in the village. They consider themselves Moslem and practice Islam but do not follow all Moslem tenets strictly, i.e. they drink alcohol, smoke, do not go to the

mosque, and do not pray. For the most part, people work on peasant farms. There are no private farms in the village because most residents do not want to take the risk of spinning off as independent farms and they have no start-up capital or equipment. There is a small group of “intelligentsia” - teachers, doctors, employees of local self-governance authorities. The village school was built in the 1950s and the classrooms are small, the floors are old and it is not painted. There is slush and dirt everywhere. The teachers said that the classrooms had not been heated since April 1, as the school had no money to pay for coal or electricity. At this time of the year it is still very cold in the village and there is still snow on the ground. The subsidiary streets are not paved with asphalt or covered with gravel. When it rains, there is slush and dirt everywhere. There is a bus running daily between the regional center and the village, and a regular bus running from Bishkek to Baetovo. There is a health care center in the village with a doctor, an obstetrician, and nurses. There is a hospital in the neighboring village but people prefer to travel to the regional center, as there is no medicine provided in the hospital. To deliver babies, women go to the regional hospital in Naryn, as the medical service center in the village or the hospital in the neighboring village lack adequate conditions, bed sheets, food, and medicines.

Beisheke village is 60 kilometres to the west of the town of Talas, the administrative center of Talas region, and 18 kilometres to the south-east of the village of Kyzyl Adyr, the administrative center of Kara Buura district. To the north from Beisheke there is the Kirov water reservoir constructed in 1975. The climate in the area is continental with an average air temperature in June of 20 degrees Celsius above zero and an average air temperature in January of 6 degrees Celsius below zero. The village of Beisheke, as well as the villages of Jany Jer, Kara Suu, and Bakiyan, are governed by the Beisheke *aiyl okmotu* (village council). The main road connecting the town of Talas and the capital city of Bishkek goes through Beisheke.

The population of Beisheke is about 7,000 people, or approximately 1,700 households. Most of the residents are Kyrgyz. There is also a Kurd ethnic minority (34 households). The Kurds were exiled from the Caucasus in 1944, during World War II. Since then, they have lived in Beisheke. All of the Kurd diaspora live in the same part of the village, speak their language, and strictly follow Kurd traditions and customs. Mixed marriages between the Kurds and people from other ethnic groups are extremely rare. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kurds tried to leave for the Caucasus. Those who did not leave then now prefer to stay in Kyrgyzstan because of the war in the Caucasus regions and the lack of economic stability in Russia. One of the Kurds to whom we talked said: “It’s no better in Russia than here, and here is our home land, so we aren’t leaving.”

In the Soviet times, every household in the village participated in the collective farm; after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many new forms of ownership appeared and now there are farms (farms owned by one household) and peasant farms (farms owned by several households which pool their resources, equipment, and land). According to experts from the *aiyl okmotu* (village council), there are 2 peasant farms, 70 individual farms, and 146 farms in Beisheke. Residents of the village have been herding sheep and growing wheat, potatoes, haricots, and corn since Soviet times. There is a secondary school, a furniture production shop, and a commercial kiosk. The mill, health care center (*medpunkt*), and post office with telephone facilities for long-distance calls are located in the neighboring village.

The village of Urmalar, as well as the neighboring villages of Madaniyat, Tash Bulak, Kyzyl Oktyabr, and Kok Tash, are governed by the Kyzyl Oktyabr *aiyl okmotu* (village council). Urmalar is located 60 kilometres to the south-west of the town of Talas, the administrative center of Talas region, 20 kilometres to the south of the road between Talas and Bishkek, 2 kilometres to

the south-east of the village of Madaniyat, and 5 kilometres from the village of Bakay Ata, the administrative center of Bakay Ata district. In other words, the village of Urmara1 is far from the permanent road and from other villages that are governed by the same *aiyl okmotu* (village council). In 1994, after the collective farm collapsed, individual farms were founded in each of the villages. In 1995 a peasant farm, an entity much like a collective farm, was created in Urmara1.

The climate in the area where Urmara1 is located is continental with summer temperatures up to 42 degrees Celsius above zero and winter temperatures down to 4 degrees Celsius below zero. Winter lasts approximately five months and it snows from November till April. In autumn and spring it rains, and there are occasional snowfalls. In summer the weather is very hot. The crops grown in the area are wheat, corn, haricot, beetroots, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, eggplants, peppers, cucumbers, apples, pears, cherries, and plums. The peasant farm that currently exists in Urmara1 is much like a collective farm: households participating in the peasant farm pool their resources, pay taxes as a single entity, and divide the crops among individual households proportionate to the size of land plot contributed by each household. Unlike other communities in the region, where individual farms (those with individual land plots, equipment, and work force) are prevalent, Urmara1 community is rather passive and people do not show much initiative in private entrepreneurship.

Currently people grow corn, potatoes, haricots, and vegetables in their vegetable gardens. Some of the households sell their surplus vegetables. On the land of the peasant farm, wheat, corn, and haricot are grown. The wheat is divided among the individual households proportionate to the size of land plot contributed to the farm. People produce flour from their wheat and use it for their own consumption. In the rare case there is surplus, it is sold. The costs of fuel and mineral fertilisers are going up, and taxes are high, so the value of crops is now just enough to cover the costs. Residents of the village herd cattle and sheep and have some poultry. The sales market for agricultural products (wheat, flour, potatoes) is in the town of Taraz (in the Jambul region of the neighboring country of Kazakhstan located 90 kilometres from the village). The community members say that they have problems on the Kazakh border where customs officers violate the Kyrgyz-Kazakh treaty every now and then. On the other hand, the community members admit that people often try to transport agricultural products across the border which do not have the necessary quality certificates. In Soviet times, the village of Urmara1 had very poor infrastructure. In the 1960s, the village was viewed as having no prospects for future development, and it was planned to join it with the neighboring villages. However, it was never accomplished. Due to the small number of households in the village, development of the village infrastructure was viewed as inexpedient, and such institutions as a school, a health care center, a *klub* (an institution holding cultural events and public education programmes in the rural area), a post office, or a shop were never opened. According to the informants, people did talk to governmental officials to ask them to open an elementary school in the village, but it was not done, and children still have to go to school to the village of Madaniyat which is in 2 kilometres from Urmara1. The informants said that they feel sorry for the young children who have to walk to school and back, because there is no bus service between the villages, and it is very difficult for children, especially in winter.

Among other institutional services which are used by the community members, there is a telephone center in the village of Bakay Ata (5 kilometres from Urmara1), a post office, a police office, and a library located in the village of Kyzyl Oktyabr (4 kilometres from Urmara1). According to the community members, in Soviet times every other household had a telephone, but in 1995 the telephone cables were stolen by thieves who illegally sold abroad cables and other items made of non-ferric metals. The institutions located in the village are the peasant farm, a

garage, and the mosque. The mosque was built by the community members without any outside support. In the Soviet times there were several hydrants in the village, but only one of them is still functional. Some 20 households have bathing facilities, the others do not. This was mentioned as a problem during focus group discussions. It costs 7 to 8 *som* to go to public baths, and most people believe that it is unreasonably expensive and that it makes much more sense to go to neighbors who have bathing facilities or to heat water at home and wash in a big basin.

Houses in the village are old and have barns and storage facilities around them. Younger families live in smaller houses of one or two rooms, so-called *vremyankas*. Houses, regularly whitewashed and painted in the Soviet times, now look shabby. The only exceptions are two two-storey houses that belong to a deputy chairman of the regional Traffic Inspection Office and a Bishkek government official. Nobody lives in these houses permanently. Their owners spend weekends and hold celebrations there and the rest of the time relatives who live nearby take care of the houses. This is a common practice nowadays, and such houses can be seen in every village of Talas region.

Urmal village is populated by Kyrgyz who have resided in the area for several centuries. In Urmal all age groups are represented. One of the Urmal community members is the head of the peasant farm. He has a secretary. Two of the community members work at the school in the village of Madaniyat, one woman works in the telephone center in the village of Bakay Ata, one man is an electrician, and the rest of the community members officially have no permanent jobs and do not receive wages. All of the community members are Muslim. Most of the families have 3 to 8 children. Community members are poorly dressed in clothes which are simple and old. Some of the younger poor men (focus group #5) were dressed in patched trousers and home-made sweaters. Informants of the mixed groups were wearing relatively new dresses and suits. Most of the clothes are European style, but some women wear *kemsels* (long traditional dresses) and *beldemchi* (long wide skirts with wide belts) and have scarves on their heads.

The village of Kenesh is located 50 km east of the regional center, the town of Talas, along the Talas-Suusamyр highway. It is situated in a canyon, south of the Talas River, on the northern slopes of the Talas mountain chain. The Kenesh village is one of the villages comprising the Bekmoldo айылы окмоту (village government). The other three villages, Sasyk-Bulak, Khan-Burgo and Kara-Oyf, are all located 3 to 5 km from each other and east of the Kenesh village. To the west is the village of Chat-Bazar, which belongs to another village council. During Soviet times, Kenesh, together with the neighboring villages (Kara-Oy, Sasyk-Bulak, Khan-Burgo) was a part of the Chkalov collective farm (kolhoz) which was a developed cattle-breeding unit where sheep, cows and horses were bred. Males were mostly involved in cattle farming, while their wives either assisted them or worked at the farm as milkmaids.

According to the general plan prior to the 1980s, a water reservoir was to be built near Kenesh and the neighboring Chat-Bazar villages so the infrastructure was not developed and construction of private houses was suspended. Consequently, the village has only one institution – an elementary school, and all the other infrastructure units are located in the neighboring villages, 3-4 km. away. The elementary school was opened in 1950 in the building of the former collective farm headquarters. Before the Soviet Union collapsed, the Chkalov's kolhoz existed on the site and after the kolhoz fell apart, the households broke into private peasant units.

The main employment of the residents is in crop (grain, potatoes, corn) and cattle farming. From 1952 until 1973 poppy was grown here and from 1973 until 1994 it was tobacco. These activities employed mostly women and children and now only several households grow tobacco. When tobacco was grown on a large scale, schoolchildren were taken away from the school to work in

the field from September until November, i.e. until the harvest was collected the school year didn't start. During those years, vanguard komsomol (Young Communist League - YCL) brigades were created from high school graduates. There were moral and material incentives for this. Rewards were allocated in the form of certificates, monetary bonuses and resort referrals. During the Soviet times this youth was provided with benefits by the state upon entering higher educational institutions, as well as assistance in komsomol weddings. Young people's weddings at that time were called komsomol because the just married were the YCL members and, as a rule, production leaders.

With transition to a market economy in early 1990s, the people were unable to reorient and adapt to the transition period requirements which led to a sharp decrease in the well-being of the village residents. The situation was worsened by the 1991 earthquake, the epicenter of which was in the Susamyr canyon about 150 km from the Kenesh village. There were no human victims, but the earthquake resulted in the loss of about a half of the cattle. Also, some old houses were destroyed and the state promised to replace them with the so-called "Finnish-style houses," but this was never done. Aside from the school, the only institution in the village was a shop which was closed in 1993 and, at present, the people go to buy goods and food products in the town of Talas (50 km. away). In 1994, the collective farm fell apart and an individual farm was formed. In 1998 the *aiyl okmotu* was renamed from Chkalov into Bekmoldo, after Bekmoldo Ishimov, a highly qualified professional from the Kara-Oy village, who worked for a long time at leading positions in the party Soviet system. Recently, a book was published about him in which he is referred to as "et jibes Ishimov," which literally means "vegetarian Ishimov." At present his children are working at leading and high positions, demonstrating professionalism in their occupations.

The climate in the Kenesh village is sharply continental with an average temperature of 25 degrees Celsius above zero in July and 25 degrees Celsius below zero in January. Because it is located on the mountain slopes, the winters are very cold and the snow sometimes reaches 1 meter. In the spring and autumn rains are frequent, so the vegetables do not have enough time to ripen. The summers are shorter than in other researched villages.

The residents are Kyrgyz Muslim; there are no representatives of other ethnic groups or minorities. At present the younger generation which has separated from their parents, is constructing houses, although these houses are not as big as those of their parents. There are about 140 households with a total of 560 people in the village. Since the households are individual, each household has to work actively, and it seems that the people in this village are more hard working than in the other two villages.

2.8. Number of Groups and Individuals Studied by Site

In the course of the study 60 individuals were interviewed and 90 focus group discussions were held. The study covered the total of 1093 people.

For further information on the number of focus groups, sites, gender and age characteristics of the groups and individual informants, please see attached Tables 2.9 (a) and 2.9 (b).

Table 2.9 (a): Number of Focus Groups by Site

Site	Poor				Other (specify)				Total
	Men	Wome n	Yout h	Sub- total	Mixed group	Specia l group	The elderly	Sub- total	
Rural Sites									
At Bashi	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Ak Kiya	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Uchkun	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Beisheke	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Urmalar	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Kenesh	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Achy	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Tash Bulak	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Urban Sites									
Bishkek	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
Kok Yangak	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	4	9
TOTAL	20	20	10	50	20	10	10	40	90

Table 2.9 (b): Number of Focus Group Participants by Site

Site	Poor				Other (specify)				Total
	Men	Wome n	Yout h	Sub- total	Mixed group	Specia l group	The elderly	Sub- total	
Rural Sites									
At Bashi	16	16	17	49	16	6	8	30	79
Ak Kiya	19	20	12	51	21	10	10	41	92
Uchkun	16	19	14	49	21	13	10	44	93
Beisheke	26	32	10	68	28	16	13	57	125
Urmalar	17	18	14	49	21	9	8	38	87
Kenesh	26	32	10	68	28	16	13	57	125
Achy	13	21	10	44	21	8	10	39	83
Tash Bulak	16	17	18	51	24	11	8	43	94
Urban Sites									
Bishkek	22	20	12	54	46	6	15	67	121
Kok Yangak	26	25	11	62	19	12	11	42	104
TOTAL	197	220	128	545	245	107	106	458	1003

Table 2.9 (c): Number of Individual Informants

Site	A poor man who was not poor in the past	A poor woman who was not poor in the past	A man who is better off now than he used to be in the past	A woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past	A poor youth	A poor elderly	TOTAL
Rural Sites							
	8	8	8	8	8	8	48
Urban Sites							
	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
TOTAL	10	10	10	10	10	10	60

3. Perception of Poverty: Well Being Definition and Trends

3.1. Local Terminology and Definition of Well Being

It is common knowledge that in the Socialist times there was no division of the rich and the poor in society, and all citizens of the Soviet Union belonged to the middle class. This was possible because the government provided stable jobs, paid benefits for young children and gave pensions to the elderly and disabled. Transition to a market economy entailed the division of society into different categories of well-being.

The results of the study show that the informants understand well-being (*tyn jashoo*) as good life (*jashoo*) and wealth (*bailyk*); however, they do not think that well-being is limited to these tangible components but believe that well-being is impossible without tolerance, peace, family, and children. The informants think that the basis of well-being is good health, peace in the family and in the society. In their opinion, wealth is an important component of well-being and can only be gained if these conditions are present. Most of the informants define well-being as stability in the household and society and the ability to satisfy one's material and spiritual needs.

Ill-being is understood by informants as problems in life. The informants very rarely used the word "poverty" when discussing ill-being. Instead, they spoke of such specific components of ill-being as lack of livestock, lack of agricultural equipment, inability to work on one's land, wage and pension arrears, payment of pensions and social benefits in-kind, by overpriced food, absence of a house and need to rent a flat, no cash in hand, lack of food and clothes, inability of children to attend school, inability of high school graduates to continue their education in universities, family conflicts, and poor health.

There is no particular difference between the definitions of good life given by urban and rural informants. Definitions given by informants are usually very much alike. However, there is a certain difference definitions of well-being given by rural and urban informants which can be explained by differences in the way of living of residents of towns versus villages and, therefore, the difference in their financial and spiritual needs.

The collapse of the collective farm system and formation of private farms deprived villagers of their permanent jobs and stable wages; the farmers are now on their own trying to resolve all problems that arise in their agricultural work. Therefore, among the criteria of well-being named by rural informants are livestock, irrigated land with good soil, ability to work on one's land (adequate agricultural equipment, enough fuel, fertilisers, seeds, knowledge of agribusiness); the informants also named stable jobs, cash in hand, timely payment of wages, pensions, and social benefits, good houses with good furniture and non-residential constructions, such as barns, a car, good roads, affordable transportation, enough food and clothes, good health, ability of children to attend school and continue their education after graduation, adequate information, family, children, peace in the community, and peace in the country.

<p>In the spring fuel for tractors is very expensive in the rural areas. There are no fertilisers, no chemicals against weeds. How can one be well-off in the absence of these? (<i>an older poor man from Uchkun village, Naryn district, Naryn region</i>)</p>
--

Urban and rural informants define well-being as a house, permanent job, cash in hand, timely payment of wages, pensions, and social benefits, wealth, enough food and clothes, ability of children to attend school and continue their education after graduation, good health, good family, peace in the country and in the world.

According to the urban informants, such components of well-being as permanent jobs and timely payment of wages and pensions can be achieved by re-opening of companies, factories, and mines, and restoration of communications. Other components of well-being, in the opinion of the urban informants, are good health of children and a sufficient amount of money.

In discussing well-being and ill-being, individual informants and participants of focus group discussions used the following terms:

- *Jugu jektor, kogongosu jektor* (from Kyrgyz *juk, korongo* -- basis, foundation, and *jok* - no) -- the poor, those who did not have the basis for wealthy life in the past. The term was used in most of the focus groups, both rural and urban, in the course of defining categories and criteria of well-being.
- *Maslokrady* -- wealthy government officials who abuse their power and illegally privatise state property. According to an informant from the group of younger poor men, there are such officials both in towns and in villages.
- *Malai* -- a poor person who has to work as a servant to earn a living.
- *Kul* (literally -- slave) -- a poor person whose only way to survive is doing hard work of all kinds for the wealthy.
- *Kurkuldor* -- wealthy people who do not care about needs and problems of others. The term was used in the focus group of rural youth during discussion of the wealthy households. Urban informants used the term, too.
- *Tash door* (literally -- stone age) -- the term used by older poor men from a rural site to describe the current situation in their community. According to the informants, people expected to build Communism, but instead found themselves in the stone age, i.e., an undeveloped society where life is based on manual work.
- *Jany Kyrgyz* (literally -- the new Kyrgyz) -- a very rich person who owns a business, cars of foreign makes, shops, kiosks. Both urban and rural informants used the term widely.
- *Saranbai* -- a greedy rich person who only cares about himself and never helps his neighbors. The term was used by a mixed group of informants in a rural site.
- *Jaltak kedei* -- a poor person who lacks self-confidence and suffers from an inferiority complex. The term was used by a wealthy woman during an individual interview. According to the woman, poor people do not feel confident when talking to others.
- *Sutkor* -- a usurer. The rural informants used the term when describing the category of “very rich”.
- *Ash toi* -- a national tradition of elaborate ceremonies held in case of a funeral or a big family event, such as wedding or circumcision. The rural informants used the term when discussing causes of poverty, because, according to the informant, the *ash toi* is one of the biggest cost items in the family budget.
- *Orto bai* -- a wealthy person who has a good house and cars (not very expensive). The term was used by the elderly informants from urban sites to describe the category of households that are neither “rich” nor “middle class”, but somewhere in between.
- *Tomoyak* -- a beggar. Urban students used the term when defining categories of households.
- *Yiman* -- high moral and conscience in the religious sense. Sometimes the term *yiman* was used as a synonym to *Islam*. Group of urban youth used the term during the discussion of effects of poverty. According to this group of informants, one of the effects of poverty is loss of *yiman*.
- *Chondor* -- people who have power and money. The informants used the term when discussing problems and priorities and argued that most of the problems require participation of the *chondor* for their resolution.

- *Tugongodor* -- people who face a hopeless situation. Informants from the group of the elderly used the term when discussing category of the poor.
- *Kurnamys* -- people who feel ashamed to admit that their situation is difficult. The informants from a mixed group used the term when discussing criteria of poverty. According to the informants, the poor are often ashamed to admit that they live in poverty, and would thoroughly conceal it.
- *Shoru katkandar* -- people who live a miserable life. Informants from a mixed group used the term as the equivalent to “beggars”.
- *Tobo kyluu* -- fear of God’s punishment for sin. The term was used by the urban informants from a mixed group in the course of discussion of the effects of poverty. According to the informants, some of the poor commit suicide out of desperation, but it is a sin.
- *Janaza buirubait* -- deprivation of the right to be buried in the Islamic tradition. The term was used in the same group when discussing suicide. Some of the informants from the group said that they do think about suicide, but it is *janaza buirubait* that, among other reasons, prevents them from it.

When discussing well-being and ill-being criteria, rural and urban informants used the following Kyrgyz proverbs and sayings:

- *Oozu kyishyk bolso da baidyn uulu suilosun* -- a rich man’s son would have a say in the matter even though he is stupid/incompetent (literally -- even though he has a twisted mouth).
- *At jerin jerin izdeit, adam elin izdeit* -- a horse looks for his land, a man looks for his nation.
- *Elde jok bolso, mendeginin paidasy jok* -- it’s no good to have everything when others have nothing.
- *Ayal jakshy er jakshy, vizir jakshy han jakshy* -- if a wife is good, a husband is good, and if an advisor is good, a ruler is good.
- *Jakshy ayal jokton bar kylat, jaman ayal bar nerseni jok kylat* -- a good wife will make something [good] out of nothing, and a bad wife will destroy the good things she has.
- *Jaman uidon jardai katyn chygat* -- how come such a great woman goes out of such a poor house.
- *Araket kysan, bereke bolot* -- if one works, one has an income.
- *Ordu menen paidalan* -- so everything on time and adequately.
- *Elin bory bolso boru bol, tulku bolso tulku bol* -- if you live with wolves, be a wolf, if you live with foxes, be a fox.
- *Eluu jylda el janyrat, juz jylda jer janyrat* -- it takes fifty years to have new/different people appear, it takes a hundred years to have a new land appear.
- *Birinchi bailyk den sooluk, ekinchi bailyk ak jooluk, uchunchu bailyk -- juz sooluk* -- the greatest treasure is health, the second greatest treasure is a good wife, and the third greatest treasure is a hundred sheep.

Informants of all groups and all sites understand well-being as normal, good, wealthy life, as opposed to life in need and problems. Wealth (*bakybatchylyk*) and well-being (*jakshy jashoo*), according to the informants, have to do with financial wealth, good health, family and children, peace on a household, community, and society levels. These components of well-being are common for both rural and urban informants.

At the same time, informants of different groups suggested criteria of well-being that can be explained by their gender and age. Thus, the elderly from both rural and urban sites believe that one of the well-being criteria is well-behaved children, adult children capable of supporting their

own families and their ageing parents, timely payment of pensions (in-cash, rather than in-kind), peace in the community, and stability in the country and in the world.

“Among all well-being criteria, peace is the most important one. Now there is war in Yugoslavia and in other countries. God willing, it would not happen here. As they say, *ach bololu, birok tynch bololu* (be hungry but live in peace).
(Group of the elderly from Ak Kiya village, Naryn district, Naryn region)

Analysis of rural informants’ responses shows that there is a certain similarity between the ideas of well-being expressed by men’s and women’s focus groups. Thus, younger and older poor men and women named the following criteria of well-being: a job, money, a house, livestock, good health, peace in the family, and peace in the country.

Younger and older poor men from the rural areas believe that the main criteria of well-being are livestock, agricultural equipment, stable jobs, ability to cultivate on one’s land, and money, i.e., the criteria that have to do with the life of the community as a whole, rather than with the life of an individual household. On the contrary, younger and older poor women from the rural areas among the primary criteria of well-being name first of all the factors that have to do with a situation in an individual family: a good house, good health, nutritious diet, ability of children to attend school and continue education after graduation, and peace in the family.

Younger and older poor men from the urban sites named lack of a permanent job with a stable wage and lack of cash as the main criteria of ill-being. Younger and older poor women from these sites named such criteria of ill-being as lack of food and clothes, financial problems, inability of families to afford school and university education of children, poor health, delays in payment of social benefits for young children and payment of such benefits in-kind, and family conflicts.

Rural youth among the criteria of ill-being name lack of a permanent job and money, inability to continue education after school, lack of entertainment, and information vacuum. Urban youth name the same criteria of ill-being, except for lack of entertainment.

”We’ve heard about computers, but we’ve never seen them and don’t know how to work on them. And, if we go to the town and enter a university, for sure we’ll be expected to have computer skills.”
(Group of youth from Beisheke village, Kara Buura district, Talas region)

In the rural areas, younger people (high school graduates, young men that come back from the army) believe that the main criterion of well-being is a permanent job. According to this group of informants, there are no functional companies in the rural area, so unemployment rate is very high. Among other criteria of well-being, the informants of this group name money, good family, enough food and clothes, entertainment, and access to information.

Urban youth named basically the same criteria (money, permanent job, ability to attend school and continue education after graduation from it). Younger people are particularly concerned with poor opportunities to continue education after high school. According to this group of informants, higher education is inaccessible because in most cases it is paid. In the course of the discussions, high school students asked the study teams a lot of questions about entering universities and colleges.

“Powerful connections, powerful relatives or friends help one find a good job, and those who have such jobs don’t have problems in their lives”.

(a 20-year old student from Bishkek)

Having discussed criteria of well-being and ill-being, the informants divided households of their communities into different categories of well-being and defined proportion of each category. Usually, this discussion began with informants’ description of the way of living of the rich and the poor. The informants in most cases broke their communities down into the following categories: the rich (*kolunda bar, bailar*), middle class (*orto jashagandar*), and the poor (*kedeiler, nacharlar*). Some of the informants also mentioned the category of “very rich” (*oto bailar*) and “very poor”, or “beggars” (*oto kedeiler, jakyrlar, oto nacharlar*). Very rich, rich, and middle class, according to the informants, can be viewed as people who are currently well-off.

Some of the informants believe that the rich can be divided into two categories. The first category is the “noble rich” who live well themselves and help others, and the second one is the “mean rich” who only think about themselves and do not help anybody. People say that the latter category would rather see their property rot than use it for their own good or for the good of others. Some of these “mean rich” have made their fortune by dishonest means. Such people are also called *saranbai* (mean rich) or *aldamchybai* (a rich person who has made a fortune by dishonest means).

“Akylbek lives in Upper Achy, part of Achy village. He has 2000 sheep, 2 herds of horses, and 50-100 cows. The value of this property is 2 600 000 *som*, or \$78235 . But Akylbek is so mean, his house is like a small hut, and his family members don’t eat or dress well.”

(Group of the elderly from Achy village, Suzak district of Jalal Abad region)

When discussing criteria of well-being and ill-being, the informants from Uchkun village, Naryn district of Naryn region, made the following comments:

- There are no “very rich” people in the village, but there are people who have enough livestock and land, own cars and shops, and have relatives who work in the town.
- In the past, everybody tried to stay in the middle in terms of wealth, because there was a strict governmental control over earnings.
- In the village there are people who have enough money to support their families. These people work, try to do something.
- There are a lot of people who have nothing but 3-4 sheep. These people have no cattle and hardly make both ends meet. They really suffer from delays in payment of pensions and social benefits.
- In the Kyrgyz tradition, in case of a death in the family a horse must be butchered and all people who come to the funeral must be fed. Therefore, even though relatives and neighbors might advise the family against holding an elaborate ceremony and butchering a horse, most people still follow the tradition. The Kyrgyz may butcher the very last animal they have, or borrow money and then live in debt for a long time.
- When a young man is getting married, his parents have to pay *kalym* (payment to the bride’s parents for the work they did raising the daughter), and the bride’s parents provide *sep* (dowry). *Kalym* and *sep* can be 5,000 - 10,000 *som*, depending on the wealth of the families.
- Some people just never try to do something about their situations. They waste their crops, lose their livestock. Many people are in a desperate situation because of their own laziness and alcoholism.

- Middle class are teachers and doctors who have a permanent job and a stable wage, but now their situation is getting worse, because wages are not paid on time.

All of the informants mentioned clear distinction between different categories of people that has become the case in the post-Soviet times; however, the categories named by the informants were different. Thus, for instance, the elderly from Achy village (Suzak district of Talas region) suggested the following categories of households:

According to the informants, the wealthiest people in the rural area are those who have a lot of livestock (1,000 -- 2,000 sheep, 20-30 cows, 20-30 horses), a lot of land, several houses (which may be two-storied), a lot of money, several cars of foreign makes, several wives living in different places, hired workers, servants, and slaves. The informants do not think that such people exist in their communities. Usually, this category was described in generic terms and given a very low proportion (most frequently -- 0%).

In some villages the informants said that there are very rich people in their community. These people, according to the informants, had several hundred sheep, several dozen cows and horses, and a lot of land. To take care of all these property, the rich use services of hired workers and slaves who take care of the animals, work in the field, and do the housework. Such hired workers or slaves may be relatives of the rich, their neighbors, or members of the same community. In some cases such people come from the town to do this kind of work. When speaking of the category of "very rich", the informants said that some of them managed to make a fortune by trade at the very beginning of the transition and now lend the money to friends and neighbors and charge a very high interest. Discussing this category, the informants mentioned not only the ways people became rich, but also positive and negative effects of the wealth:

"One can make a fortune, but, if it has negative effects for the rest of the community, such wealth gives just an illusion of well-being, because it does not do any good for people. If somebody's well-being is based on ill-being of others, it is not a true well-being. There are rich people in the village. They made their fortune by selling alcohol and vodka. The community do not like these people, because their prosperity is only possible due to growing problem of alcoholism in the village."

(A 54-year old man from the town of Kok Yangak, Jalal Abad region)

Analysis of the responses shows that in most focus groups the informants named basically the same criteria of being "very rich". However, the figures provided by the informants when they assessed the number of livestock, units of equipment, or size of land, was different. Comparative analysis of the responses shows that in the remote villages where there are pastures the number of livestock of the "very rich" is greater than in the villages located in the valley, close to district or region administrative centers. Younger and older poor women of Jalal Abad region spoke about very rich families in their community. According to the informants, these people account for about 1% of the community and have 1,000-2,000 sheep, some 10 horses, a herd of cows, a lot of land, big houses, small businesses, and mills. The informants believe that the rich are very selfish and never help others.

Younger and older poor men from the rural sited believe that there are no "very rich" people in their communities and describe this category as people who have 300 - 2,000 sheep, 20-30 cows, 2 herds of horses, good houses, businesses, lots of money, lots of land, and cars.

Rural youth (below 20) and schoolchildren think that there are no “very rich” households in their communities and define “very rich” as the households that own a lot of money and livestock, have trucks and agricultural equipment, big land plots, permanent highly paid jobs, and big houses.

According to the urban informants, there are very rich people in the community. According to the urban informants, “very rich” have lots of houses, sometimes two-storied or more, both in the rural and in the urban area, several cars of foreign make, cars for the children, businesses, private shops, lots of money in local currency and U.S. dollars, bank accounts, several wives, and servants.

Poor urban women named basically the same criteria of “very rich” households but said that there are no such households in their community.

Younger poor men from the urban sites believe that “very rich” households do exist, and say that “very rich” own two-storied houses, 10-15 cows, cars, and businesses. Proportion of such households, according to this group of the informants, is not more than 2%. Older poor men from the urban sites believe that there are no “very rich” people in their town.

The other urban focus groups did not mention the category of “very rich” in their discussions. Special group of refugees from Tajikistan currently living in the town of Kok Yangak (Jalal Abad region) did mention the category of “very rich”, but they did not make a distinction between the “poor” and “very poor”.

Urban informants believe that “very rich” are government officials who have power. According to the informants, these people have high official positions, own businesses, and have made their fortune by selling metals, cotton, and other raw materials on conditions unfavourable for the country. These people, in the informants’ opinion, had enough money to privatise large buildings, factories, mines, and other valuable property. According to older poor women, many of such people have accounts in Swiss banks.

The informants include tax officials in the category of “very rich”. In general, the category of “very rich” is described by the informants as “those who have made their fortune at the expense of the nation”. The informants feel negatively about this category.

The category of “rich” appears to be much less wealthy than “very rich”. According to the rural informants, the “rich” have a good house with good furniture, agricultural equipment, car, several hundred sheep, money, and, in some cases, hired workers who help them with agricultural work. Children of the “rich” can afford university education.

According to the informants, many of the people that currently can be qualified as “rich” were quite well-off in the Soviet times. In many cases such people had high positions in the collective farm (such as the position of chairman of the collective farm, chairman of the Communist Party Committee of the collective farm, manager of the garage, chief veterinary, chief agronomist), and during privatisation many of them misappropriated much of the collective farm property, including agricultural equipment.

At the same time, among the “rich” there are people who have gained their wealth by honest work or trade from the very beginning of the transition.

“It’s very difficult to gain wealth by honest work. Usually, people make their fortune by dishonest means. For instance, there are several two-storied houses in our village. Their owners have high positions in the region center and in the capital city. My family and I work from morning till night, and what we earn by such hard work is just enough to have decent living standards. This hard manual work costs us our health.”

(A 44-year old woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Urmaral village, Bakay Ata district of Talas region)

Rural poor men named basically the same criteria of the “rich” households. In the opinion of this group, proportion of the “rich” in the community is about 2%.

Rural poor women listed the following criteria of the “rich”: a big house, a lot of livestock, several items of agricultural equipment, a business, a mill, a commercial kiosk. According to this category of the informants, there are 1% to 5% of the community members that can be qualified as “rich” in Talas region, 0% to 30% -- in Naryn region, and 1% to 10% -- in Jalal Abad region.

Middle class, or “average”, in terminology of some informants, are the households that have livestock (10 to 100 sheep, 1 to 5 cows, 1 to 5 horses, and about a dozen chicken), some agricultural equipment, a car, a good house with barns and storage rooms, enough money, clothes, and food, and can afford school and university education for their children. Some of the informants included in this category the white-collar workers, such as teachers, doctors, and government officials of the village level. According to the informants, these people earn their living honestly, their main sources of income are wages, proceeds of sale of agricultural products, meat, and milk, and proceeds of trade. The informants believe that retail traders, *chelnoki* (those who go to other towns and to the neighboring countries to purchase goods for further re-sale in their home town or village), also belong to middle class. Middle class, in the informants’ opinion, are people who have well-paid jobs. Analysis of the responses and observations of the study team lead to the conclusion that the category referred to as “average” meets the criteria of “middle class” as defined in social science. According to social science research, middle class is the basis of social stability, and the higher its proportion is, the more stable is the society.

Informants from Achy village (Suzak district of Jalal Abad region) believe that there are representatives of middle class in their community. Most of these people had a good stable job in the Soviet times, and many of them were in trade (shopkeepers, managers of warehouses, managers of department stores). Due to the deficit of basic goods which was quite a problem in the Soviet times, people had to contact such traders informally and pay higher prices for the goods that were otherwise impossible to find. Among other representatives of the middle class the informants named the leader of their community, the director of school, the director of the local branch of the social fund and social service, the director of district office of state administration, and the chief doctor of the local clinic. These people belong to the category of “middle class” rather than “wealthy” primarily because they suffer from wage arrears (payment of wages is being delayed for 4-5 months).

Categories and Criteria of Households

as Defined by Younger Poor Men from Ak Kiya village, Naryn district of Naryn region

Categories	Criteria	Proportion
------------	----------	------------

Rich	A house, a car, enough of everything, money	5
Middle class	A house, a job, a stable wage, a family	90
Poor	A house, some land, no income	5

Rural poor women from Jalal Abad region believe that the rich account for 0% to 20% of their communities, and middle class -- for 1% to 20%. Rural poor women from Naryn and Talas regions believe that the rich account for 0% to 15% and 0% to 5% of their respective communities, and the middle class account for 10% to 65% and 40% to 70% of their respective communities.

Rural youth and schoolchildren from all regions name basically the same proportion of the households (1% to 5% for the rich, 20% to 30% for the poor).

According to rural elderly informants from Naryn region, there are no rich people in their community, and middle class in their community account for 15%. The elderly informants from Jalal Abad region believe that the rich account for 0% to 5%, middle class -- 10% to 30%, and the poor -- 60% to 70% of their communities. In Talas region, the elderly assess proportion of the rich at 0% to 5%, middle class -- at 20% to 35%, and poor -- at 50% to 60%.

Urban poor women believe that the rich account for 5% to 10% of their community, middle class -- for 0% to 13%, and poor -- for 80% to 90%. Urban poor men assess proportion of the rich, middle class, and the poor in their community at 3% to 18%, 0% to 20%, and 70% to 80%, respectively. According to the urban youth, proportion of the rich is 0% to 4%, middle class -- 2% to 9%, and the poor -- 80% to 90%. Finally, the elderly from urban sites believe that the rich account for 0% to 1% of the community, middle class -- for 5% to 10%, and the poor -- for 85% to 90%.

In the informants' opinion, the majority of people now fall under the category of poor and meet the following criteria of poverty: lack of a house and need to rent a flat, lack of a permanent job, constant lack of money, inability to buy adequate clothes, malnutrition and hunger, inability of children to obtain a good education.

According to the rural informants, the poor are the households that do not own any livestock or own not more than one cow, 1-2 sheep, and several chicken, are short of basic food and clothes, can not afford school education for children, live in a poor old house or a rented flat, and constantly have family conflicts caused by financial problems.

There is also a category of people who live in extreme poverty. The informants used the words *nischii* (beggar) and *bomzh* (Russian abbreviation for "homeless"). The basic criteria of this category are unemployment, lack of a house (rural informants, however, believe that people who live in extreme poverty do have at least very basic shelter), hunger, lack of clothes/old, worn out clothes, inability of children to attend school because of the lack of basic clothes and footwear. This category includes the elderly who have nobody to support them; however, there are not many such lonely elderly in the Kyrgyz communities, because the Kyrgyz highly disapprove adult children who live their parents and elderly relatives without support.

According to the urban informants, the extremely poor people (“the beggars”) are a separate category of people who have no property, starve, have to do hired work or serve others to survive. The informants believe that 3% to 25% of the community can be qualified as “beggars”; informants of a mixed group from an urban site assessed proportion of this category as high as 90% of their community.

Younger people of Kok Yangak town (Jalal Abad region) believe that *bomzhi* (the homeless) are a separate category of people who represent the lowest level of the society. These people “have nothing”, “do not take care of their children”, “drink to excess”, “look terrible”, “sleep in the entrances of the apartment houses”, “find food in the garbage cans”, “beg”, and “have no family”. According to the informants, proportion of this category is 5%.

It appears that overall economic crisis and economic reform in Kyrgyzstan caused a dramatic decrease in the living standards and mass poverty in the country.

“Poverty is understood as very low financial level which is not sufficient for normal life of a person and their family. Poverty measurement can be based on the minimal requirements of food, water, clothes, and shelter. Poverty level is the level of income which is not sufficient to satisfy these needs. To assess poverty, it is necessary to take into account consumption structure that currently exists in the country and the consumption prices; poverty level can only be assessed approximately.

According to the study held by the National Committee on Statistics in autumn 1996, minimal consumption level is 716 som per person. Proportion of people whose income falls below this level is above 60%. Extreme poverty level is assessed as monthly income below 221 som per person. This income is required to provide the very basic food. 20% of population of the country fall below the level of extreme poverty.”

(Araket poverty alleviation programme, 1998-2005)

To assess poverty level, experts of the World Bank suggested in 1997 to use the data on annual expenditures on food. Use of this method has allowed to assess the situation with poverty for a particular year. The National Statistical Committee used the method and in cooperation with experts of the World Bank received the following data:

1. Poverty line for the purpose of assessment of poverty level:
1996 - 4,190 som a year (approximately 349,16 som a month) per capita;
1997 - 4,647 som a year (approximately 387,25 som a month) per capita.
2. Severe poverty line for the purpose of assessment of extreme poverty level:
1996 - 2,199 som a year (approximately 183,25 som a month) per capita;
1997 - 2, 439 som a year (approximately 203,25 som a month) per capita.

According to the data of the National Statistical Committee, Osh and Jalal Abad regions of Kyrgyzstan are the poorest. Population of Naryn region face a very difficult situation, too. Talas region is also among the poor regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Percentage of Poor by Region

Region	Urban		Rural	
	Poor	Extremely poor	Poor	Extremely poor
Overall in the Kyrgyz Republic	28.5	4.9	64.5	20.7
Naryn region	75.9	46.9	94.7	62.0
Talas region	57.8	32.7	68.2	21.7
Issyk Kul region	38.9	3.1	79.9	36.1
Chu region	20.7	3.5	28.2	3.5
City of Bishkek	6.6	.8	0.0	0.0
Jalal Abad region	58.3	10.2	76.8	35.6
Osh region	56.7	7.8	68.7	10.9

(Data of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic: Assessment of Living Standards)

To obtain complete and accurate information on the standards of living in the Kyrgyz Republic, the National Statistical committee held study of households in 1997 in the framework of *Social Safety Net in the Kyrgyz Republic* project. The results have shown that poverty is a growing problem throughout the country and is a particular problem in some of its regions.

Percentage of People Living Below Poverty Level and Severe Poverty Level

	Extremely Poor	Poor	Non-Poor
Urban area	4.9	28.5	71.5
Rural area	20.7	64.5	35.5
Nation-wide	14.8	51.0	49.0

Results of *Consultations with the Poor* study support the data of the National Statistical Committee provided above. According to the informants which have participated in the study, proportion of the poor is 35% to 78% in the town of Kok Yangak and 43% to 75% in the town of Bishkek. Naryn region is characterised by the highest poverty level, followed by Jalal Abad and Talas regions.

- When defining well-being and ill-being, the informants used local terminology that let them better understand the issues discussed.
- There is a similarity between the definitions of well-being given by rural and urban informants. According to the informants, well-being has to do both with wealth, and with such criteria as good health, family, children, peace in the community, and peace in the country.
- Rural informants name such well-being criteria as ability to work on land, adequate agricultural equipment and fuel for it, and mineral fertilisers, i.e., the components required for resolution of their current problems.
- Urban informants believe that the main criteria of well-being are a house, a permanent job and stable wage, timely payment of pensions and social benefits, enough food and clothes, ability to give education to children, peace in family, and peace in the community.
- There are both similarities and differences in the definitions of well-being given by different focus groups. Thus, men tend to define well-being as permanent jobs, money, a house, while women refer to such criteria as children, their health and wealth, and peace in the family.

- The informants believe that there are generally two categories of households that are currently well-off: the rich and middle class. Some of the informants believe that there are “very rich” households in their communities, but these households are not very numerous.
- The informants particularly emphasise the category of “poor” and increase in its proportion in their communities.

3.2. Cause and Effect Analysis

The informants named a variety of factors that, in their opinion, cause poverty in their communities. Some of the factors are common for urban and rural sites, while others are site-specific. Depending on living conditions and characteristics of their site, and depending on their age and gender, the informants named different causes of poverty.

In the informants’ opinion, the main causes of poverty in Kyrgyzstan are unemployment, high prices, wage and pension arrears, payment of pensions and social benefits in-kind (by flour, oil, sometimes hosiery). These factors are caused by the transition and limited state budget. These causes of poverty were named by informants of all focus groups both in the urban and in the rural area. Urban informants believe that unemployment is caused by closure of factories, mines, companies, and some public agencies.

A 45-year old woman from the town of Kok Yangak believes that unemployment in her town is caused by closure of the clothes factory which has been privatised by one of the Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic. The factory has been closed for almost five years. A 51-year old Kyrgyz man from the same site believes that the cause of unemployment in the town is destruction of the brick factory which had production capacity of 3,000 to 8,000 bricks a day. Among other causes of poverty the informants from Kok Yangak named misappropriation of the property of bus station and closure of the mine.

Rural informants think that poverty is caused by collapse of the collective farm system, because in the absence of collective farms residents of rural areas no longer have stable wages. The informants also spoke of high prices of consumer goods and food and increased prices of basic utilities.

“Because prices for food and clothes are so high, many people in this village can’t afford even the very basic products and goods. Many of them are dressed in old coats, and their children have to wear old clothes to school. Some of the children don’t want to go to school because they feel ashamed of their old clothes.”

(A 39-year old woman from Uchkun village, Naryn district, Naryn region)

Most of the informants spoke of high prices in generic terms, but some of them specifically emphasised high prices for fuel, electric power, basic utilities, and construction materials as their serious problems.

“Petrol is very expensive. I gave a sheep to that man because he promised to bring me some petrol. My wife told me that I should go and bring the petrol myself, but I didn’t, because the man promised to bring everything. It’s the second week that there is no man and no petrol to see. I tried to find the man, but failed, and now my wife is picking at me.”

(A 50-year old man from Uchkun village, Naryn district, Naryn region)

In most sites delayed payment of pensions and social benefits and their payment in-kind, by flour, oil, sometimes hosiery, is viewed as a serious problem that adds to poverty.

“Pensions and social benefits are never paid on time, and when they are paid, they’re rarely paid in cash – usually we’re offered overpriced flour and oil. For instance, flour is 210 som a sack, and at the market one can buy it at 160-180 som.

(A 49-year old woman from Uchkun village, Naryn district, Naryn region)

A group of elderly Kyrgyz and Russians was queuing outside the post office at about 4.30 p.m. Some of them approached us and explained that they had been waiting for their pensions since five o’clock in the morning, but the post office employees would not say if there is any money. One of the pensioners said that the post office would throw them some money as if they were dogs, but there wouldn’t be enough for everybody, so people would be waiting for months. One of the Russian pensioners cried and said that his wife would not let him in the house if he does not bring any money; the rest of the group showed their disapproval saying: “Don’t cry, you aren’t a woman, are you?” The pensioners looked tired and sad, were poorly dressed, their hands were weather-beaten (“wooden”, as the informants themselves said).

(Observations of Jalal Abad study team, town of Kok Yangak)

In addition to the causes of poverty discussed above, urban informants mentioned such specifically “urban” problems as low wages and wage arrears, and lack of a permanent source of income. Urban poverty is rather specific, because prices of food, services, and accommodations are higher than in the rural areas, and households can not compensate absence of stable wages by growing agricultural products or livestock for their own consumption or sale.

“I’ve been working in this mine for 27 years and I had some property, but sold it all when they stopped paying us. All we have in our house now are 2 beds with mattresses, and my wife and son are hungry all the time”.

(Volodya, a 47 year old miner, Kok Yangak town of Jalal Abad region)

According to the rural informants, poverty in the rural areas are caused by high water and land tax rates, collapse of the collective farm system, misdirected policy of agrarian reform, unpreparedness of people to the reform, lack of governmental support, lack of sales market for agricultural products, unavailability of loans (difficulties in obtaining loans and high interest rates), and poor crops caused by lack of fertilisers, natural disasters, and unfavourable climate.

A particularly heated discussion was about loans and grants which, according to the informants, can not be accessed. To the repeated questions of the study team whether or not the informants ever tried to obtain the loans, collect the necessary documents and go through the required bureaucratic procedures, the informants said that they did not, because they knew that it was useless. According to the informants, loans are only available for those who have money, and to obtain a loan, one needs to pay a *shapka*, or a bribe to the official in charge of loan issuance. The informants appear to believe that long-term loans are the way out of their difficulties.

(From the discussion with the group of poor men from Tash Bulak village, Bazar Korgon district of Jalal Abad region)

Among other causes of poverty, the informants of all regions named lack of a basis, or starting capital. According to the informants, some of the currently poor families have a long history of poverty, and the older generation in these families failed to create a “starting capital” based on which their children could gain wealth.

“Some of the families did not become poor overnight, their parents weren’t wealthy in the past, so they had no *korongo* (basis, or starting capital required to improve living conditions or gain wealth).

(A 35-year old poor woman from Beisheke village, Kara Buura district of Talas region)

The informants believe that poverty is caused by excessive spending on the national rituals and traditions, such as *ash* (funeral ritual) and *toi* (celebration of big family events, such as weddings, housewarmings, and birthdays).

In Naryn region, if a wealthy person dies, several horses must be butchered, and if a poor person dies, at least one horse must be butchered as part of funeral ceremony. This tradition has been followed by the Kyrgyz for several centuries and was observed even in the Soviet times. Failure to butcher a horse is viewed as disgrace, so the poor borrow a lot of money to buy a horse, and then have difficulty repaying the debt. Currently, a horse costs 7,000 *som* or more.

(From the interview with a 56-year old woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Ak Kiya village, Naryn district of Naryn region)

“Poverty is caused by laziness. I think that poverty is caused by inability to work and laziness, and as a result of poverty people lose their well-being. I don’t understand the poor who are begging or sitting and gossiping all days long, while they could do some hired work or at least sell sunflower seeds [a popular snack] in the street”

(A 44-year old woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Urmara village, Bakay Ata district of Naryn region)

Results of the study show that the causes of poverty discussed above entail health problems, family conflicts and divorces, alcoholism, increased crime rate, degradation of youth, and malnutrition. These effects of poverty were named by informants of all rural and urban sites.

Poor health, according to some of the informants, is both a cause and an effect of poverty. In poor families there is not enough food and clothes, in winter such families suffer from inadequate heating, and, as a result, people experience health problems. Both the informants’ responses and observations of the study team lead to the conclusion that conflicts in poor families are triggered by financial problems, lack of food, clothes and footwear, and inability of children to attend school.

“Yesterday wholesale traders came to buy our potatoes. My daughter-in-law wanted to sell five sacks to buy shoes for children, but my son didn’t let her do so, because, if we sell too much, there will be nothing to plant. I think both my son and my daughter-in-law were right: children need shoes for spring, but we also need potatoes to plant. Here’s what poverty effects are like.”

(A 64-year old poor woman from Kenesh village, Talas district of Talas region)

Alcoholism is also viewed as both a cause and an effect of poverty. Results of the study show that the rural poor often have no cash to buy alcoholic drinks, so they buy on credit and repay when the crop is harvested, so they do not have enough products left for themselves. Constant use of poor quality, home-made alcoholic drinks by the poor affects not only their health, but also the genetic pool of the nation in general.

Informants said that poverty leads to growing crime rate in their communities. Among the most common cases of crime they named vandalism, petty theft, and theft of livestock. In most cases, according to the informants, the poor commit crime out of desperation. Poverty and ill-being results in degradation of the younger generation.

“Younger people do steal, but mature people do, too. Younger people steal small items, and the older thieves, especially state officials, steal millions of dollars. Don’t you think it’s also a theft?”

(A 19-year old man from Tash Bulak village, Bazar Korgon district of Jalal Abad region)

Diet of the poor is usually limited to bread and tea; some of the households can not afford even these products and suffer from malnutrition and hunger.

In the urban sites, in addition to the effects of poverty discussed above, the informants named the following specifically urban factors: growing number of street children, increased child labor, growing problem of prostitution, STDs, and suicide.

Poor younger people from rural areas migrate to the towns, because their households can not work on land, children can not attend school. The *mardykers* (hired workers) appear in the rural area.

“Some of the rich people now have servants who do all work for them for food and shelter, or for a very low payment. The number of such people is growing every year, we don’t know how many of such people exist now. They do the laundry and clean the houses of the rich”

(A 33-year old woman of At Bashi village, Naryn district of Naryn region)

According to the informants of Naryn region, poverty causes that are particularly serious for the region are lack of arable land, severe climate, and the residents’ lack of aptitude for trade. It can be explained by the fact that Naryn region is located high in the mountains, where winter is long and severe, arable land is scarce, and very few kinds of agricultural products can be grown. According to the informants from Naryn region, transition to the market economy is very difficult for them, because they are not used to trade and have no history of trade. There are no region-specific effects of poverty.

In Talas region the study revealed such specific cause of poverty as inadequate performance of customs offices on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border. Residents of Talas region of Kyrgyzstan have been selling their agricultural products in the town of Taraz (Jambul region of the neighboring Kazakhstan). Currently, lack of awareness of customs requirements, such as the requirement to provide quality certificates for food transported across the border, and customs officers’ abuse of their power many people can not go to the market of Taraz.

“To sell our products, we go to Taraz, the town in Jambul region of Kazakhstan. There’s a customs office on the border, and customs officers sometimes abuse their power, even though we have all necessary documents for our products. I think this procedure must be simplified. There was no customs office in the Soviet times, you know.”

A 49-year old informant (ethnic Kurd) from Beisheke village, Kara Buura district of Talas region

Responses of the informants do not reveal any effects of poverty that are unique for Talas region.

Sites of Jalal Abad region are different than the rest of the sites studied. Thus, the town of Kok Yangak was a town of miners supported by Moscow and supplied with high quality products and goods directly from Moscow. Currently infrastructure of the town is destroyed, and in January 1999 the town was transferred to administrative supervision of Suzak district. Residents of Kok Yangak believe that the primary reason of their current poverty is collapse of the USSR which entailed liquidation of companies, isolation, lack of law and order, growing crime rate, divorces, and drug problem.

The village of Achy (Suzak district of Jalal Abad region) is also unique. Since 1990, the area has been frequently affected by landslides and mudslides. In 1994 10 families were killed by a landslide; after that, it was decided to move the village. Some of the residents built new houses in the valley, but others returned to the mountains. Since natural disasters present a serious problem for Achy community, informants from this community believe that their poverty is caused primarily by repeated mudslides and landslides and the need to move to other areas where conditions are inadequate for livestock herding, and have difficulty switching from herding to agriculture.

Tash Bulak village (Bazak Korgon district of Jalal Abad region) suffers from lack of drinking water and very high taxes on non-irrigated, barren land. The village is populated by refugees from Tajikistan who believe that their poverty is caused by natural disasters, lack of drinking water, infertile land, and severe climate. Among effects of poverty, the informants of this site named

hunger which, in their opinion, is a real threat for 95% of the community, and diseases which have become more frequent in the past ten years.

Difference of informants' opinions of causes and effects of poverty can be explained by difference in their age and gender.

The study has shown that elderly urban informants view unemployment, misappropriation of state property, corruption, inflation, wage and pension arrears, and alcoholism as primary causes of poverty. The effects of poverty, in their opinion, are poor health, hunger, public disorder, violation of human rights, growing crime rate, bribery, and low morals.

“Corruption is one of the most important causes of poverty. The corrupt officials delay payment of our pensions and social benefits, because they use the money and profiteer on it.”
(A 65-year old man from Kok Yangak, Jalal Abad region)

Elderly rural informants believe that poverty in their communities is caused by unemployment, high prices, collapse of the Soviet Union, and collapse of the collective farm system, lack of arable land and irrigation water, high tax rates, poor law enforcement, severe climate, unavailability of loans issued on beneficial conditions, great number of children, and lack of sales markets for agricultural products. Among effects of poverty this group of informants name family conflicts, inability to work on land, poor health, inability of children to attend school, lack of public order, growing problem of corruption, hunger, bribery, lack of clothes and footwear, existence of hired workers who do all kinds of work for the wealthy, growing rate of murders, migration of younger generation from the rural area, degradation of the younger generation, gambling, and alcoholism.

“Some families in this village can't even afford enough food for their children. These people don't work on their land and offer it for lease to others. In many of such families children can not attend school, because they don't have clothes and shoes. To some extent, these people are guilty in their situation themselves. Many of the men are lazy and drink alcohol instead of working and providing their families.”
A woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Kenesh village, Talas region

One of the effects of poverty named by informants is hunger. Thus, residents of Tash Bulak village (Bazar Korgon district of Jalal Abad region) said that 95% of their community face a real threat of hunger, even though the community members grow wheat. According to the informants, if soil in the area was not as barren as it is, their crops could be twice as good.

Another effect of poverty is illness.

“There are a lot of murderers out there now. In the Soviet times they would be all in prison, but now criminals aren't punished, because officials of law enforcement agencies commit such crime themselves.”
An aksakal from Tash Bulak village, Bazar Korgon district of Jalal Abad region

Urban youth believe that poverty is caused by unemployment, closure of factories and other companies, inability of people to adjust to the market economy, lack of legal education, and laziness. According to this group, poverty leads to growing rate of diseases (TB, nervous diseases), frequent family conflicts, lack of friendliness, and existence of what the group referred

to as “modern slaves”, people whose only way to survive is doing any kind of work for the wealthy.

“Our current poverty level is caused by poor performance of municipal authorities. Municipal officials have stolen and sold out everything of value. They are greedy and never stop. Poverty is also caused by lack of law and order and lack of equality. It looks like laws are written for the poor only, and the rich do whatever they please. People aren’t equal. The rich and the poor don’t like each other and don’t associate with each other.”

(A 22-year old man from Kok Yangak town, Jalal Abad region)

Rural youth think that poverty is caused by unemployment, high prices, delays in payment of pensions and social benefits, unfair distribution of humanitarian aid, cheap labor, lack of livestock, mismanagement, lack of stable wages, poor law enforcement, natural disasters, laziness, absence of one of the parents, and inability to continue education. These factors entail diseases, hunger, growth of crime rate, family conflicts, divorces, inability of children to attend school, increased mortality rate, debts, indifference to life, bitterness of the youth, alcoholism, drug problem, malnutrition, and information vacuum.

“Life’s very boring here. There is no place where we young people could go in the evening, no entertainment. The only fun thing is cards and alcohol. We work in the fields for the whole season, this work is very hard, very bad for health, and labor is very cheap.”

(Group of youth, Kenesh village, Talas district of Talas region)

“Many people suffer from tuberculosis nowadays. I’m not married yet. If I decide to get married and it happens that she has tuberculosis, than my children will be affected, too. It will influence genetic pool of my family -- of course, I don’t want that to happen.”

(Bakyt, 27 years, village of Tash Bulak, Bazar Korgon district of Jalal Abad region)

According to the refugees from Tajikistan, poverty is caused by unemployment, lack of money, lack of food and clothes, status of a refugee, and alcoholism. Effects of poverty are suicide, divorce, diseases, decline in morals, cruelty, isolation, and failure of the local community to understand refugees.

According to the informants of a special group (ethnic Kurds), primary causes of poverty in their community are misdirected policy of agrarian reform, lack of agricultural equipment, misdirected tax policy, inability of the government to keep the promises it gave to the nations which have suffered from Stalin repression and deportation, high inflation rate with no indexation of money, lack of production companies in the area, lack of sales markets for agricultural products, and abuse of power by of tax and customs officers. The informants believe that poverty leads to distrust to the government and local self-governance, nostalgia for the Soviet past, decline in the living standards, diseases, hunger, lack of hospitality, shame, humiliation, lack of respect among people, and particular lack of respect to the older generation.

“Seven people in the Kurd community have documents proving that they have suffered from Stalin deportation, but no benefits are provided to these people. It’s not our fault that we live outside our home land, it’s the fault of politicians who made this step during World War II. Now the government has to provide us the benefits that we’re eligible for in accordance with laws.

“In the Soviet times we had no idea of poverty, all people were equal, equally wealthy. Now we feel ashamed of the way we live, it’s humiliating, we can’t even visit people or invite guests. It’s for this reason that we couldn’t invite you [the study team] to our houses.”

(An ethnic Kurd, 60-year old man from Beisheke village, Kara Buura district of Talas region)

Some of the causes and effects of poverty named by informants appear to be gender-specific.

Thus, younger and older poor men from urban sites named such causes of poverty as poor education, information vacuum, failure to use loans rationally, lack of law and order, selfishness of government officials, and costly national traditions and rituals. According to this group of informants, poverty causes growing crime rate, poor health, ecological problems, starvation, alcoholism, drug problem, suicide, divorces, and destruction of buildings.

“We were absolutely unprepared for the drastic changes. We have no experience, no knowledge. If somebody came, lent us money and told what to do, we would do something for ourselves and for others. Every day one man dies nowadays. I have some fifteen specialities, but I have no permanent job. My wife left for another man who has money and power. Another woman, our neighbor, also left for a rich and powerful man. We can’t resolve our problems without support of the government. To obtain a loan, I had to give a five-thousand *som* bribe.”

(A 45-year old poor man from Kok Yangak town, Jalal Abad region)

Analysis of causes and effects of poverty in Kyrgyzstan from gender viewpoint shows that men pay more attention to the factors that have to do with their community or the society as a whole, while women are more concerned by the factors that affect their family life, children, and relatives. Some of the causes and effects of poverty named by informants are unique for their region. This is particularly true for Jalal Abad region.

Younger and older poor women of urban sites, unlike men from the same sites, believe that poverty is caused primarily by wage and pension arrears, lack of food and clothes, poor public transportation, closure of factories, expensive health care, lack of irrigated land, and (in the town of Kok Yangak) loss of a status of independent territorial unit. Poverty, according to the women, results in hunger, misappropriation, suicide, child labor, lack of clothes and footwear, high crime rate, drug problem, and alcoholism.

Younger and older poor men from rural sites, unlike the women from the same sites, emphasised such causes of poverty as difficulty to sell agricultural products, poor law enforcement, theft caused by desperate situation, need to move out of the areas affected by natural disasters, failure to adjust to the market economy, misdirected staffing policy and policy of agrarian reform, corruption, mafia, lack of governmental support, lack of unity in customs policy of neighboring countries, closure of production companies, small land plots, high prices of petrol and electric power, mentality of parasitism developed in the Socialist times, prevalence of barter transactions, and migration of the younger people to urban areas. According to this group of informants, these factors lead to such effects of poverty as chaos, nervous breakdown, excessive consumption of

alcohol purchased on credit to be repaid when harvest is cropped, premature, ageing, fraud, and inability to work on land.

“Because of unemployment and laziness, younger people commit crime, steal livestock. Many young people go to the town to somehow earn money, and some of them stay there if they’re lucky enough to find a job. Those who don’t find a job come back and live the way they did before.”

(A 53-year old man from Uchkun village, Naryn district of Naryn region)

Unlike men, older and younger rural women believe that poverty is caused by lack of a permanent source of income, delays in payment of pensions and social benefits, excessively fast transition to the market economy, disabilities, misdirected policy of agrarian reform, cheap labor, and earthquakes. According to the women, all these factors lead to such effects of poverty as poor health of children, lack of food and clothes, lack of equality among people, inability of children to attend school, isolation, deterioration of family ties, conflicts in family, hunger, and alcoholism.

“Tomorrow’s the funeral of my eldest daughter’s mother-in-law. We have to contribute at least 500 *som* and a good carpet to be hung on a wall. I have neither, so I borrowed 300 *som* from a neighbor. My daughter-in-law borrowed a carpet for the floor, but relatives told me that it won’t do, so I had to take another, better carpet, which costs 500 *som* -- so that my contribution is like everybody else’s. I’ll have to repay these debts, eventually, but I don’t know how. Many people don’t lend us any more, because they know we have nothing to repay the debt with. See, it’s difficult for the poor to maintain the links with the relatives.”

(A 53-year old woman from Kenesh village, Talas district of Talas region)

“My eight-year old daughter died several days ago. She was disabled, never walked. The benefit that we received for her was our only source of income, because my husband and I are unemployed. Now we’ll have to survive on the small benefits paid for the other two young children that we have. A month ago I gave birth to another boy. The benefit for my deceased daughter was more than 300 *som*. Now I don’t know what to do.”

(A 35-year old poor woman from Ak Kiya village, Naryn district of Naryn region)

The data provided above lead to the following conclusions.

- Discussing causes of poverty, informants of all focus groups mentioned external factors that were somehow or other related to the government: unemployment, high prices, pension arrears, inadequate legal environment, misdirected policy of reform, difficulties of the transition, inflation, and low wages.
- In several cases the informants named physiological causes of poverty, such as poor health, disability, and alcoholism.
- There is a separate category of subjective causes of poverty that have to do with the mentality and personalities of the poor. Among these causes are laziness, lack of initiative and self-confidence, and indifference. In most cases these factors were named as causes of poverty by more wealthy informants.
- Some of the poor households are actively trying to cope with poverty. When asked about causes of poverty, informants from such households named their inability to access the resources which are being used by the rich, such as agricultural equipment, big plots of good irrigated land, livestock, starting capital for a business or trade, loans, and powerful connections.

Interpretation and Conclusions

Analysis of causes and effects of poverty has shown the following features of transition in the Kyrgyz Republic:

- Standards of living are worsening, and the number of poor households is growing.
- The main causes of poverty both in the rural and in the urban area are, according to informants, unemployment, high prices, wage and pension arrears.
- Causes of poverty that are particularly serious for the urban area are small wages, wage arrears, lack of money, and absence of such sources of income as livestock or a vegetable garden.
- Causes of poverty that are particularly serious for the rural area are high land and water tax rates, lack of governmental support, lack of sales markets for agricultural products, and unavailability of loans. Rural informants also named subjective causes of poverty, such as lack of starting capital, excessive spending on national rituals and celebrations, laziness, alcoholism, parasitism, and lack of initiative.
- The effects of poverty common for urban and rural area are health problems, family conflicts, growing crime rate, malnutrition, and degradation of the younger generation.
- Informants from the urban sites such specifically urban effects of poverty as child labor, growing problem of prostitution, STDs, and suicide.
- In the rural areas typical effects of poverty are inability to work on land, migration of the younger people to towns, inability of children to attend school, and appearance of hired workers who serve the rich for minimal payment or for food and shelter.
- On a personal level, poverty has such effects as health problems, premature ageing, weak and ill children, degradation, depression, suicide, crime, prostitution, family conflicts and divorces, and social exclusion.
- On a community level, poverty results in exclusion of a growing number of people from social life, weakening government, decline in the field of science and culture, and a possibility of social unrest.

3.3. Safety Guarantees

The informants understand safety as economic security, adequate conditions of living (peace, absence of natural disasters), personal safety, and government protection of the socially vulnerable groups.

The informants say that in the Soviet times people felt support of the government, which guaranteed them jobs, timely payment of wages, pensions, and social benefits for the disabled and mothers of many children. In addition, people felt economically secure, because they had livestock and vegetable gardens. Food and clothes were inexpensive, ties between relatives were strong, and all this made people feel protected.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic crisis, growing problem of unemployment, low wages, wage and pension arrears undermined people's confidence about protection provided by the government. According to the informants, most people now risk to become poor or very poor.

During the transition period, many people had a chance to improve their situation by opening a business and developing it, but the unfair distribution of property during privatisation, lack of equality at the beginning of this process, and lack of knowledge in the field of business resulted in a clear division of the society into the rich (protected) and the poor (unprotected).

The difference between the protected and the unprotected households is their economic situation, ability to cope with crisis, government support to the households trying to cope with poverty, and social protection provided by the government.

People define safety as confidence about the present and the future. In the past people felt more confident, because everything was guaranteed by the government: a strong social safety net was in place, people had permanent jobs, and were paid pensions and social benefits in a timely manner. The system of law enforcement worked well, and crime rate was lower than it is now. Now people feel less safe, because they face economic difficulties, so, in case of a problem, they can not protect themselves from either financial or moral viewpoint.

(Opinion of the informants from a mixed group, At Bashi village, Talas region)

Safe households are the ones that have enough resources to satisfy basic needs of the family, cope with possible crisis situations, such as natural disasters, illness or death in the family, or loss of a job. According to the informants, the households that can be qualified as safe are those of traders, business people, government officials, and people with stable high wages.

“I feel reasonably safe and confident. My family and I have a shop, and most family members work in it. Of course, there can’t be a 100% guarantee that we don’t run out of business or have things stolen from us, but we’re doing our best, investing our money and labor in our business. Even pensions of our parents are invested in it.”

(A young man who is better off now than he used to be in the past, Kok Yangak, Jalal Abad region)

The households that are facing difficulties and can not cope with crises, are unprotected. Primarily, such households are those of teachers, doctors, low level officials who are now paid very low wages, and households with many young children, where the main source of income is pensions and social benefits for children.

Urban unemployed are also unprotected. Many of the urban unemployed are people who have come to towns to find a job and currently face difficulties. As they are not registered in the town as permanent residents, they are not eligible for unemployment benefits and benefits for young children; on the other hand, they have no land to work on, or have a land plot too small to satisfy the basic needs of the family.

In case of downsizing the government during 3 months pays a benefit; within the three months the unemployed are supposed to find a new job. Many people begin trading at the small open-air markets or just in the streets. If their attempts are not successful, they get back to the rural area to do agricultural work or herd livestock, because they understand that such work is more stable and less risky than occasional employment in the towns.

In case of a death of a primary income earner, a household is eligible for a benefit in the amount of 1000 *som* which is spent on the funeral ceremony. The households that have lost primary income earners face serious difficulties and have to apply to Social Service (*Sotspomosch*, formerly *Sobes*) for support.

An important guarantee of safety, according to the informants, is peace in the society. Tension and conflicts between countries undermine confidence about the future. In the course of the study,

rural informants named peace, unity, tolerance, and government protection of personal safety and public order, as important components of well-being.

The current war between the NATO and Yugoslavia makes people fear military conflicts. The informants emphasise importance of peace and unity for well-being and believe that financial wealth is secondary to these factors.

“If God gives nothing but peace, people will cope with the rest of problems themselves”
(*Elderly men from Uchkun*)

The informants believe that, in case of natural disasters the government is capable of liquidating their effects without depleting the budget. Natural disasters are one of the factors that cause increase in the number of unprotected people. Loss of property as a result of a natural disaster may cause change in one’s social status from middle class to the poor, even though the government does offer financial support by allocating the money from other budget items or from other regions.

“We live in difficult times, and now we have repeated disasters, mudslides and landslides. When it rains, we’re afraid not only for ourselves, but also for our relatives who still live in the dangerous areas. We’re also afraid that our food is eaten up before the next season begins and before the next crop is harvested. The prices that grow every day are scary.”
(*Older poor women from Achy village, Jalal Abad region*)

“People from our village had to settle in this bad area where there is no drinking water, no irrigated land. It’s because of the officials who made us move here and never asked how we live. The village is 5-6 kilometres from the permanent road. There is no transportation, no bathing facilities, the health care center is too far, and to buy very basic things we have to go 25-30 kilometres from here.

We can put up with everything but lack of drinking water. It’s a vital problem. Often we drink water, there are bacteria and even worms in it, but we still use it after boiling”

(*Older poor women from Tash Bulak village, Jalal Abad region*)

In the Soviet Union, a country more developed from economic standpoint than Kyrgyzstan currently is, and having an efficient law enforcement system and promoting equality, people felt more safe. Growing crime rate during the transition and inability of law enforcement agencies to keep the situation under control make people feel that they are not protected against physical abuse and violence.

The Soviet system of social protection of vulnerable groups is still in place, but, due to the overall economic crisis and lack of money in the budget, most people eligible for social benefits can not receive them on time.

Inflation, growing prices, natural disasters, death of a primary income earner, and loss of a job are named as the main shock factors which may cause mass poverty. Devaluation of the national currency has strongly affected traders who are re-selling at the markets and in the streets goods purchased abroad. Many such people have incurred losses due to devaluation of *som* (national currency) as compared to U.S. dollar. In the rural area this situation most strongly affected the

households which obtained loans in U.S. dollars and now have to repay them in dollars. In addition, prices for utilities and electric power have risen.

“When I obtained a loan from *Helvetas* (Swiss organization accredited in Kyrgyzstan), rate of *som* to dollar was 20 to 1, and now it’s 37 to 1. I have to repay the loan within two years. I’m really grateful that *Helvetas* is accepting repayment at 25 *som* per dollar.”

(A woman from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

Currently it is very difficult for the poor to cope with their poverty, with crises which have specific causes. The poor see the way out in receiving support from the government, the community, the relatives, and the international organizations. However, due to overall economic crisis, the government, community, and relatives face a difficult situation, too, so their support can not resolve all problems.

“My family and I are more economically secure than most of our neighbors. As for risks and vulnerability, everybody can die, fall ill, grow old, or have an accident. That’s risk for me. Recently, a good friend of mine had a traffic accident, and she had no money, so I went to Jalal Abad and brought her all necessary medicines. When she got better, she repaid me the money. To be safe now and in the future, I work a lot and do my best to have my children have a good education and live well.”

(A middle-aged woman who is better off now than we used to be in the past, Achy village, Jalal Abad region)

Some of the households do cope with crises. Ability to cope with crisis depends on financial resources of a household, as well as personal abilities of their members, and support of the government provided in a crisis situation.

“In case of a natural disaster the government helps to cope with the situation. It helped people after flood and landslides in Suzak district in 1998. All nation helped people affected by the disaster, people collected money and humanitarian aid.

I have a disability of the second category. I have forty years of work experience as a teacher. My family (wife and five children), as well as all other families from Achy that have suffered from the disasters, received a loan of 32,000 *som*. In addition, the Ministry of emergency situations provided 300 *som* to each family member and 1500 *som* to the head of a household as a benefit. We built a house in a safe area, and my son and his family live there now. I still live here, because I don’t want to leave the house of my parents. If another landslide strikes, I can go live with my children. Some people in the village wouldn’t have such opportunity, because they did not use the loan rationally and didn’t build houses in the valley, so, if there is another landslide, they may find themselves without a shelter. My wife and I have university education and are paid wages, but our wages are delayed all the time. We also have a horse, 15 sheep, 2 cows, and some land. We grow peas, sunflower, and wheat, and then process them”

(An elderly poor man from Achy village, Jalal Abad region)

Risk is defined by rural informants as a possibility to lose one’s wealth and social status. Currently people face this risk all the time, because governmental support is not nearly as strong as it used to be in the Soviet times. Support of relatives and neighbors, and support of the community, is also weakening.

One of the informants said that people are afraid to take the risk of starting their own business, because a lot of money needs to be invested, and there is no guarantee that the business would not fail because of the outside factors such as high inflation rate.

The government is trying to implement the policy of reform, undertaking initiatives on social protection, but people down in the regions are not covered by them due to lack of initiative, decisiveness, and professionalism on the part of local authorities. According to one of rural informants, head of a community is elected by the community members, but he does not resolve their problems and just keeps referring to lack of funding.

Currently, risk and vulnerability are increasing due to high inflation rate, growing prices for basic goods and products. In the past, when prices were growing, wages, pensions, and social benefits were increased proportionately; now such indexing is done rarely and not soon enough to be helpful. Therefore, the risk of those who are “safe” now to become “vulnerable” in the future is a reality. Informants of different focus groups believe that this process is one of the features of the present time.

“Risk for me is the need to go to the market every day to sell goods. I feel that I’m not protected against difficulties. I feel danger all the time. Those who have permanent jobs are sort of protected against danger, but they also face the risk. For them, it’s the risk to lose a job. And the poor are not protected at all, they face risks all the time, are afraid of the future. I am concerned about the future, because standards of living in my family are going down.”

(A young woman from At Bashi village, Naryn region)

3.4. Opportunities, Social and Economic Mobility

The informants believe that now they have better opportunities to improve their financial situation than they used to have in the Soviet times. Under the Soviet regime, everybody tended to “stay in the middle”, not to go above the average level of well-being, because all sources of income were strictly controlled by the government. The government guaranteed stable jobs for everybody, but at the same time it controlled the maximum amount of wages and salaries and the number of livestock that people in the rural areas could own. Therefore, possibilities to improve one’s financial situation were limited due to the state policy that promoted equality.

Currently, rural informants speak of opportunities primarily from an economic viewpoint.

“There are a lot more opportunities now. In the past, any attempts to gain wealth were disapproved by the society, and everybody tried to stay “in the middle”. Now there are a lot of opportunities, especially in the field of business, but many people lack initiative or can’t start their businesses because they don’t have the right conditions for it.

(A woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Ak Kiya, Talas region)

The overwhelming majority of people in the Soviet times belonged to the category of “middle class”. This is understandable, because the principle of equality was promoted by the government and was deeply rooted in the mentality of Soviet people. People were afraid to go above the average level and felt ashamed to fall under it. Naturally, this equality hindered individual development.

According to the informants, current opportunities to improve one’s financial situation are much better, because the government no longer imposes limitations on the income of individuals and

views their income as a good opportunity to collect taxes. Possibility to start a business in trade, production, or livestock herding, are limited, because conditions for it are quite unfavourable: thus, loans are hardly available, tax rates are high, and people themselves rarely have the knowledge and skills required to successfully start a business.

Many of the informants said that, to start their own business, they have to obtain a loan. However, there are other factors that hinder development of small business, such as lack of knowledge in the field of business and marketing.

“The first and the best way out is to herd cattle and sheep, the second -- to do agricultural work, and the third -- to sell products (fruit, vegetables, eggs, milk) at the market.” Discussing the third way of coping with crisis, the informants said that they need these products for their own consumption, but they have to sell at least part of them to have enough cash for paying electricity and utility bills, buying clothes for children, going to the town as necessary, paying for health care, and visiting relatives.

From a discussion with the group of the elderly, Uchkun village

Older poor women from Achy village (Jalal Abad region) were particularly pleased to discuss with the study team their crafts. During the focus group discussion they showed their work, woollen carpets with ornament. According to the women, the unique “deer ornaments” on the carpets were taught to them by their mothers; now they, in their turn, teach their daughters this art. The crafts are made of wool of the sheep that the women themselves or their neighbors own. Now it is quite a problem to find good quality dyes for wool. Chinese dyes are very low quality, so the women prefer to make the dyes themselves using folk methods, such as boiling onion peels for rich brown colour. The women also make beautiful bedclothes for themselves and their daughters. Men of the village make wooden spoons, soup spoons, and plates of different sizes. The study team told the women about a forthcoming in Bishkek which was organised by NGOs with participation of donor organizations, and invited them to attend it. The women were quite interested, because they want to open a small facility for production of carpets, but currently have no money for it.

(From a discussion with women of Achy village, Jalal Abad region)

Economic mobility has grown, because now there are a lot of opportunities to find a niche at the goods and service market. However, economic mobility has grown only in case of people who quickly understood possibilities offered by market economy and used them. Many representatives of middle class and the poor did not react to the changes quickly enough, which could be explained by a variety of objective and subjective reasons. Among the objective reasons most common was inadequate starting capital at the beginning of transition; among subjective reasons were lack of knowledge in the field of business, laziness, alcoholism and drug problem, mentality of parasitism, belief that the government would always resolve all problems that may arise.

A mother of ten believes that younger generation is poorly adjusted to life: “I remember the time of World War II. After it people managed to improve their living standards. People suffered from hunger and cold the way they do now, but they did survive, and now -- here’s a current example. My daughter’s husband is 32. He is lazy and helpless. My daughter used to work as a nurse, and her wage was the main source of income for the family. Than she gave birth -- it was hard, she had to have a caesarean section. In three years she gave birth to another baby, the same way. Now she stays at home with her children, and her husband doesn’t have a permanent job -- just occasional work. So my husband and I support our nine children and that adult daughter of ours, her husband, and their two children. I don’t know what will happen to my daughter after I die.”
(*Sabira, an elderly woman from Tash Bulak village*)

Social mobility has changed, as compared to the Soviet times. It increased among people who successfully adjusted to the changing situation, understood the need to increase contacts and connections dictated by market relationships, and established links with friends, relatives, prospective partners, and prospective clients. Now socially mobile people have better opportunities to improve their financial situation.

For many people relatives are the only institution that provides support; however, in the Kyrgyz traditions, relatives not only receive, but should constantly provide support.

“The Kyrgyz say: *Tuugandyn topuragy altyn*” (literally -- relatives are the most expensive people in the world”.
An elderly man from Urmaral village

Strong links within an extended family were not affected by the Soviet system, even though some restrictions were imposed, for example, two close relatives could not work together. Economic difficulties of the post-Soviet time undermined family relations. For the poor social mobility seriously decreased, because their lack of money prevents them from supporting relatives and friends, thus losing their support, too. As a result of such changes, proportions of the rich and the poor increase, while proportion of the middle class decreases.

According to the informants, the current crisis can be overcome by a number of steps. The informants believe that the government has to create adequate conditions for development, which includes legal environment, favourable tax legislation, timely payment of wages and pensions, improvement of performance of government officials, especially those of local level, and resolution of region-specific problems (problem of water supply, lack of land, refugees, people repressed during Stalin’s reign), while people themselves need to objectively assess their current situation and try to find ways out of it.

Informants from the village of Tash Bulak said that standards of living are continually decreasing. However, the informants try to cope with it and find ways out of the situation. Since the village of Tash Bulak has unirrigated land, residents of the village can not rely on agricultural work. The informants said that in summer men go to other villages and towns to work there, while women and children stay at home, grow cereals, melons, water melons, and tomatoes, and sell them by the road between Osh and Bishkek. Such sale is a good source of seasonal income for the households. In autumn men come home and look for wholesale traders interested in purchasing sunflower oil and peas. The proceeds of sale are used to buy wheat and produce flour, which, however, often does not last till the next agricultural season. The informants believe that these steps do not make a big difference in their lives and just allow them to satisfy their very basic

needs. Kiyamdin, leader of the refugee community, described their life as “*Olbo janym olbo*” (survive for the sake of survival).

To improve economic and social opportunities of the poor, the government, according to the informants, needs to develop industrial enterprises, create jobs, provide adequate condition for development of agriculture, issue loans on favourable conditions, create adequate conditions for sale of agricultural products, supervise issuance of loans, and create a broad network of microcredits which will allow general public to start or strengthen small businesses.

Informants of Jalal Abad region, among their most acute needs, named the need to establish favourable customs policy. Thus, between the Kyrgyz towns of Osh and Jalal Abad there is an Uzbek town of Hanabad. A great number of Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens pass Hanabad every day. There are two customs offices in the town, the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek one, and within 12 kilometres all passengers are checked at both. Customs officers make people open their bags and take out all luggage, and thoroughly search for drugs, prohibited publications, foreign currency, and firearms. After 5:00 p.m. very few private cars can cross the border, while buses are thoroughly searched. Both Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens waste a lot of time at the customs and feel very unhappy about it. The situation was further worsened by a recent remark of the President of Uzbekistan that the Uzbek allegedly “feed the Kyrgyz”. Both the Uzbek and the Kyrgyz said that people in Fergana valley have always lived in peace, traded, and got married irrespective of ethnic background, so the President’s remark should not affect their relations. In the village of Achy a representative of a 100% Uzbek group said: “We ethnic Uzbek are Kyrgyz citizens. We were born in Kyrgyzstan, have always followed and will always follow Kyrgyz laws, and appreciate the policy of the Kyrgyz President”.

Improvement of local authorities’ performance will create adequate conditions for development and decrease the tension that currently exists between community members and officials of the local level. It is necessary to define local priorities and take measures to overcome local problems.

The informants appear to realise that, if people do not do something about their current problems themselves, nobody will help them. People who have realised it are now trying to start their businesses, increase their wealth, and improve their living conditions. They face a lot of difficulties in this process, because there is no governmental support to rely on, no loans to be issued. Therefore, other group of people has put up with the decrease in the living standards and believe that nothing can be done about it without governmental support.

The informants said that people were not prepared for the transition and lacked basic knowledge of market and the opportunities that it offers for improvement of one’s standards of living. Lack of information about loans, sales markets, and international experience hinders attempts of the poor to overcome their poverty, so, one of the main factors required for coping with the current crisis is access to information.

Groups of younger poor men and older poor women from Ak Kiya village (Naryn region) had particularly heated discussions of the procedures of loan issuance and availability. According to these groups, there are frauds who come to villages, offer their support to those who want to obtain a loan, charge some money for it, and leave. Many people have trusted the frauds and given them all their savings.

“That credit line opened in the town of Naryn. They said it was issuing long-term loans with low interest rates. One man applied for a loan, and the “representative” of the credit line demanded that the man give him a horse. A horse costs about 7,000 *som*. Many people from other villages also gave bribes to the representative of the credit line, but they didn’t receive any loans. Because there was no answer from the representative for a long time, people went to the police, and the fraud was arrested. He is in prison now.

(A poor man from Ak Kiya village, Naryn region)

3.5. Social Exclusion

The problem of social exclusion in Kyrgyzstan may be considered from several different viewpoint. It may be viewed as isolation from markets of goods and services, lack of access to labor market, deprivation of right to work on land, and violation of human rights.

The distinction between the rich and the poor in the society is becoming more and more clear, and the difference in level of consumption increases proportionately. Due to the overall economic crisis and impoverishment, drastic increase of prices for food, clothes, and medicines, paid health care and university education, the poor, especially the rural poor, can not access the products and services available for other groups, and feel isolated from them.

A group of teachers from the village of Ak Kiya can not receive land to build houses and grow vegetables on, and a group of teachers from the village of Uchkun do not have time to do something about their situation, because they work very long hours and are too tired in the evening to work in their vegetable gardens. Situation of the teachers who do not have houses of their own, and teachers who can not improve their living conditions, can be viewed as social exclusion, too, because they feel isolated from the rest of the community.

The rural poor who have children of school age are concerned that their children will not be able to continue their education in universities or colleges, because the newly introduced paid education is not affordable.

“Teachers of our school are in a desperate situation. They can’t receive their wages for months. The school is far from the center of the village, there are no cultural institutions, no shops near it. To buy things, people have to go to the town of Jalal Abad. Because of all these difficulties, turnover in the school is very high.”

(Women from the village of Achy, Jalal Abad region)

Unemployment is one of the main factors contributing to social isolation of the poor. For the great majority of people a permanent job is the only source of income. Most of the rural households do agricultural work on an individual basis, and the urban unemployed make a living by selling small items at the markets and in the streets. People who have no private business are somewhat isolated from the rest of the society.

The problem of social exclusion from the viewpoint of use of land is as acute as the problem of unemployment in the sites studied. Informants of one of the sites view agricultural work as one of the ways out of crisis. Lack of land plots is a problem for the urban informants and for residents of some villages that may not have arable land due to their status of administrative centers.

Social exclusion from the viewpoint of human rights affects primarily refugees from Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan has accepted the refugees when war began in Tajikistan. The refugees live in different areas of Kyrgyzstan and, even though the central government is taking steps to create favourable conditions for them, local authorities in most cases fail to resolve refugees' problems. The refugees who have no passports have great problems trying to obtain them, and without passports they can not receive medical services, find a job, obtain loans, or participate in the elections.

Social exclusion of the refugees is caused by local authorities' ignorance of relevant legislation and by bureaucratic procedure of problem resolution. In addition, refugees feel hostility of the local people who say that "we had enough problems ourselves, and now you're here to add to them". The result of such exclusion is further division of the society into the rich and the poor and increase of social tension. The refugees believe that the problem may be resolved if they have Kyrgyz citizenship and can develop their businesses.

3.6. Social Cohesion, Conflict, and Crime

Social cohesion is understood by the informants as a possibility to resolve problems of the community by a joint effort of all community members, and as unity and friendship between people of different ethnic backgrounds.

In the Soviet times, according to the informants, there was cohesion and friendship between people, because everybody had equal level of wealth, and there was no social exclusion. The economic crisis of the post-Soviet period caused isolation and exclusion. The informants explain it by economic factors and changing mentality of people.

"People were getting along better in the past, because they were all equal, had equal conditions of living. Now every family works individually and survival is a concern for everybody, people are more cold with one another. It's particularly true about relations between the rich and the poor."
(An elderly woman from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

"There is no unity in our community. We don't visit each other. In the past, we used to help, pool money (*razha*) if somebody had a death in the family. We no longer do. How can people help others if they don't have enough for themselves?
(A middle-aged woman from Ak Kiya village)

In the Soviet times the sense of unity and belonging promoted by the Soviet ideology as an important component of Communist society was stronger than economic problems. The first years of transition caused frustration to many people, as such principal values of the Socialist society as unity and equality of people were replaced by purely economic priorities.

According to an elderly informant from the village of Ak Kiya, currently the country is undergoing a difficult period, and the problems can only be resolved if there is unity between people. Ak Kiya is a village founded by one man, the ancestor of the current residents. Since basically all Ak Kiya residents are relatives, they live in peace. However, even there informants think that they were closer in the past, while the current difficulties cause bitterness and isolation between community members and even family members, and people are on their own trying to resolve their problems. In the past, all community members pooled money (*razha*) if somebody died or a big family event was held, but now many households can not contribute anything because they are short of money. Many people, especially the poor with many children, are frustrated, have no confidence about the future, and expect support of the government or other

outside support. The only sources of income for this group are social benefits paid for young children and occasional support of relatives.

Many informants view social cohesion as a strategy of coping with crisis. Thus, an informant from the village of Urmalar said that people can cope with crisis if they join their efforts and work together the way they did under collective farm system. The informant said that costs of agricultural work can be cut significantly if people pool their land and other resources and work together, and drew a map showing how much is spent now on fences around individual land plots and how much could be saved if there was one big land plot with one fence around it.

According to the informants “everybody does what he can to survive”, people stay at their homes and can not afford inviting guests or visiting friends. These factors add to social exclusion on a community level and between representatives of different communities. Another cause of exclusion is such important feature of market economy as competition.

Crime

According to the informants, the current crime rate is higher than it used to be in the Soviet times. The informants believe that Soviet system of law enforcement was more efficient, and most frequent cases of crime were misappropriation of state property and PETTY CRIME.

“In the Soviet period I worked as a chief accountant. I could build a big house and buy two or three cars, but I didn’t because governmental control over earnings was very strict, and I was afraid to be punished for what was called “earnings by improper means”, even though in my case the means were proper, I rented land and grew wheat, onions, peas, carrots. Besides, I had some livestock and a bee garden. All that was a good source of income for my family. If I used the money to build a luxury house or buy prestigious cars, I could have trouble with law enforcement agencies, so I decided to invest my savings into education of my seven children. Now they all have university education and can earn a living in spite of the difficult economic situation.”

(A World War II veteran from Kok Yangak town, Jalal Abad region)

Crime rate has increased during transition, and new types of crime have appeared. Appearance of private businesses invites attempts to make money at the expense of others, so unemployed younger people, especially those in a good physical shape, such as professional sportsmen, racket business people. Other types of crime are banditry, organised crime (mafia) and corruption of government officials (in the informants’ opinion, even people who have very high positions in the government may be corrupt). Crime is caused by poverty and changing mentality of people; transition entailed selfishness and attempts to make money by all means.

The informants named domestic violence, petty theft, and livestock theft as the most common types of crime. Livestock theft is a growing problem: people herd their cattle and sheep in the meadows, and the thieves steal animals from the meadows or butcher them right there and then sell meat at markets in the towns. The government is taking measures against this crime and organising special brigades that go to villages to catch the thieves and prevent further theft. Some of the community members organise informal brigades (*Kyrk Choro* in Naryn region). These measures are helpful, but livestock theft is still among the most widespread types of crime in the country.

“Poverty is caused by poor crops, unemployment, and lack of money. As a result, people steal, rob, and even kill.”

(Middle-aged men from Kenesh village, Talas region)

“There are some beggars in the town. They steal chickens, ducks, kitchenware, and food.”

(An older man from Kok Yangak town, Jalal Abad region)

Poverty and the desire to gain wealth quickly results in a growing problem of prostitution. This problem was mentioned by basically all informants. Violation of women’s rights on a household and a community level (physical abuse of wives, bride abduction) is common. Women in most cases are unaware about their legal rights and view complaints about such cases as a disgrace, so the problem is rarely discussed in public.

“Men don’t care about anything. Some of them would get drunk as soon as they receive their wage or pension. It was the case in the past, too. Men get drunk at any pretext so that women do their work for them. Some men beat their wives. My old men could hit me when we were younger.”

(An elderly woman from Ak Kiya village)

“Life is very difficult for women now. They are overburdened with work both within and outside their families. Some women prostitute themselves to support their children and husbands.”

(A middle-aged woman from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

Theft of non-ferrous metals is another common type of crime. Traders from Kyrgyzstan were selling in China non-ferrous metals, especially aluminium and copper, which in many cases were stolen. Demand for non-ferrous metals in China resulted in theft of electric power lines and cables, power transformers, telephone cables, and electric engines made of these metals.

“As a result of poverty, people steal and rob, children run away from their parents, because of the lack of clothes and shoes children can’t attend school, the poor are humiliated by the rich, and people commit suicide. We’ve sold to China everything we had, even electric power lines. Everything built in the Soviet times was broken, stolen, taken apart.”

(A middle-aged man from At Bashi village, Naryn region)

Racket, or extortion of money from business people by criminal groups, is a widespread type of crime which prevents many people from starting or developing their businesses. Some of the business people were killed, others chose to share their profits with the criminals. Racket was particularly strong in Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of transition, when business people began to make high profits. Racketeers were either former convicts, or professional sportsmen.

“First of all, poverty leads to crime at all levels. We’re trying to avoid conflicts with tax police, racketeers, and organised crime.”

(A woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Kenesh village, Talas region)

It is very difficult to obtain a loan on beneficial conditions. In many cases such loans are distributed by government officials. In the transition period bribery has become a common type of crime.

“I received a loan of 36,000 som. To get it, I had to give a 5,000-som bribe to that official.”
(An elderly man from the town of Kok Yangak)

Other types of crime of which the informants blame state officials are misappropriation of state property and corruption.

“I think that one’s wealth should equal one’s needs and should be gained honestly. I’ve read that article about a customs officer who has fourteen cars and four or five houses. What does he need fourteen cars for, when other people are starving?”
(An older man from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

Conflicts

According to the informants, there are no serious conflicts on the national level. There may be some tension on the level of an individual community; sometimes such tension results in conflicts that are difficult to settle. Due to financial problems, there may be a certain tension between family members.

“Conflicts may occur in any family, and it’s OK as long as you know how to settle them with intelligence and grace. I think that a family is dominated by a man. Situation now is more difficult for women than it used to be, and I know that some men abuse their wives and thus add to their problems.”
(A middle-aged woman from Uchkun, Naryn region)

Crime entails increased tension on a community level. Division of the society into the rich and the poor results in social exclusion of the later, which adds to social tension.

“My daughter came from school crying. Somebody at school called her a beggar, because she was wearing the jacket that we received as humanitarian aid. She refused to go to school.”
(A middle-aged woman from Uchkun, Naryn region)

Social tension may be a result of unfair distribution of land in the course of privatisation of collective farm property. Due to unscrupulousness of some officials, good land plots were left for the state, and farmers received bad, unirrigated land. In addition, there is tension within communities and between different communities where people believe that their neighbors received better land.

During the Soviet period, collective ownership of land, water, electric power, agricultural equipment and fuel for it provided equal access of all community members to these resources. The recent introduction of private property of land, supported by general public, results in further division of households into the rich and the poor. Lack of land, water, and agricultural equipment entails social tension, disputes, and lawsuits between villagers.

“People of Achy village received land plots of three kinds: first for livestock herding and growing grass, second -- for growing agricultural products (wheat, peas, and others), and the third -- for vegetable gardens. The plots are located in three different places, and the land of the first two kinds is far in the mountains. Some of the households do not have agricultural equipment and therefore can not work on their land themselves, so they lease their land to others. Neighbors often change the borders between the land plots and try to add some land to theirs, thus stealing from others. A member of *aksakal* council (council of the elderly) from Almaluu Bulak village said that the council has to settle disputes arising over land issues between community members, and those community members who do not agree with the decision made by the council appeal it in the village council and even in the district court. There were lawsuits over land in the area.”
(An older man from Achy village, Jalal Abad region)

In the South of Kyrgyzstan, where different ethnic groups live closely together, there is a certain tension which was aggravated by the problems of land distribution. Thus, informant of a special group (ethnic Uzbeks) from Jalal Abad region complained that the Kyrgyz received bigger and better land plots than the Uzbek. Informants were reluctant to discuss the tension between the two nations, unless they were in mono-ethnic groups. During the discussion with a group of ethnic Uzbeks from the village of Achy (Jalal Abad region) the interviewer explained the purpose of the study and the importance of the informants’ viewpoints for the research, and the informants said that they received small land plots with quite barren soil. The Uzbek informants spoke a good Kyrgyz.

Many of the conflicts can be settled at the local level, but, due to indecisiveness of the local authorities, they are not. The informants are concerned that, if the situation does not change, tension between the ethnic groups may grow into a conflict like the one which has already occurred in the South of Kyrgyzstan.

Currently there are no serious violations in the rural area, even though younger generation do occasionally commit crime. There are no conflicts on a community level, but a social unrest is possible if the crisis continues. According to one of the informants, a “revolution” is a possibility, because the poor have nothing to lose and can do anything out of desperation.

A military conflict in the neighboring country of Tajikistan and migration of refugees from Tajikistan to various towns and villages of Kyrgyzstan resulted in a certain tension between the refugees and the local community. The primary reasons for such tension are the refugees’ problems, such as lack of permanent registration in Kyrgyzstan which prevents them from official employment.

“I used to be wealthy and independent, and now I am poor. It’s all because of the war, because I had no money, no sources of income after I left Tajikistan and moved to Kyrgyzstan. We came here after the currency reform. Our savings in banks were in roubles, and they devaluated overnight, so we have nothing. Now we have to work on this bad land, weeding it five or six times.”
(A refugee from Tajikistan currently living in the village of Tash Bulak, Jalal Abad region)

Some of the conflicts are settled within a community with a support of *aksakal* courts (courts of the elderly), non-governmental organizations, and offices of international organizations that deal with migration and refugee problems.

“Our collective farm used to be very rich. When privatisation began, individual households received 19 to 50 sheep, a horse, and two cows. The livestock was distributed by casting of lots, because there were different animals out there, the good and the bad. People decided that casting of lots is the best way to decide who is taking what, based on sheer luck, so that there are no conflicts afterwards.”

(Middle-aged men from Achy village)

“Currently people often have disputes over land and water, and sometimes serious conflicts outburst. Stronger community members take the best land and a lot of water, and it causes tension in the community. *Aksakals* (the elderly) try to interfere, settle the conflicts, and have people calm down.”

(A young man from Achy village)

3.7. Coping Strategies

The study has shown that transition to the market economy, difficulty to adjust to the changing situation affected well-being of people in Kyrgyzstan. According to most informants covered by the study, it is for these two reasons that poverty in the country is increasing and categories of people by well-being are changing. In the Soviet times, most people belonged to middle class and there were very few rich people; currently, the society can be divided into “very rich”, “rich”, “middle class”, “poor”, and “very poor”, or “beggars”.

Informants of all regions believe that categories of well-being have changed significantly in ten years. There were no “very rich” people in the past, proportion of the “rich” was much smaller than it is now, and proportion of the “middle class” was much higher. The “poor” accounted for a very small percentage of population. The slogan of equality prevented people from earning more than others and going beyond the limits established by the governments. Relations between people reflected Soviet ideology that promoted equality.

Changes in the proportion of different categories of households were mentioned both by rural and by urban informants. According to the urban informants, in the past the proportion of “very rich” was extremely low, most people had “average” living conditions, there were some wealthy people and some poor people, and the government supported the latter.

The Table above summarises responses of the informants from Kok Yangak (Jalal Abad region) about changes in the proportion of different categories of households over time.

Category	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Very rich	0	1	0	1	0	0
Rich	10	9	30	7	30	10
Middle class	90	0	70	10	60	0
Poor	0	0	0	67	10	60
Very poor	0	90	0	15	0	30

Category	Group 4		Group 5		Group 6	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Very rich	1	3	0	1	12	5
Rich	25	8	10	18	68	10
Middle class	60	8	90	20	0	0
Poor	10	76	0	50	20	60
Very poor	4	3	0	10	0	25

Category	Group 7		Group 8		Group 9	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Very rich	10	5	0	1	2	0
Rich	17	5	0	0	20	10
Middle class	60	15	30	9	70	30
Poor	10	65	60	75	8	45
Very poor	3	5	10	15	0	15

The Table above shows that proportion of the “poor” has increased significantly in the post-Soviet time as a result of the transformation of the society or, rather, decline caused by a number of objective and subjective factors.

A similar tendency of change in the proportion of different categories of households may be observed in the responses of rural informants who believe that living standards in their communities were generally better during the collective farm system than they are now. There were some wealthy people in rural communities, but most of the community members fell down the category of “middle class”. The Tables below summarise changes in the proportion of households according to the responses of residents of Ak Kiya village (Naryn district of Naryn region) within ten years.

Category	Group 1 (mixed)		Group 2 (mixed)		Group 3 (younger poor women)	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Rich	10	10	40	7	20	7
Middle class	80	10	41	20	72	14
Poor	10	80	19	40	8	79
Very poor				33		

Category	Group 4 (older poor women)		Group 5 (younger poor men)		Group 6 (older poor men)	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Rich	0	18	5	5	5	5
Middle class	100	33	90	90	90	10
Poor	0	49	5	5	5	85

Category	Group 7 (youth)		Group 8 (elderly)		Group 9 (special)	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Rich	5	15	10	0	10	5
Middle class	90	20	80	15	65	20
Poor	5	65	10	85	25	75

Criteria of well-being have changed, too. Thus, the main criteria of the “rich” were power, prestigious jobs, powerful relatives and connections; thus, according to informants of Tash Bulak village (Bazar Korgon district of Jalal Abad region), people who had jobs in the system of trade, high government officials, and religious authorities could be qualified as “rich” and accounted for 15-20% of the society.

Among the current criteria that characterise the “rich”, the informants named money, livestock, private firms, two-storied houses, foreign cars, hired workers and servants. For the rural informants livestock, land, agricultural equipment, and ability to afford hired workers are the main criteria of wealth.

All of the informants tend to agree that in the past overwhelming majority of people could be qualified as “middle class”. Currently, the proportion of the “middle class” is decreasing. In the past this category was represented by white-collar workers (teachers, doctors, and others) and was characterised by permanent jobs with stable wages, houses, and ability to give children a university education. According to the forecasts, many representatives of the middle class may become broke, and proportion of the poor may increase. It is known that middle class is a guarantor of stability in any society, and its absence causes increased social tension and creates preconditions for social unrest. Discussing this as the worst possible scenario, informants emphasised peace and tolerance as their top priorities.

The Table below is a summary of the responses of a poor 62-year old woman from Kenesh village (Talas region) regarding categories and criteria of well-being in her community. According to the informant, in the past all community members could be qualified as middle class, while now proportion of the poor is increasing and proportion of the middle class is decreasing. When asked about the possible scenarios for the future, the informant said that most representatives of the “middle class” are going to become poor, and only few of them will improve their financial situation and become rich.

Changes in Categories, Criteria, and Proportion of Households by Well Being

#	Category	Criteria	Now	In the past	In the future
1	Rich	A car, a tractor, a lot of land, hired workers, livestock (100-300 sheep, 10 horses, 10 cows)	8	10	
2	Middle class	1-2 cows, no agricultural equipment, 2-3 sheep	60	80	
3	Poor	No livestock, some poultry	30	10	
4	Very poor	Disability	2	-	

The study shows a dramatic increase in the proportion of the poor caused by transition to the market economy, privatisation of state enterprises in the urban area and privatisation of collective farms in the rural area. As a result of privatisation of collective farm property, each of the individual households received about 30 sheep, 1-2 cows, and some land; however, people were completely unprepared to the new economic relations and affected by a strong economic crisis, so many of them sold their livestock at very low prices and could not maintain their property. Currently these families are poor whose life changed to the worse recently. These households are prone to different kinds of losses and problems. Thus, they are affected by unemployment, high prices of basic goods and products, misdirected policy of privatisation and agrarian reform. There are also seasonal problems, such as poor crops caused by severe climate, lack of irrigation water, and barren soil. The poor have particular difficulty coping with such unpredictable problems as natural disasters (Southern regions of Kyrgyzstan have been recently affected by mudslides and landslides). Other negative factors undermining well-being of the poor households are wage arrears, unfair distribution of humanitarian aid, lack of food, clothes, and money, and inadequate utilities.

Currently people understand that that long-term loans with low interest rates are of great help to those who try to develop their business or individual farm. However, the undeveloped system of lending institution does not allow people to obtain loans as necessary, so they can only count on themselves and their work.

Most of the informants assess their opportunities to cope with crisis as very low and rely on outside support (support of relatives, humanitarian aid, charities, governmental support, and connections). Other, more active poor, try to cope with their situation by:

- retail trade;
- seasonal work (such as construction and remodelling of houses);
- agricultural work with or without further sale of agricultural products;
- livestock herding;
- work in other countries (thus, some people from the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan go to the neighboring Kazakhstan to grow tobacco or work for the wealthy Kazakh farmers);
- hired work for more wealthy community members; and
- artisan work (production of traditional crafts, embroideries, and knitwear).

In other words, people are trying to adjust to the market economy and improve their living conditions. The poor who lack such initiative rely on the outside support and the government, while more energetic people try to cope with the situation themselves.

4. Priorities of the Poor

Problems of the rural informants differ depending on their level of well-being, age, gender, and social group.

Based on the results of the study held in 8 rural and 2 urban sites, problems faced by the poor in Kyrgyzstan can be qualified by:

region:

- problems common for rural and urban sites;
- specifically rural problems;
- specifically urban problems

well-being category:

- problems experienced by the rich
- problems experienced by the middle class
- problems experienced by the poor
- problems common for all categories

age:

- problems of the young
- problems of the middle aged
- problems of the elderly
- problems common for all age groups

specifics:

- problems of special groups;
- problems common for all residents of the area

gender:

- problems experienced by men
- problems experienced by women
- problems common for men and women

possibility to resolve the problems:

- problems that can be resolved by the community members without outside support
- problems that can be resolved by the community members with outside support

regions of Kyrgyzstan

- problems experienced by the poor in the south;
- problems experienced by the poor in the north.

4.1. Problems Common for Rural and Urban Areas

Transition in Kyrgyzstan had a number of negative consequences, such as growing problem of unemployment, decreased family income, deterioration of social safety net, and overall decline of living standards.

In the Soviet time Kyrgyzstan had a relatively well developed economy, unemployment rate did not increase, the government provided social protection to the vulnerable groups, and adequate infrastructure existed in urban and rural areas.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union economic links were destroyed and the achievements of the Soviet period were not maintained, so people in Kyrgyzstan have gone through all hardships of the early transition period, and now many of them face economic and social problems.

Comparison of the information collected from rural and urban informants shows that the problems common for urban and rural areas are unemployment, high prices for basic food and clothes, high prices of health care, problems of education, and problems related to national and local legal environment.

Unemployment is a problem that has affected both rural and urban areas. Closure of factories and privatisation of collective farms resulted in mass unemployment, and survival became a concern for both urban and rural population.

In the past, residents of the rural areas worked for the collective farms all year round: they took care of livestock and provided wool in spring, sow wheat and grass, herded sheep on the alpine meadows and irrigated the fields in summer, were busy haymaking and crop harvesting in autumn, and took care of livestock breeding and baby animals in winter.

After privatisation of collective farms, livestock and land were distributed among individual households. The first years following privatisation were particularly difficult, there was not enough food and clothes, so many households sold their livestock at very low prices or exchanged it for food, clothes, or food grain. Some of the households sold all their livestock or its large part. Many animals died because of lack of medicines. Currently, rural households have some livestock, but the number of animals is low. In winter and spring most of the rural community members are busy with agricultural work. Many people, especially the younger generation, leave for towns where they hope to find jobs, thus adding to the number of urban unemployed which is high because of the closure of production companies and downsizing of public agencies.

“Because there aren’t enough jobs, many trained teachers sell stuff at the market or just stay at home, and the old teachers who have long reached pension age keep working. Most of the young people have nothing to do in autumn and winter. In the past, they were busy sheep breeding.”
Special group from Uchkun village (teachers)

“Because of unemployment, young people drink to excess, commit crime, rape, steal livestock.”
Mixed group from Ak Kiya village

“Many young people go to towns to somehow earn a living. Some of them find jobs and stay with relatives, while others come back and live the way they did before”
Group of young men from Uchkun village

High prices for basic food and clothes is another problem common for urban and rural regions. Due to the overall economic crisis, prices for flour, sugar, and tea have grown. Wage arrears and the low amount of wages, pensions, and social benefits put people in a difficult situation.

“Pensions and social benefits aren’t paid on time and in-cash. We receive oil and flour instead, and they are overpriced, 210 som per sack of flour which can be bought at the market at 160-180 som.”
Group of elderly, Ak Kiya village

Lack of cash fosters barter transactions in the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, especially in the north. Thus, residents of At Bashi village (Naryn region) exchange livestock for flour and wheat.

High electricity bills were named as a problem by informants of both rural and urban sites.

In case of illness, the poor can not afford adequate medical services due high prices of medical treatment and medicines and remote location of health care centers in the rural area.

“There is no health care center in the village. If you get ill, you have to go to the district center. It’s 20 kilometres from here.”

Mixed group, Urmalar village

Most of the urban poor live in the newly constructed suburban districts. For the most part, these people are young; they have come to the town to look for jobs and received land to build houses on. Currently many of them are selling small items in the streets or open-air markets.

One of the priority problems mentioned by both rural and urban informant is taxation. According to the informants, taxes are very high nowadays, and tax payment is one of the factors undermining well-being and hindering attempts to cope with crisis.

Q.: “What was your life like ten years ago?”

A.: “Life was good. I had 10 sheep, a cow with a calf, a horse, and a good wage. I was a farmer, did agricultural work. Now I have nothing. I am doing agricultural work now, too, but when we have no irrigation water, we have no crops, and all our revenues are used to pay taxes. We grow SAFFLOUR and by autumn we need to find a combine harvester to harvest it. When it’s overripe, it can’t be cropped.”

Q.: “How can people cope with the crisis?”

A.: “A good sponsor is needed. And we have to work, too. But still, money is everything.”

Q.: “Why did you lose your livestock?”

A.: “There was no other source of income, we had to sell the animals to buy food for the family. It’s always easier to destroy than to gain.”

Q.: “Do you believe that well-being can be achieved?”

A.: “Yes, I hope.”

(From an interview with a man who is better off now than he used to be in the past, Tash Bulak village)

To start and develop their businesses, both rural and urban informants need loans; unavailability of loans is one of priority problems for them. Lending institutions do exist, but many of the people who need loans do not know what they have to do for it, how forms must be completed, and what documents need to be submitted in support of application for a loan. To collect all necessary documents, people have to spend some money, because forms and services are not provided free of charge.

“Many people want to obtain loans, but they’re afraid that their crops will be too poor, and they won’t be able to repay the loans on time. Besides, to obtain a loan, one needs to provide a whole lot of documents, and to get all these documents, one has to go to the town or to the neighboring village where the village council is. Sometimes the right official isn’t there, and people go back without the documents they need, and have to pay 15 *som* for transportation. For many of us it’s not affordable.”

Mixed group from Uchkun village

Both rural and urban informants named the problem of infrastructure that arose due to overall economic crisis.

One of very important problems is lack of drinking water. Water channels built in the Soviet times badly need repair, and most residents of the rural areas suffer from lack of drinking water.

People have to get water in springs or in rivers near their villages. In the urban areas water is not supplied to the new districts, so people have to go a long way to get water.

“Our problems are lack of jobs and money, high prices of food, clothes and health care, and lack of shops. Besides, we don’t have training manuals, there is no high school, no public baths. And, most important, there is no drinking water. We have to buy it and then keep it for a long time, so it gets bad, but we still use it.”

“There is no drinking water. We use rain water or buy water at 30 *som* per ton. We had to sell our cattle and sheep to build a house. The land here is bad, and we have to weed many times. There is no irrigation water, and irrigation service costs 60 *som* per hectare of land.”

Aidana apa, Achy village

Inadequate roads are also a problem for both rural and urban informants.

“Roads are awful here, and there’s no transportation. People contribute 15-20 *som* from time to time and repair the road, but it only lasts till the first rain or mudslide.”

Mixed group, Ak Kiya village

Problem of education of children has become quite acute during the transition. High prices for training manuals and their short supply and constant need of parents to contribute their money for needs of the school have become common both in the rural and in the urban area.

“We only have a primary school. After the fourth grade, our children have to go to other schools. The schools are far away, there is no bus service, so the kids have to walk, and it’s very difficult for them, especially in winter, because it’s cold. Some children just don’t attend school in winter.”

Kiemeddin, a man from Achy village

A man who used to be a deputy director of school in the village of achy said that in the Soviet times his salary and the vegetable garden were enough for the family, and the social status of teachers was quite high. Now, when most people have moved out of the area because it is affected by landslides, the school does not have enough students, and officials of the village council keep reminding those who still live in the village that it is high time to move to the valley. The man, now a school teacher, sees poorly dressed children suffering from cold in winter, and feels really sorry for them. Children come to school from several small villages, and it takes them from half an hour to an hour and fifty minutes to get there. In winter many children can not attend school for weeks and even months, because they do not have winter clothes.

“We give free textbooks to the poor children, and have the weak children sit next to the electric heater. Children don’t eat at school, and at home they have bread and tea diet. These children don’t know how fruit or candies taste. During classes, I see pale and thin faces of these children, and it makes me feel really sad.”

(A teacher from Tash Bulak village)

“When our children were small, it was easier to take care of them. Now they need to go to school, which means -- they need clothes, and shoes, and school supplies. We don’t have enough money, so only two of our children, two sons, attend school, and our daughters stay at home, because they have no shoes and the school is located very far from here, 6 kilometres. The boys walk this distance. Occasionally some driver would pity them and give them a free ride.”

(An elderly woman from Tash Bulak village)

Most of the informants mentioned lack of support or inadequate support of local authorities to people who try to resolve their problems. According to the informants, local authorities are aware of the problems faced by the communities, but can not do much about them due to inadequate funding. According to the elderly informants from Uchkun village, the head of local self-governance is supposed to take care of such issues as finding petrol at a low price so that people can start agricultural work on time, but he demonstrates lack of initiative and does not try to make a difference in life of the community.

“We all go to the head of self-governance and ask for seeds, equipment, petrol, but he doesn’t give us any and asks for money. If we had the money, we could buy these things without his help, right? To be honest, the man is useless.”

(Group of the elderly informants from Uchkun village)

In spring people do not have enough seeds and are concerned that it would affect their future crops. Other problems are lack of agricultural equipment; informants say that head of local self-governance can not provide spare parts for their tractors and combine harvesters. According to some of the informants, “a wooden plough would be more efficient in this situation”, because, even if the necessary spare parts were found, it would be very expensive to buy petrol or exchange grain and livestock for it.

Creation of jobs, public order, and favourable lending system are viewed by the informants as necessary steps for resolution of these problems.

“First, jobs must be created so that people can honestly work. There should be a strict order. Loans must be issued for 2-3 years, so that people have time to strengthen their businesses. I visited that bank in Bazar Korgon once, wanted to get a loan. They said that I would have to repay it within a year. That’s not realistic for me, because I want to herd sheep, and there is no way to increase their number significantly within one year. We’re talking sheep, not chicken. Sheep don’t lay eggs every day, it takes time to breed them, and to increase their number, I need 2 to 3 years. If the bank issued a loan for 3 years, I would be able to repay it easily and improve living conditions for my family.”

(A middle-aged man, Tash Bulak village)

Problems of alcoholism, divorces, crime, abuse of women on a family and community level, have become more acute during the transition.

“There are a lot of people in this village who drink vodka in the morning, and then go do something bad, commit crime. There are a lot of divorces among the younger generation, too.”

“Young healthy guys are wandering about doing nothing all winter long, because they only have seasonal work. They do work in spring, summer, and winter, when we sow, make hay, and harvest the crop, but the rest of the time they just drink vodka.”

(A woman who is better off now than she used to be in the past, Ak Kiya village)

The informants believe that relations between people have changed. Economic problems have affected all kinds of relations, including family relations.

“People no longer trust each other. Even relatives don’t trust each other any more, because, when you lend money, you may never get them back, and a distant relative may even bring a thief into your house.”

(A middle-aged woman from Uchkun village)

In spite of poverty, people butcher a horse in case of death in the family. A horse costs 6,000-7,000 *som*, and this excessive spending on traditional ceremonies is viewed as a problem by both rural and urban informants.

“When somebody dies, a horse has to be butchered and all guests need to be fed. People follow this tradition, even though their neighbors and relatives may tell them not to do it. The Kyrgyz can butcher the very last animals they have to follow this custom, and, if they have no animals, they will borrow the money and buy them, and then have difficulty repaying the debt.

People spend on about 25,000 *som* on burial of their close relatives and then 25,000 to 30,000 *som* on the mourning ceremonies, so it makes 50,000-55,000 *som*. Guests invited for the ceremony have to stay in the houses of neighbors and offered dinner there, which is about 3,000 *som* per house. Some people believe that it’s wrong, that such excessive spending is sinful.”

A lot of money is spent on wedding ceremonies, too. Parents of the bridegroom have to pay *kalym* (payment to parents of the bride for raising a good daughter), and parents of the bride have to provide *sep* (dowry) in the amount of 5,000-10,000 *som*, depending on wealth of the families.

4.2. Problems and Priorities of the Urban Poor

Priority problem of the urban population is the closure of production companies. Thus, in the town of Kok Yangak closure of the mine that has caused mass unemployment is a great problem. In the town of Bishkek closure or downsizing of factories has caused unemployment, too.

Other priority problems of the urban sites are problems of infrastructure (streets are poorly lit, electricity bills are high, garbage is not collected on time, health care and education of children is inadequate, there are no telephones, so an ambulance or other emergency service can not be summoned if necessary).

Growing rate of crime, especially theft, is another problem of the poor, because many poor people, especially the younger generation, commit crime. Growing crime rate can also be explained by lack of entertainment and recreation facilities (a problem mentioned primarily by

schoolchildren and young people from poor urban districts at the outskirts of the towns), because younger people who have nothing to do are more likely to join criminal groups.

4.3. Priorities of the Rural Poor

After privatisation of collective farms, people received land and livestock and were supposed to take care of this property individually. However, lack of fertilisers and medicines for the animals, as well as lack of knowledge in the field of agribusiness, resulted in poor crops and death of animals, which entailed mass poverty.

“There are no fertilisers, and soil is getting more and more barren. There are no chemicals against weeds, so we have lots of weeds and lose much of our crops this way.”

“There are no medicines for the animals, so lots of them die, and some of them have infectious diseases that can affect humans, too.”

(A group of the elderly, Uchkun village)

One of the most serious problems in the rural areas is absence or lack of agricultural equipment and spare parts for it, which seriously hinders rural development.

High prices for fuel is another priority problem. Currently farmers exchange livestock and wheat for fuel, and conditions of such exchange are not very favourable for the farmers.

Land is critical for agricultural production. Currently, many farmers suffer from lack of arable land. After privatisation, each household acquired a land plot size of which was calculated proportionately to the number of people in the household; since the number of family members is growing, land plots received several years ago appear too small to satisfy the increasing needs of the families. This problem is particularly acute in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan. State-owned land is offered for lease, but rental payment and production costs are high, and people need to obtain loans to start or develop their agricultural business.

In the process of land distribution, a lot of good arable land was kept as a state property. Members of many rural communities are unhappy about this, as well as with the current rate of land tax which, in their opinion, is too high.

“Head of the local self-governance has sown something on the land which was previously used for pasture. Now people don’t have enough water for their vegetable gardens, because all irrigation water is used to irrigate that field.”

“Land tax is very high, and we also have to pay for water that we get from the channel. Rate of payment is calculated proportionately to the number of family members, but there isn’t enough land for all family members.”

(A group of the elderly informants from Uchkun village)

Problem of irrigation is quite serious for many villages, because there is not enough water. In the Soviet times a lot of irrigation channels were constructed, but now they are not functional and badly need repair; construction of some new channels was stopped at the beginning of transition.

“Our problem is water, both drinking and irrigation. There is no water for people, no water for animals. We were lucky to have a rainy month. We use snow water and rain water, and the animals drink out of puddles. Irrigation water would not be supplied until June.”

(Mixed group from Tash Bulak village)

“We did have such problems in the past, too, but they were resolved by the collective farms. For instance, it was the responsibility of collective farm to supply drinking water to people, so they could work and didn’t have to think about these things.”

(A middle-aged woman from Achy village)

Rural informants have realised that their situation can be improved by a joint effort of all community members. Local authorities, especially those whom community members themselves have elected (such as heads of local self-governance) could play an important role in this process, but there are very few effective leaders among them, so such problems as lack of agricultural equipment, seeds, and fuel, remain unresolved. Since three or four villages are governed by one village council, , people have to go from their home village to the one where the village council is located when they need to obtain powers of attorney or official documents proving the number of livestock and size of land plots owned. This is very inconvenient and viewed as a problem.

“If the head of self-governance worked well, he would provide spare parts for the equipment. Now we have none, and we aren’t sure if we’d be able to start work on time.”

(Younger poor men from Uchkun village)

One of the most serious problems of the rural area is lack of sales markets for agricultural products. In the Soviet times, products grown by collective farms were purchased by consumption cooperatives (*Potrebsoyuz*), so there was no problem related to sale. The government had to purchase the products from the collective farms in accordance to official state plans. This system does not exist now, so people have to find buyers and often end up selling their products to wholesale traders at very low prices.

“Prices of grain and livestock are very low in autumn. We have to sell cheap, because we need cash to buy school supplies and clothes for children. The traders know it and set low prices or exchange goods and products, such as tea, oil, and vodka, for grain. If the government or other purchasers offered better prices for grain and livestock and sold it in spring, it would be easier for the farmers to cope with all these difficulties.”

(Group of middle-aged men from Uchkun village)

Lack of information about loans is viewed as a serious problem by rural informants.

“I have improved my situation somewhat. It’s better than it used to be. First, I kept all my livestock, second, all my sons found jobs and don’t need my support, and, third, I work, too. Last year I was responsible for irrigation of 14 hectares of land of the association to which I belong. We cropped 19 tons of wheat. I was paid a wage, but a lot of it was withheld as a tax. After the Soviet Union collapsed, we received land, 6000 square metres per family member, and each family member had to pay 28 *som* of land tax. Now, thank Allah, our family has twenty-five members, and the tax inspectors impose the tax on every member, even on those who do not live with me. Nobody wants to help farmers. All agricultural equipment is very old in our village. If somebody issued a loan, it would be of help. I read somewhere that loans for equipment are issued for 25 years. Even if they were issued for 10 or 5 years, it would be great.”
(A man who is better off now than he used to be in the past)

Priorities of the Poor Depending on Well Being Level

Problems faced by people who are better off than others are poor roads, lack of drinking water, inadequate power supply, and tax policy.

“We’re busy resolving our own problems: increase of turnover, maintenance of three units of equipment, work on the 3,000 square metres of land that we own. We try to improve our financial situation every year. Responsibilities are divided between family members, and they all do what they must. No institutions have ever helped us. We did go to the employment bureau to have them help us obtain a loan, and they were willing to help, but I didn’t have enough time to collect all documents, and, besides, I had no property to secure the loan.”
(Turgunbek, a 28-year old informant who is better off now than he used to be in the past)

Priority problems for the poor are unemployment, health, transportation, high electricity bills, poor education opportunities for children, and delays in payment of wages, pensions, and social benefits.

Priorities of the Poor Depending on their Age and Gender

Younger and older poor men in the rural areas view their priority problems primarily as factors hindering development of their businesses and improvement of financial situation in their households: unemployment, unavailability of loans, unfavourable tax legislation, lack of agricultural equipment, irrigation water, and medicines for livestock.

Younger and older poor men in the urban areas name as their priority problems unemployment, wage arrears, unavailability of loans needed to start a business, growing crime rate, and inadequate infrastructure (poor transportation, lack of drinking water, expensive electric power).

Younger and older poor women in the rural area are concerned with unemployment, inadequate medical services, poor education opportunities for children, delays of payment of benefits for children, unavailability of loans needed to develop agriculture, and inadequate infrastructure (lack of bathing facilities and drinking water).

“Streets aren’t lit, garbage isn’t collected, and there’s no transportation to the town of Jalal Abad where I get goods to re-sell here. Petrol is very expensive, so transportation is expensive, too. Public phones don’t function, so it’s impossible to call an ambulance. Petty theft is a growing problem, people steal everything, even kitchenware.”

(Mixed group from Achy village)

Younger and older poor women in the urban area name unemployment, inadequate health care, poor education opportunities for children, and lack of entertainment and recreation facilities, as their priority problems.

Priorities of youth and schoolchildren are related to education: this category of informants complain about lack of textbooks and manuals in libraries, lack of recreation and sports facilities.

“We don’t go to discotheques or parties that school students organise. When we do go, older guys would come and make us pool money so they could buy vodka.”

“We don’t go to the library, because all books there are old. We rent textbooks that belong to the school and pay 20 *som* a year for them. There aren’t enough textbooks for everybody. For instance, there are only two English and German books for two groups of students.”

(Schoolchildren from Uchkun village)

In the course of discussion of priority problems, youth (under 20) expressed their concerns about lack of entertainment in the rural area. Younger people have nowhere to go. In one of the villages younger people spend their free time at the self-made pool table. According to the informants, there are no newspapers, no radio, and the TV only broadcasts two channels -- the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek. Discussing their priorities, younger people touched upon military service. They said that in the past military service gave an opportunity to go to different cities and join prestigious troops, while now military service is not prestigious at all, so a lot of soldiers desert. Further, the informants said that a university diploma used to be more prestigious in the past than it is now, “because now people can buy diplomas”, and “if one makes a lot of money, nobody cares if he has a university diploma or not”.

Older generation, when discussing priorities, elaborated on excessive costs of national rituals and traditions and said that a wedding ceremony or a funeral costs not less than 25,000 - 30,000 *som*.

The elderly were displeased with the younger generation. During a discussion in one of the mixed groups the group split into the younger and the older generation who reproached each other for lack of understanding.

The elderly from the urban area named pension arrears, unfair allocation of pensions, and payment of pensions in-kind, by food, rather than in cash, as their priority problems.

The elderly from the rural sites named such problems as lack of agricultural equipment, spare parts, and fuel for them, unavailability of loans with low interest rates, pension arrears, and payment of pensions in-kind. Other concerns of the rural elderly are lack of trained professionals among village leaders, growth of juvenile crime rate, unemployment that has affected the younger generation, and alcoholism.

“There are no capable leaders nowadays. If a well-educated man who knows how to rule a country had power, all these problems wouldn’t have occurred”

“We only see parliament members during elections. Then they come, give people tea, scarves, vodka, so that people vote for them, and after they’re elected, they’re good for nothing, they’re too busy resolving their own problems.”

(Elderly informants from Uchkun village)

Many of the informants believe that, if the authorities allowed people to retry to resolve some of their problems and provided financial support for it, people could make a joint effort the way they did in the Soviet times, and cope with crisis.

Problems Specific for Particular Groups

Special groups, such as ethnic minorities, suffer from the problems common for other groups, too, such as unemployment, high prices for basic food and clothes, unavailability of loans, and lack of agricultural equipment.

At the same time, special groups face unique problems, such as tension between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek aggravated by the problem of land distribution, and difficulty in obtaining an official status of a refugee and Kyrgyz citizenship, experienced by the refugees from Tajikistan.

“As for vulnerability and risks, I know from my own experience what it is about. My family and I are refugees. We came from Tajikistan. We have seen a lot, and now we feel that we don’t matter. My relatives try different coping strategies. The younger people leave for other places, and I have to stay with my parents, because I’m their only son. Sometimes I get so angry with myself and with others, feel like yelling at someone. All these difficulties are particularly hard for heads of households. Some of them commit suicide. Women abandon their children, girls prostitute themselves to get some money for the family.”

(A refugee from Tajikistan now living in Tash Bulak)

“For my family the greatest problems are unemployment, poverty, poor health care, unavailable loans, and lack of social life. These problems are getting worse every year. The only goal that people have in life is to get something to eat, they have no other thoughts.”

(A refugee now living in Tash Bulak)

For the ethnic Kurds the most serious problem is the problem of their isolation aggravated by economic difficulties. In the Soviet times, they kept close ties with Kurds who lived in other Soviet Republics, while now they have no such opportunity, and, therefore, marriages between relatives have become more frequent in their diaspora. The Kurds understand that it is a problem, and try not to lose contact with representatives of their nationality living outside Kyrgyzstan.

The problems of ethnic Uzbeks living in At Bashi village are the same as the problems of the rest of the community, because the Uzbeks have lived in the area for a long time.

In the village of Ak Kiya a group of teachers who have been sent there by a district Department of Education was selected as a special group. The problem unique for this group is lack of land to build houses on.

Area-Specific Problems and Priorities

In the north of Kyrgyzstan, most people herd livestock, so the problems named by the informants from the northern areas as the most acute are related to herding rather than agriculture. Among these problems are lack of medicines for animals, lack of sales markets for meat, wool, and leather. In the south of Kyrgyzstan the main source of income is agriculture, and the informants name primarily such problems as lack of land, fertilisers, and seeds, and inadequate irrigation.

Frequent natural disasters in Jalal Abad region (floods, landslides, mudslides) and difficulties in the process of liquidation of their effects are viewed as a serious problem by informants living in this area. Series of landslides which began in 1990 has dramatically changed life of several communities. In 1994 several houses were buried under a landslide, and residents of the village that has suffered from the disaster were visited by President Akaev and provided loans in the amount of 32,000 *som* for construction of new houses in the safe area. However, some of the villagers failed to construct new houses and used the money irrationally.

Another difference in problems and priorities of the southern and the northern regions is caused by the fact that the northern villages are basically mono-ethnic, while in the south representatives of different ethnic groups and refugees from Tajikistan live closely together. Each of the ethnic groups appears to have its own problems and priorities.

In addition to the above, the informants mentioned problems created by the customs officer on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border.

4.4. Recent Changes in Problems and Priorities

In the past, problems were not as numerous as they are now, because their resolution was a responsibility of the government. All that people had to do was good work; they did not have to think about such things as production costs, resolution of problems arising in the production process, and marketability of the final products. Land, water, electric power, agricultural equipment, and fuel for it were owned by the state, and people had equal access to these means of production. Introduction of private property of land, though supported by general public, entailed further division of the society into the rich and the poor. Lack of water, land, and agricultural equipment has caused a certain tension among people.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union problems typical of the transition have arisen. Among these problems informants name high prices of basic food and clothes, difficulty of finding sales markets for agricultural products, problems of land distribution, expensive fuel, paid medical services and university education, growing crime rate, and alcoholism.

Problem of infrastructure typical of both rural and urban areas can also be viewed as a transition problem: infrastructure created in the Soviet times is destroyed or obsolete, some of the objects have been misappropriated in the course of privatisation, other badly need repair, for which there is no funding available.

A special group of problems includes lack of spiritual values, decline in morals, apathy, and indifference of people. However, these problems are secondary to purely financial difficulties.

Despite all problems, people believe that there are ways out of the situation. Many people rely on the government and on outside support. Others, however, no longer trust the government and try to cope with the problems without any help from outside. Some of the poor got used to their

poverty and do nothing about it: *el korgondu korobuz* (literally -- we will see what other people will see).

Problem Resolution

The poor believe that their problems may be resolved if the government creates legal environment favourable for the poor and fostering poverty alleviation and overall country development. In addition, the informants emphasise the importance of re-opening production facilities, factories, mines, and development of small businesses. They believe that in the rural areas the main problems that need resolution are the problems of land, irrigation water, fertilisers, and fuel. Among other priorities the informants name the need to improve lending system and simplify the procedure of obtaining loans. Regional development is hardly possible without changes in the current staffing policy of local agencies.

Resolution of the infrastructure-related problems is a responsibility of the government and local authorities, but, due to their current lack of funding, some of the local communities try to resolve the problems on their own. However, such infrastructure problems as lack of drinking and irrigation water and inadequate roads may only be resolved if financing for purchase of construction materials and equipment is provided.

People are willing to participate in resolution of their problems. Many of the communities, especially in the south, widely employ *ashar* method -- construction of objects needed by the community and performed by community members themselves. Schools, irrigation channels, and other important objects are being constructed this way.

Non-governmental organizations that appear in towns and villages of Kyrgyzstan demonstrate that, even though apathy and indifference is common for some of the groups, there are also enthusiastic people who care about others. These people mobilise local community members and call attention of the authorities to the concrete problems that need resolution. These activities make people more confident about the capacity of the country to cope with the current crisis.

5. Institutional Analysis

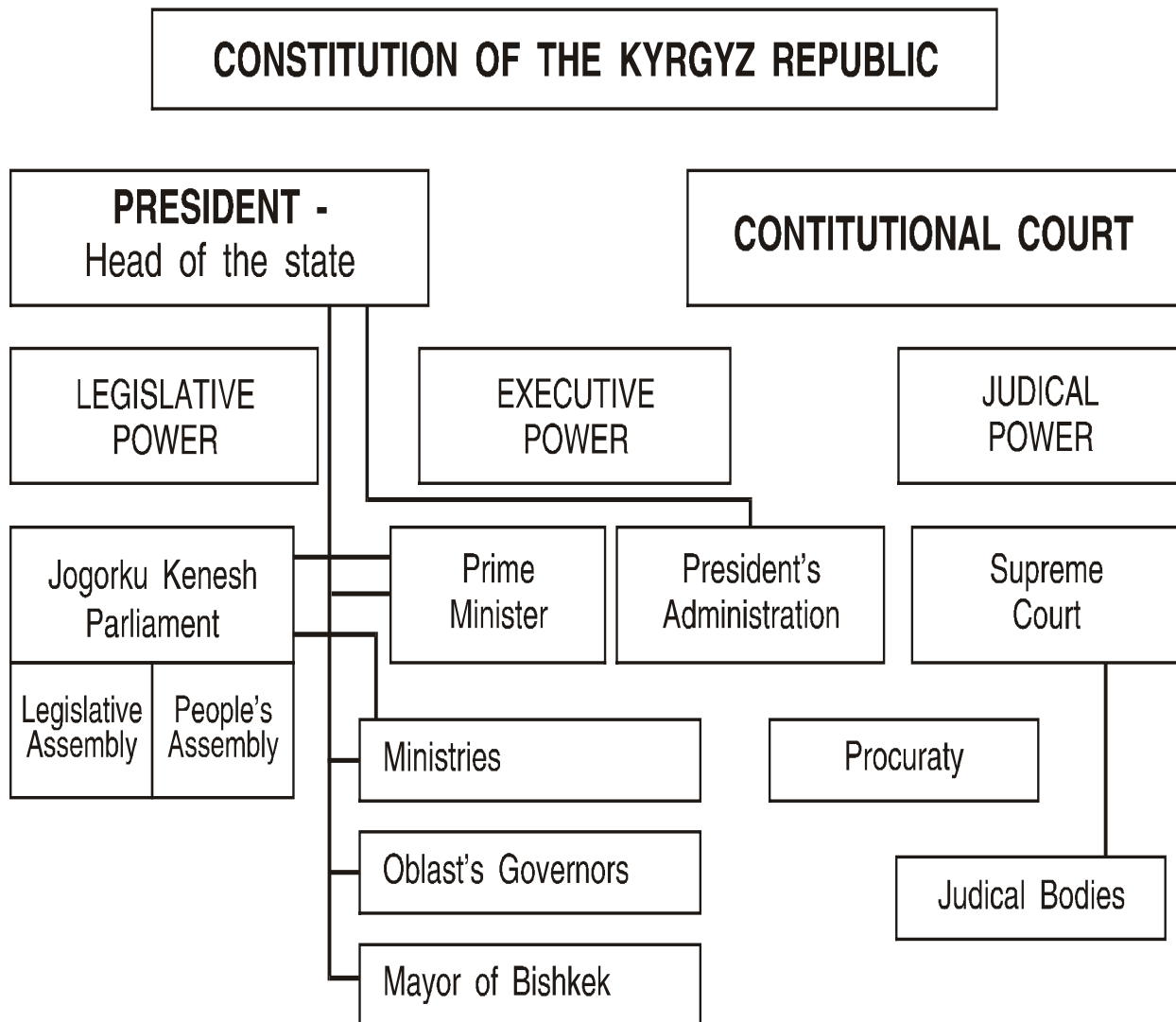
5.1. Institutional Profile of the Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

Transformation of the social system resulted in changes of institution system in Kyrgyzstan. New institutions have appeared in addition to a number of the old institutions inherited from the Soviet system.

The basic concept of transformation of political system of Kyrgyzstan is its decentralisation. Institutional changes have affected primarily governmental and political structures.

Political reform in Kyrgyzstan is aimed at division of power into the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The current structure of state governance was introduced by Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted in 1993 (see the Chart below).

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: GOVERNANCE



In addition to state authorities, democratic system of governance in Kyrgyzstan includes regional self-governance bodies. The local self-governance institutions were created as a step to de-centralisation of power for more efficient resolution of local communities' problems.

The existing system of local self-governance in Kyrgyzstan includes local Keneshes (elected bodies), territorial units of local self-governance (committees of microdistricts, block management committees, village councils, courts of the elderly, women's committees, veterans' councils, youth organizations, local associations). This system has no vertical hierarchy and exists parallel to local offices of state agencies.

The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic provides for the principle of local self-governance and divides functions of state authorities and local self-governance. 16 Presidential Degrees on local self-governance have been issued.

Institutionalisation of local self-governance at the grassroots level began in 1996, when *aiyl okmotus* (village councils) were created. The second and the third level of local self-governance existed prior to 1996 and was represented by district and region *Kenesh* (elected bodies). Currently there are 455 local municipalities in the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. The only town that has self-governance is Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, where a mayor was elected in 1995, which created a precedence for Central Asia.

According to Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic of 24 April 1996, local self-governance has the following powers: to develop projects of social and economic development of the area, to manage communal property and financial resources, to supervise ecological situation in the areas, to supervise implementation of construction project developed for the area, to protect community members' right for medical services and education, to take steps necessary for creation of new jobs, to supervise use of land and formation of land fund, to register citizens at their permanent residence addresses, to register civil and marital status of citizens, to provide notary service, to issue documents proving identity of citizens and number of their family members.

However, the village councils currently do not have adequate funding and still lack legal environment that would allow them to resolve local problems. In addition, people, especially the poor, tend to distrust village council for a number of reasons. One of such reasons is lack of professionalism on the part of local authorities which was proven by testing of professional qualification of village council officials held in 1996-1997. Many of the local officials are only motivated to keep their official position, and so far opinion of general public is not as important for it as the opinion of the superior authorities.

Data collected by the International Institute of Strategic Research demonstrates low professional level of the officials, especially those who have little work experience in the system of governance. Many of the officials are not quite clear about their responsibilities, and are excessively affected by tribal, family, and personal relations. Many of the officials believe that, in case of a conflict with their superiors, they have no chance to protect themselves. (*Kyrgyzstan, National Report on Human Development, 1998*)

The next level of local authority is district *akimiat* (state administration office) to which all village councils of the district are subordinate. Another type of local authority bodies are district

and town *keneshes*, institutions elected every four years. The *keneshes* are headed by chairmen. The procedure of electing chairmen of *keneshes* has been widely discussed in the media.

The highest level of local authority is represented by governors of regions whose candidacy is suggested by the President and approved or disapproved by regional *keneshes*.

Market Sector

Institutional structure of Kyrgyzstan has been changed by appearance of free market institutions. Their foundation and development was not an easy process. It was greatly hindered by inherited from the Soviet system stereotypes about governmental and commercial institutions. Nevertheless, private sector has appeared and now is developing in Kyrgyzstan.

One of the tendencies that may be observed now is the tendency of failed business people to try look for jobs in the state agencies.

Privatisation and liberalisation of prices entailed institutional reorganization. State property was privatised by different means, including incorporation, sale at auctions, tender-based sale, sale to individuals and collectives, transformation into limited liability companies, lease with further purchase, and free transfer.

Currently, about 50% of formerly state-owned companies in Kyrgyzstan are privatised, and the unprofitable enterprises are being restructured. Legislation for the next step of privatisation, namely, privatisation of electric power company, is under way, and the issue is being discussed by the media and in the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) of the country.

Local communities have received and now have schools, *klubs* (institutions holding cultural events and public education programmes in the rural area), hospitals, and other less attractive objects. Currently these objects are communal property, but they need a lot of investment, and in many cases are dismantled.

Deputy chairman of Achy village council showed us the remainders of what was once a very rich dairy collective farm “Communism” name of which was written among names of the best Soviet collective farms in the Exhibition of National Economy Achievements in Moscow. According to the informant, at the beginning of privatisation somebody privatised the farm and even received a loan for its further development, but nothing has ever been done, and several years later only some dismantled construction were left of the once prosperous farm.

By the Referendum of 17 October 1998, private property of land was introduced in Kyrgyzstan.

Currently, the Parliament is considering Draft Land Code. The new land policy is being implemented in the rural regions and is supported by general public. Private property of land has created new market both in rural and in urban areas, thus adding to the institutional changes in the country.

Kyrgyzstan was the first of the CIS countries to adopt in 1997 the National Strategy of Sustainable Human Development and based on it Strategy of Poverty Alleviation.

Sustainable human development is the development aimed at protection of the poor, protection of the natural resources, support to women, and creation of new jobs.
(*National Strategy of Sustainable Human Development in the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek, 1998*)

5.2. Institutions that Play an Important Role in Lives of People

In the Soviet times, people relied primarily on formal institutions, and the formal institutions did meet the needs of people. Collapse of the old system resulted in decline of formal sector.

Lack of a broad network of accessible civil institutions in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan changed ideas of general public regarding institutions.

The stereotype of the government as an institution that may and must resolve all problems, distribute property, protect the society, and develop ideology, is still very strong, so real power in the country is still viewed as the power of the government.

Local self-governance plays an important part in resolution of economic, social, and cultural problems; however, further development of local self-governance is hindered by hierarchy of administrative system, while general public is growing more and more impatient with inefficient performance of the grassroots level governance.

“We’re stepchildren of the local self-governance. We’re really grateful to the President of the country, because he has done something real for our community. After the landslide to our village, and explained plans of the government regarding the villages that had suffered from landslides, and issued cheques of 32,000 *som* for each of us.”

(An older man from Achy village)

Analysis of the informants’ responses shows that they are unhappy with the performance of local institutions. Official authorities are authoritarian, and civil sector is still quite undeveloped, which creates particularly serious problems in the process of establishing democratic relations among people. People can not influence these institutions because of poverty and resulting from it economic dependence.

Authoritarian state officials do not follow the principles of equality and fairness. Despite all resolution, decrees, and instruction developed by the government, performance of such officials is still greatly affected by their family ties, personal connections, and bribery. Access of the people who have no personal relations with the officials and can not bribe them is quite limited.

There are no direct conflicts between general public and state authorities, but in some cases people disagree with the decisions of central and local authorities and hold pickets, strikes, and sanctioned meetings. In some cases such steps do make a difference.

In Bishkek pensioners concerned with misdirected pension policy picketed the Government House and building of the Parliament, and their action brought about real results. Rural youth who live in factory dormitories in Bishkek held pickets and received the right to live in one-room apartments of the former factory dormitories and further privatise them. In Naryn pensioners and women eligible for social benefits picketed the building of regional administration to have the practice of distributing oil of humanitarian aid with a stamp “Not for Sale” instead of pensions and social benefits, but their picket did not bring about any results, even though the practice was criticised in the media.

During the study in the town of Kok Yangak, miners of the town were on strike. The principal requirement of the strike committee was payment of wages. According to the miners, they held long and difficult negotiations with the head of state administration and the mine director, and as a result of the strike, the head of state administration office met with the miners and salary for one month of work was paid to them. The rest of the money was supposed to be paid in the nearest future, so the miners stopped their strike. Information about the strike was publicised about some of the local newspapers and broadcast by Jalal Abad region TV channel.

“Local authorities are appointed for the purpose of demolishing the town. Why else don’t they stir a finger to make the existing organization function? The mine director has constant conflicts with the miners. He’s stolen everything, and doesn’t pay wages to the miners. They have been refusing to go out of the mine for four days. And the local authorities don’t care about it.”

(A middle-aged man from the town of Kok Yangak, chairman of the strike committee)

An important problem named by informants of urban sites is closure of production companies.

Informants of the town of Kok Yangak named the mine as one of the most important institutions and had long and heated discussions about it. The town of Kok Yangak was founded at the beginning of this century after a coal deposit had been discovered in the area. Life in the town depends on the mine completely, and closure of the mine equals demolition of the town. The government finds small towns like Kok Yangak lacking future due to depletion of coal deposits, while the informants from Kok Yangak are positive that the deposits are still rich and “there is enough coal for another 100 years of work”. A serious investment is required to make the mine function, and the government currently does not have the funds for that.

The study team has noticed that men deal with local authorities more frequently than women and are more critical about their performance. Women of different focus groups appeared more tolerant about local authorities. The only exception was the category of women traders who assessed performance of the authorities quite negatively.

Performance of local authorities is criticised by rural informants, too. Thus, informants from Naryn region, when discussing institutions, talked about the governor of the region rather than authorities of lower level, because the latter can not resolve their problems. On the other hand, the study team is of the impression that such attitude towards the governor is natural for Naryn region, where traditional system of relations among people and the principle of paternalism are still very strong and a high official is viewed as “father of people”. The negative side of such attitude promoted by the lower authorities officiousness and lack of constructive criticism.

Younger informants were particularly active during discussion of state institutions. Older informants assess performance of different institutions differently, depending on the issues discussed. Informants reproached each other in giving their votes for the candidates to the parliament who gave them some vodka, tea, and other products. Groups of younger and older poor men had a very heated discussion of these issues.

One of the positions on the payroll of village council is *aiyl bashchy* (community leader). Community leader is responsible for representing interests of the community vis-à-vis village council and state authorities, and for promoting policy of the central and local government in the community. Informants spoke of their community leaders with tolerance but said that the leaders can not resolve their vital problems.

In the towns there are offices of state administration; thus, in each of the four districts of Bishkek there is such an office, and all these offices are subordinate to Bishkek municipality. The offices of state administration have departments in charge of economic, cultural, and political issues.

Informants of Bishkek sites do not participate in public life of the town, because most of them live in newly constructed districts and are not officially registered as permanent resident of Bishkek. Even though these people live in a town with a developed network of institutions, their access to the institutions is limited. Most of these people have left their home villages and thus lost their access to land and possibility to do agricultural work; having moved to the town with many educational institutions, they can not afford university education. This category of people does not belong to either rural or urban area, and have neither land nor education opportunities. Many of them work in the informal sector for very low wages, sell goods in the streets, and do a variety of work that does not require special qualification.

For residents of Archa Beishik district of Bishkek interviewed in the course of the study the most important institution is electrician. Archa Beishik is a newly constructed district where there is no central heating, gas, or shops. Electric power is vital for residents of the district, but many of them can not afford it, and therefore visits of electricians are associated with the danger to be punished for failure to pay electricity bills.

Network of institutions is better developed in the urban area. Bishkek, the capital city of the country, is in the best position from the viewpoint of institutions. About 50% of all formal institutions existing in Kyrgyzstan are located in Bishkek (as compared to 13% in Osh region, 10.4% in Issyk Kul region, 8.7% in Chui region, 7.0% in Talas region, 7.0% in Jalal Abad region, and 6.1% in Naryn region). Network of formal institutions in smaller towns is in decline since the beginning of transition. Thus, a number of formal institutions in the town of Kok Yangak has decreased by almost 50%.

Access of the poor to the formal institutions is limited. According to the informants, the primary reason for this is the newly introduced paid services of schools and health care centers. Unemployment, deterioration of social safety net, and devaluation of the local currency make the situation particularly difficult for the poor households. Study of Bishkek and Kok Yangak sites shows that currently the poor less frequently deal with formal institutions, even though services of these institutions are still needed.

Informants from Bishkek did not name production companies as institutions important for them, because most of the informants have recently moved to Bishkek from rural areas and currently make a living by trade.

Formal institutions are less developed in the rural area; the institutions that do exist there are not very helpful, and the informants do not trust them and rarely resort to their support. Infrastructure created in both rural and urban areas in the Soviet times is now in decline.

Most of the women emphasise the importance of such social institutions as schools, health care centers, post offices, and social service. Older women pay a lot of attention to the performance of the Social Fund.

Men and women have similar attitude towards the institutions performance of which is related to their safety, risk, and vulnerability. Thus, district police officers are associated with safety and at least some guarantee of protection on the part of the state authorities. Growing rate of petty theft makes people more frequently ask police for help, even though efficiency of such help is rather

low. This is explained by objective reasons: thus, for instance, in the rural area there is only one police officer for several villages located far from each other. The remote location of villages and poor roads make immediate involvement of police impossible. Another problem is the fact that police officers are subordinate to the district Department of the Interior who are not as familiar with the local situation as village council officials are. District police officers report to their immediate superiors, and the opinion that local authorities, such as village council, have regarding their performance, is not very important for them.

In the towns and bigger villages there are police offices, but their performance is also assessed by informants as poor. Urban informants had long discussions about the police. Younger men and women argued that the police officers violated the law and said that, even though a lot of laws are aimed at protection of average citizens, neither the citizens, nor the police can apply these laws efficiently.

In the rural areas people are more likely to have a case of less serious crime, such as petty theft, considered by the court of the elderly, while in the urban areas people prefer the police to take care of it.

Efficiency of the performance of police in towns is higher than it is in the villages. Nevertheless, the phrase “my police protects me” (a popular quote from a poem by Mayakovsky, *moya militsiya menya berezhot*) is no longer true. The informants believe that many police officers are corrupt and distrust the police.

Informants of the sites studied named livestock theft as a growing problem. This problem is being discussed in the media, too.

Article 165 of the newly adopted Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic provides for 6 to 11 years of imprisonment for livestock theft in case that the value of animals stolen exceeds 20,000 *som*, or 200 minimal salaries. A horse costs about 7,000 *som*, so a person who steals three horses can be sentenced under this Article.

Sometimes in case of a livestock theft court of the elderly settles the parties, the guilty party covers the losses, and no criminal procedure is started against the thief. However, such cases are rare, and usually courts of the elderly deal with less serious problems arising in the rural communities.

Younger poor men and informants from mixed groups of different sites believe that district police officers are of no help, and personal safety is becoming a concern.

“Now even murderers can avoid punishment. Their relatives give huge bribes to law enforcement officials, judges, and even relatives of the victim. What can a district police officer do in such situation? Nothing, not even on a village level.”
(*An unemployed 27-year old man*)

“Role of the police in protection of public order is great. Without the police, there would be much less order.”
(*A middle-aged man from a special group, Achy village*)

Another institution discussed by the informants in relation to their vulnerability is tax inspection office. Both rural and urban informants felt negatively about tax officials.

Activities of tax authorities are regulated by the Tax Code and relevant laws and instructions of the government. Tax authorities are divided into two branches: tax inspection office and tax police. Currently, tax inspection office is subordinate to the Ministry of Finance and has branches of regional, district, city, and village level. Each tax inspection office has a status of a legal entity. Tax inspectors authorised by directors of the offices enforce tax legislation. Tax Police since 3 July 1995 has been a division of the tax inspection office under the Ministry of Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic. The functions of the tax police are preliminary investigation of tax law violations subject to criminal law of the Kyrgyz Republic. Tax police is a law enforcement agency created for the purpose of maintaining economic stability in the country. The tax police consists of the Department of Tax Police in the National Tax Inspection office, and branches in the regions, districts, and towns.

Negative attitude of the informants towards the tax authorities can be explained by high rates of the taxes imposed on individuals and business entities of the country where, in the official assessment, 60% of people live below poverty line. High tax rates present a great burden to people. In addition, tax system lacks flexibility, does not reflect regional features, and is not adjusted to such local conditions as land and water resources and other factors affecting capacity of citizens to pay taxes.

Tax-related problems in the rural area are caused by inadequate assessment of land resources, and the land tax is a serious concern of rural informants.

“It has been 12 years since we began to ask the authorities to make us pay land tax the way we should. Our land is not irrigated, except on the paper. It used to be irrigated more than ten years ago, when it belonged to a herding farm. No there is no farm, no irrigation water, no drinking water, even -- but we still have to pay taxes as if this land is irrigated. Rate of the tax for irrigated land is three times as high as for non-irrigated.”
(*A young man from the village of Tash Bulak*)

Land tax rates adopted by the government provide a certain flexibility, and the objective situation of the taxpayer, including such factors as quality of soil (if the land is used for agricultural purposes), existence of infrastructure and possible use of land for construction purposes. However, local tax authorities violate these provisions of tax legislation and thus discredit status of tax authorities from the viewpoint of local community members. In the rural communities covered by the study conflicts with tax inspectors are caused by failure of the inspectors to apply the above rules and objectively assess quality of land, even though need of such individual assessment is provided for by the Tax Code.

In the towns both individuals and legal entities suffer from high rate of social allocations. According to the programme of employment and labor market development, amount of such allocations needs to be decreased from 39% of salary fund to 25%. Since a smaller amount of money is going to be allocated for social purposes, strict rules about citizens eligible for social benefits are going to be introduced. Recently, minimal salary was increased from 90 to 100 *som* which incurred high costs for the state budget. In 1998 the absolute maximum of expenditures on social benefits is 510 million *som*, which is 1.5% of the expected GDP of 34040 million *som*. According to the forecasts, GDP in 1999 will be twice as small, which will definitely cause further cuts of benefits.

Efforts of tax inspectors are absolutely necessary for timely collection of taxes in the regions and at different levels. This work is needed for implementation of social policy in any country, and, therefore, people who can pay taxes on time must be educated about their responsibilities.

The study has shown that public education in the field of tax policy is badly needed. Some of the steps in this direction are already being taken: thus, popular brochures are published, and video vignettes promoting timely payment of taxes are broadcast on TV.

Men, women traders, owners of private shops, kiosks, and restaurants are the categories of people who have frequent encounters with tax inspectors. All these groups complain about devaluation of the national currency that creates serious problems for their businesses and hinders timely payment of taxes.

Some people share the opinion that tax inspectors are robbers. A job in the tax inspection office gives an opportunity to quickly gain wealth.

5.3. Assessment of Local Institutions

Analysis of formal and informal sector institutions shows that informants of all sites rely on their parents, relatives, friends, and neighbors. These institutions are more accessible for the informants, especially in the rural areas, than formal institutions.

Social distance between the poor and formal institutions is increasing due to lack of democracy of the officials and poor communication skills of the poor. Many of the informants have no experience of dealing with formal institutions, do not know how necessary information can be obtained and what mechanisms can be used to make formal institutions attend to their problems.

This situation makes it natural for informants to view relatives and friends as the most important institutions in their lives. Interestingly, the same results were received by study team in Sofia (Bulgaria), even though rural Kyrgyz sites and urban Sofia are expected to be quite different. Similarity between the attitude of Kyrgyz and Bulgarian informants shows that the problem of formal institutions is likely to be common for the former Socialist countries political structure of which did not allow the society to have parity relations with the government.

When ranking different institutions, the informants give highest ranks to their parents, then to relatives, friends, and neighbors. The informants trust these institutions and receive their support, but assess the support as not very efficient. Informants understand efficiency as the amount of financial support and capability of providing moral support. Responses of the informants show that support of their parents, relatives, and friends, though important, can not make a big difference in their economic situation.

The institutions discussed above are needed by both men and women. Children have a responsibility to support their parents. Importance of parents and relatives was emphasized by men more frequently than by women. The study team believe that it can be explained by Kyrgyz mentality: in a Kyrgyz family hopes of parents are about their sons, rather than daughters, and boys have more responsibilities related to family than girls, because girls are viewed as future members of other families. Men are closer to their parents and have to support their parents when they grow old. However, now these stereotypes are challenged, because working daughters can support their elderly parents, while unemployed sons can not. The study was held primarily in the

rural area, and the results reflect rural mentality. Efficiency of parents' support is assessed by informants as low, because parents are in a difficult situation, too.

Opinions of the informants regarding relatives were different. According to the informants, there are different people among relatives. Division of the society into the rich and the poor has affected relations within extended families, and now some of the rich people are more likely to invite to their houses rich friends, than less wealthy relatives. Nevertheless, reliability of relatives is still higher than that of any formal institution.

Urban informants assess reliability of neighbors as high. Relatives may be far away, and neighbors are near, so it is very important to have good neighbors. The Kyrgyz say that it is better to have a good neighbor than a bad relative. The institution of neighbors was highly assessed by informants from Kok Yangak. In the rural sites members of a community are neighbors and relatives at the same time, because they belong to one kin or one extended family. Rural informants view this as a guarantee of their social and communal safety.

Most people feel safe when they feel their identity with a big family or a community. Belonging to a community for the Kyrgyz is a guarantee of social protection, particularly important for the poor. Therefore, one of the features of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan is increased interest to genealogy. Several research monographs on the subject have been published (S. Zakirov. Sanjyra. Bishkek, 1996; S. Attokurov. Kyrgyz sanjyrasy. Bishkek, 1995). Following certain rules, every Kyrgyz can find who his ancestors and current relatives are. In the Soviet times the Kyrgyz were broadly divided into the southern and the northern, while now there is a great interest to tribes and kin, which can be explained by two factors. First, people need protection and prefer to be part of a community that can support them; second, people are interested to find more about their past, which is natural for the Kyrgyz who historically had a cult of the ancestors.

A new phenomenon is tendency of people who belong to a big kin to get together regardless of the region where they currently live. Members of the kin at their meetings discuss political, economic, staffing, and education issues, and receive moral support from each other. If necessary, the kin can provide financial support to its members.

Younger men emphasised the institution of friends. According to this category of informants, friends may be of greater help than parents. A special place in the category of friends is given to prosperous business people. Informants provided examples where friends' support was critical for holding such events as funeral and wedding ceremonies. Some business people support formal institutions, such as schools and health care centers. There are business people who contribute their money for construction of mosques, repair of roads, or construction of other important objects; however, such cases are rare so far.

Institutions most needed by the poor are social institutions, such as schools, clinics or, in rural area, paramedic offices, post offices, Social Fund and Social Service branches, shops, and small commercial kiosks. This is the short list of institutions that currently exist in the rural area and are in demand by the informants.

The institutions of school, post office, market, library, day care and kindergarten, departments of education, local newspapers and television have undergone serious changes. Thus, there are commercial sectors in all these institutions now, and the services provided by these institutions are paid. There are private television channels and private newspapers in the regions.

Out of these institutions, the institution of school is assessed as the most important by all informants. The informants said that they are well aware of the problems faced by schools, such as wage arrears, lack of training manuals, furniture, and visual aid, inadequate heating in winter, and leaking roofs. These problems were mentioned by informants of all sites, except for Urmalar; school in the village of Madaniyat attended by children from Urmalar is a pilot school of Soros foundation - Kyrgyzstan which supplies textbooks, computers, and money to the school. Schools in Tash Bulak village (Bazar Korgon district) and Kenesh (Talas region) are primary schools that accommodate only the students of the first four grades, and in the village of Achy (which in fact is a number of villages scattered around the mountains) only two schools can accommodate students of all 11 grades, and the other four are either primary or nine-year schools. The school in Boston village (part of Achy) which is now in a very difficult situation has been videotaped by the study team.

All informants said that they do their best to make their children attend school, so percentage of children who are unable to attend school is very low. Parents of schoolchildren collect money for remodelling of schools and participate in the process by *ashar* method (collective work done for free). A school in Boston village has been constructed by *ashar* method, and trust to the school in this site is higher than in other sites studied.

“Our school is one of the first schools in Achy. It needs complete remodelling, but neither the local authorities nor the central government have money for it. We have been trying to get some money for remodelling, but it was hopeless. The money that parents of the schoolchildren collect is just enough for minor repairs. But we are trying to do something about it. We began construction of a new building by *ashar* method.”

(Director of school, Achy)

Another formal institution frequently visited by informants is health care center (clinic, paramedic office). These institutions are accessible for most informants and were given high ranks. However, the informants believe that work of these institutions is not very efficient, because the patients have to bring with them everything, including bedsheets. Services of these institutions are paid; an initial registration form costs 10 *som*, tests and X-ray examination cost 50 *som* and can only be done in the district center, medicines are in short supply, and prices for them are higher than in the urban area. The informants believe that services of doctors and nurses are not very high quality, because salaries of doctors and nurses are low, and quality of training is very poor, as compared to the Soviet times. On the other hand, good doctors create a positive image of the clinics where they work. Thus, informants of Achy and Beisheke villages (Talas region) spoke highly of the chief doctors of their clinics.

Smaller villages have paramedic offices instead of full-fledged clinics. Paramedic offices have several nurses on the payroll; the nurses provide basic health care services and prenatal care. Some of the rural paramedic offices serve several villages, and their employees have to walk a long way to visit people who need medical services.

During the discussions, some of the informants said that their access to the health care institutions that exist in their villages is limited, because their services are too expensive. Thus, an elderly man from At Bashi (part of Achy) began to lose eyesight several years ago, but he has no money for the eye surgery. A middle-aged woman who has an individual farm suffers from a serious kidney disease, but she can not be hospitalised, because she would not leave her farm for too long. A younger woman from Tash Bulak has a liver disease, but she can not afford medical treatment and has nobody to take care of her young children while she is in hospital. Many of the informants said that in the Soviet times medical services were free and all working people had to

have a compulsory annual medical examination and could go to a health resort if necessary. Nowadays the ill try to treat their diseases themselves and rely on God, and doctors are visited only in the extreme cases. Health care institutions appear to be more important for women than for men, because women need prenatal care, assistance at childbirth, and medical treatment for children.

Urban informants named sanitary control as an important institution. Infectious diseases, including STDs, have become a serious problem within the past ten years. Tuberculosis is becoming a real threat. *Tuberculosis* state initiative funded by the government with assistance of UN Development Programme and other international organization is under way. The informants said that sanitary control does not function properly, and recalled the Soviet times when this institution was responsible for keeping situation with infectious diseases under control. Nowadays sanitary control is inadequate not only in the rural areas, but even in the capital city of Bishkek. Sanitary norms are violated at most Bishkek markets, and there have been many cases where people were poisoned by food. Some of these cases were lethal. All informants believe that their health and even lives are being put at risk, and are concerned with a great number of imported food of low quality offered at Kyrgyz markets. Some people are attracted by brightly packed and inexpensive products, while others believe that they may cause various diseases, allergic reactions, and even infertility (thus, many people do not buy Chinese sugar because it is believed to cause infertility).

The informants were quite unhappy about failure of the state authorities and sanitary control to ensure adequate quality of food. Women were particularly emotional when these issues were discussed.

Another problem related to safety of people is water supply. The informants of all sites covered by the study named the problem of drinking water as serious. In some of the villages people get water in the natural springs. This water is clean and tasty, but the informants are still concerned with its quality because of the environmental problems. Other rural sites (Kenesh, At Bashi), as well as the urban sites (Kok Yangak) water pipe no longer functions and, even though informants continue to pay for water, its supply is irregular and its quality is questionable. The informants blame growth of intestinal diseases on poor quality of drinking water. In Tash Bulak and Achy villages the problem of drinking water is particularly serious. The informants of these sites said that the need to buy drinking water adds to their poverty, and water supply is their very first priority.

Post office is named by the informants as an institution that they frequently visit. This institution is more important for the pensioners and women eligible for social benefits, than for the rest of the community, because post offices are responsible for delivery of pensions and benefits.

Performance of the post office is a concern of all informants, even though informants of At Bashi (Naryn region) give it a score of 80 out of 100, and informants of Talas region -- from 30 to 90. In Jalal Abad region, especially in the village of Achy and the town of Kok Yangak, performance of the post office is viewed quite negatively. Informants of Tash Bulak village (Jalal Abad region) had difficulty assessing performance of the post office, because their access to the post office was quite limited due to its remote location (about 6 kilometres from the village). Lack of public transportation and irregular work of the post office make the informants waste their time and money going there and back. Analysis of the responses shows that work of the post office adds a lot of negative factors to life of the poor. Many informants mentioned unfriendly attitude of post office employees. A man from At Bashi village (Naryn region) said that "no" appears to be the favourite word of post office employees, as all their answers to customers begin with it: no

communication, no pensions, no letters, no forms. The informant said: “Why are they [post office employees] there? They don’t even want to talk to us the way people do. We come to receive our own money, our pensions, and they treat us as though we come to take their own money away from them.” Informants of all sites admitted the importance of post office in their lives, but disapproved of their performance and indifference of local authorities who never try to supervise work of post offices and do not care about opinions of ordinary people about this problem.

“Post office employees make us buy old newspapers when we come to receive our pensions. If we don’t take the newspapers, they subtract their price from our pensions anyway.”
(An elderly man from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

Informants of mixed groups in the town of Kok Yangak and village of Beisheke named fire brigade and electricians as the institutions that protect them against danger, even though efficiency of these institutions was assessed as low. The fire brigade usually comes when all property has burnt down, and the electricians provide their services only when the request is repeated several times. These institutions were named primarily by men.

Among the informal institutions the informants emphasise the role of mosque. Trust to this institution is rather high in the rural areas. People go to the mosque to participate in religious rituals, pray, hold a wedding or a funeral ceremony, and receive moral support. Authority of the mosque is unquestionable in the rural area. Usually, mosques are built by joint effort of all community members who invest their time, money, and labor. In the Soviet times, construction of mosques was not as active as it is now. For the rural informants mosque is a sacred place. In the course of the study the informants shared a story about the flood in the village of Suzak in spring 1999. According to the informants, all houses in the center of the village suffered from flood, but the mosque which was among the houses was not affected. The informants spoke of this as an example of God’s will and grace.

Attitude toward Islam and the institution of mosque is different in urban sites. In Bishkek, informants of only one site (art college dormitory where art students and migrants from different regions of the country live) spoke of the mosque. The study team finds this community quite peculiar. A professional artist who lives in the dormitory with his family is a spiritual leader of the community who has a high authority. His views allowed him to turn the dormitory into a model community based on Islamic tradition. Basically all community members, especially men, pray five times a day. The facility is clean and tidy. Informants of this site said that, if President Akaev followed the Islamic tradition of praying, the country would be more prosperous. On Fridays all men go to the central mosque of Bishkek, and on big religious holidays they gather with other Muslims on the central square of the town to pray. The number of people praying in the central square on Muslim holidays is growing every year.

The study shows that informants of Talas region assess role of the mosque in the life of their communities highly.

Some negative comments about the mosque have been expressed, too. Thus, group of older poor women in Kok Yangak made a comment that some of the mullahs are too greedy, and the mosque does not share the gifts it receives on Muslim holidays, not even with orphans and the poor. The informants sometimes disapprove of the luxury of funeral ceremonies when a lot is received by the mosque and the mullah. The informants view these facts as negative.

The next informal institution named by informants is *Ajy*. *Ajy* is a person who has been to Mecca and therefore has a certain authority in the community. However, some of the *ajy* are not trusted

by informants who believe that they go to Mecca not only for religious purposes, but also for trade, and view it as a negative fact. The informants believe that a VISIT to Mecca is a duty of any Muslim. This ritual is respected by both younger and older informants, men and women of different sites alike. Moreover, the informants noticed the current tendency of women to go to Mecca, too. However, only the wealthy women can afford it.

Library and public baths make the next group of formal institutions. According to the informants, libraries in many villages currently do not function, and, even when they do, people hardly attend the libraries, because books and periodicals there are old. Thus, in the school of Almaluu Bulak (part of Achy) there is a library, but it is visited primarily by teachers. In the village of Kyzyl Tuu, not far from Urmalar site, there is a library founded in the Soviet times by efforts of a woman evacuated from Ukraine during World War II. Currently, the woman's daughter works as a librarian, but now the library is rarely attended, because it does not have new books and periodicals. The informants are tolerant about performance of libraries; they say that it is nice to have a good library, but it is not their first priority.

Public baths exist in three of the sites covered: villages of Uchkun and Achy and the town of Kok Yangak. None of them is functional. The informants recalled the Soviet times when public baths were functional and affordable for everybody. Current closure of public baths is caused by overall deterioration of the social infrastructure. Some people build small private baths for their own use, but some households do not have such facilities. Public baths functioning in administrative centers of the districts are occasionally visited by the informants, but remote location of the facilities, as well as high price for service (8 *som* per person) and transportation make it hardly affordable for the less wealthy community members. Many of the informants prefer to use bathing facilities of their neighbors or wash at home. The issue of bathing facilities was raised primarily by women's focus groups.

Institutions Providing Social Protection

The policy of targeted social protection is being implemented in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The social safety net includes social protection and social insurance. The newly created Social Fund is responsible for all social insurance issues, including pension issues. Social Service (a division of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection) is responsible for providing support to the poor, payment of social benefits, and distribution of humanitarian aid.

State standards of social benefits have been developed. In 1998, the number of people eligible for social benefits was 700,000 people, or 15% of the population. The number of social pension beneficiaries was as high as 35,000 people. Guaranteed minimal monthly income in 1998 was 100 *som* per person, which is lower than the extreme poverty line of 221 *som* a month established in the course of poverty monitoring project. In the regions covered by the study poverty line equals 93 *som* in Naryn, 83 *som* in Jalal Abad, and 82 *som* in Talas, as compared to 106 *som* in Bishkek, 105 *som* in the Chui region, and 100 *som* average in the country.

The institutions of Social Fund and Social Service were discussed and criticised a lot. Both men and women feel quite negatively about these institutions. The former Minister of Labor and Social Protection, Ms. Uchkempirova, was replaced due to poor performance of local branches of Social Protection.

Informants of all sites were quite critical of the performance of Social Fund and Social Service. The Social Fund is an institution that existed in the Soviet times; then it was responsible for all issues related to social needs. In the Post-Soviet times, the Social Fund is responsible for the

issues of old age pension and the newly introduced medical insurance. Social Service, a division of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, is in charge of providing support to the poor families by paying social benefits for children under 12, disability pensions, and pensions to families that have lost a primary income earners. Regional branches of the Social Service are supposed to help the poor, but the informants of all sites, performance of both Social Fund and Social Service is inadequate. In the course of ranking the informants assigned these institutions ranks of 5 and below. The informants had a long discussion of the role of these institutions; according to the informants, these institutions are very important because of the current poverty, and are the only government institutions on which they rely for support. At the same time, the informants believe that officials of these institutions are profiteering on the problems of the poor, distribute social benefits in-kind, by overpriced flour, oil, candies, and hosiery; among the products offered to the poor instead of cash there is oil from humanitarian aid stamped “not for sale”. A public association of the disabled in the town of Naryn initiated picketing the building of regional office of state administration; participants of the pickets demanded that the practice of in-kind payment of pensions and social benefits be prohibited; however, the picket did not bring about any results, and local communities face the same problems. Informants of Beisheke village (Talas region) and Achy village (Jalal Abad region) said that they receive their pension in-kind, by flour price of which is about 30% higher than at the market. The pensioners have to take the flour and sell it at the market at a lower price to receive some cash for purchase of other products and goods that they need. As a result, some 20% to 30% of a 360som pension is lost.

“Last time they paid benefits for children by candies at 120 som per kilo.”
(A young woman from Kok Yangak)

5.4. Control and Influence over Institutions

Totalitarian Soviet system hindered development of civil practice and social partnership. Collapse of the official socio-political environment entailed collapse of the models of cooperation that existed among people. People who live closely together for a long time develop co-habitation standards, ideals, and norms, and develop social capital. The main reason of inability of the study team to influence formal institution, in the opinion of the study team, is their lack of social capital, lack of experience of rational resolution of problems by join effort. Therefore, local formal institutions appear to be inaccessible to people. Even though the highest government authorities of Kyrgyzstan promote transparency, atmosphere of caution and isolation appears to be still prevalent in the society. Individualism and selfishness of people add to their isolation and lead to negative events that can affect life of the society in general. Social capital developed by some communities forces even the most unscrupulous officials to improve their performance.

Greed of officials was named as a cause and effect of poverty by informants of most sites. The informants said that there is no control over the performance of local officials, and recalled the Soviet past when all officials were responsible for their deeds before the Communist Party and general public. Some of the focus groups talked about Stalin times when strict order allowed to decrease prices for food after the World War II. Informants from the town of Kok Yangak said that the poor can not influence the existing institutions whatsoever, while the rich can do anything, because “money means power”.

In Bishkek, the study covered primarily the newly constructed district of Archa Beishik that appeared due to non-sanctioned capture of land at the outskirts of the city by young rural Kyrgyz. Collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by deterioration of social infrastructure, growing unemployment, and collapse of collective farms, made younger people from rural regions of Kyrgyzstan move to towns, primarily to Bishkek. Not registered as permanent residents of

Bishkek, these people could not find a job or engage in trade. A number of public associations (*Bishkek, Ashar*) and political parties (*Asaba* -- party of national revival, *Kyrgyzstan* democratic movement) appeared and made themselves political names by participation in the campaign of unsanctioned construction of houses for the migrants.

Finally, state authorities had to permit the migrants to build houses at the outskirts of Bishkek. Several districts have been constructed and are now populated by migrants from rural areas. These districts have the worst infrastructure in the town, such basic facilities as water pipeline, electric power line, schools, shops, and health care centers there are either absent or out of order, roads are in very poor conditions, and public transportation is inadequate. The government and the municipality of Bishkek constantly have to deal with the problems of these districts, because their residents regularly ask the authorities for support in resolution of their problems.

In early 1980s a lot of young rural people came to Bishkek; currently these people live in dormitories that owned by big factories, and make a living by trade. The current owners of factories charge 300 to 500 *som* rental payment a month. The study covered residents of the dormitory of Arabaev pedagogical university in Bishkek, most of whom are rural Kyrgyz.

Informants from Bishkek have access to various institutions. Thus, informants from the dormitory of Chokmorov Art College and residents of Archa Beishik district named such institutions as university, outpatient clinic, library, cinema, post office, police office, and head of district office of state administration. Bishkek informants were not quite sure that they can make a difference in the performance of these institutions; however, they said that, if they picket the Government House, some reaction of the authorities definitely will follow.

The informants said that they have no influence over private schools, shops, and kiosks, owners of which do what they find necessary.

People have come to believe that non-governmental organizations can help them to influence formal institutions and make a difference in their lives.

Kyrgyzstan has one of the biggest numbers of NGOs in Central Asia. According to the most recent information, as many as 984 non-governmental organizations have been registered in the country, including 134 women's NGOs, 108 NGOs specialising on the issues of youth and children, 75 education and science NGOs, 75 charitable NGOs, 65 ecological NGOs, 57 NGOs specialising on the issues of human rights, 56 media-related NGOs, 51 agricultural and farmer NGOs, 40 health care NGOs, 38 NGOs in support of the disabled, 37 NGOs in support of associations, 34 NGOs in support of businesses, 34 art and artisan NGOs, 34 legal NGOs, 33 NGOs specialising on family issues and problems of pensioners, 31 NGO in support of NGOs, 25 ethnic and cultural NGOs, 9 NGOs specialising on issues of sports, recreation, and entertainment, 9 refugee NGOs, and 3 NGOs specialising on issues of civil PARTICIPATION.

There are 225 NGOs in Osh region, 126 NGOs in Jalal Abad region, 73 NGOs in Chui region, 73 NGOs in Issyk Kul region, 69 NGOs in Talas region, and 51 NGOs in Naryn region. These numbers show that NGOs are less developed in Naryn and Talas regions, which are two of the regions covered by the study.

Recently, a coalition of non-governmental organizations has been created for the purpose of active participation in political processes. So far the role of the third sector in the public life of the country is not very important, and non-governmental organizations are not very likely to

influence governmental policy; the willingness of many non-governmental organizations to participate in political processes can be viewed as the new step of third sector development.

The informants of the sites covered by the study named the following NGOs: *Chynar Bak* (social support to women, Naryn region), *Ak Bairak* (support to the disabled children and employment of their mothers, Naryn region), *Ajar* (employment services, Beisheke village of Talas region). *Ajar* NGO has established contacts with the regional representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is looking for possibilities that people have in obtaining microcredits. Among the urban NGOs the informants named *Save the Town* association (Kok Yangak, Jalal Abad region) whose mission is to prevent demolition of the town caused by closure of production companies and high outflow of residents of the town who dismantled their privatised houses to take with them construction materials. In this situation some people raised their voices against such vandalism. Among other NGOs, the informants named *Nurlan* NGO (legal advice), and *Nurjamal* NGOs (livestock herding issues).

Informants of Naryn and Jalal Abad regions mentioned Centers for Support of NGOs which provide advisory services and various training programmes. These centers are regional branches of Counterpart Consortium. Women and younger men of the focus groups showed more interest to NGOs than other informants.

The study team is of impression that many of the informants still do not have the tools necessary to influence the existing institutions, and need civil education. The social activities of many informants are based on pessimistic rumours that they hear; the informants believe that their attempts to make a difference will fail anyway and, when asked if they ever tried to actually do something, many of the informants say no, even though some members of their communities did.

Many of the informants touched upon the issue of loans. They said that lending institutions can only be influenced by bribes, and people who have no money for bribes can not obtain loans. Most of the informants do not have money, so they view lending institutions as inaccessible.

5.5. Coping with Crisis

Transition has caused economic, environmental, and social problems in Kyrgyzstan. People were not prepared for the transition. The “shock therapy” of the transition required a capable government who could make the effects of dramatic changes less painful for the citizens. According to the concept of United Nations Development Programme, a capable government is the one that can fulfil the following tasks: (1) decrease uncertainty and anxiety about the measures taken to build market economy; (2) maintain and protect the system of support for the poor inherited from the previous system; and (3) educate the general public about market institutions and increase trust towards them.

Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan is undergoing the process of transitional decline followed by people’s loss of ability to satisfy their basic social and financial needs. Among the problems faced by people are unemployment, poor health, and limited access to financial resources and services. At the south of Kyrgyzstan the situation is aggravated by frequent natural disasters.

In this situation, survival becomes a primary concern of many people. How do individuals, communities, and society as a whole manage to survive? Is there an experience that can be

successfully followed? What institutions help the poor to cope with crisis? What do the poor themselves do to cope with crisis?

Analysis of site reports shows that the institutions that help the informants resolve their problems are, first of all, their parents, followed by school, health care center, mosque, and peasant farm. When ranking institutions, many of the informants name the village council as an organization where the poor can go for help. Focus group discussions have shown that the informants relate the issue of poverty alleviation to the performance of official government authorities.

According to the informants, development of the network of lending institutions will be of help in the process of coping with the crisis. Informants of the sites studied are aware of the existence of lending institutions, but very few of them have actually used the institutions' services, while a great majority of the poor do not have such opportunity.

A certain experience of microcrediting has been gained in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, such financial institutions as FINCA, Gramin Bank, and *Meerim* foundation issue loans for various purposes. Citizens themselves create credit unions to help general tge public with the resolution of financial problems.

The banks currently existing in the country hardly ever issue loans to the poor. According to the informants, to obtain a bank loan, one needs to bribe bank officials, and to do that, one needs information as to whom to bribe and how much to pay. In addition, banks' interest rates are very high, more than 100%, and banks demand collateral. There are few official financial institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic, and none of them specialises in the needs of small businesses. One of the banks offered a service of opening accounts upon request, but suggested an interest rate of 8% to 10%, while the inflation rate was above 30%.

According to a recent survey, heads of agricultural enterprises in Kyrgyzstan believe that the inadequate system of lending in the country is one of the most serious problems faced by producers of agricultural products.

(UNDP. Poverty of the Transition Period, 1998)

A great majority of the micro-financing programmes organised by NGOs can not be viewed as financial institutions from the legal viewpoint, and therefore can not issue loans.

People believe that their first and the best way out of the current situation is agricultural work. Informants of the sites studied gave positive responses regarding the land policy of the government, but complained about distribution of land by village councils.

Agricultural work is hindered by a lack of agricultural equipment and high prices for fuel. Many farmers pool their land plots and join into peasant farms, voluntary farmers' associations similar to collective farms. Members of peasant farms pool their resources to buy seeds and equipment, resolve all issues related to the farm at general meetings, and elect the Chair of the farm at such meetings.

Another type of farm, individual farms, are entities owned by individual households. Usually, individual farmers are more mobile, active, and open to new experiences when compared with the rest of their communities. Sometimes community members feel negatively about prosperous individual farmers and do not tend to support them.

Among the institutions that help to cope with poverty in the rural areas, the informants named veterinary service. They said that it worked very well in the Soviet times, and health of the livestock owned by households was subject to constant strict control. There were fewer cases of infectious diseases in animals that affected people, while currently there are many cases of BRUCELLOSIS in the country.

Some of the individual farms offer jobs for the poor and provide poor households with one or more sacks of free wheat. Thus, Jumabubu Balbakova from the village of Uchkun (Naryn region), a successful individual farmer, helps relatives and neighbors who ask her for support. She rents their land, pays land taxes for the three years which they failed to pay, and gives 15% of the crops to the land owners. This woman has also helped the elderly who have no income earner in the household.

As it has been mentioned above, the poor sometimes ask the prosperous business people who come from their community for support, and there are cases where business people help to remodel buildings of school, mosque, or public baths, and repair the roads.

During the discussions, the informants said that some people obtained loans, used the money rationally, and became wealthy. These loans are in most cases provided by informal lenders, such as local usurers, who lend money at a certain interest rate. Such loans have allowed some people to start their retail trading business.

Some of the urban informants believe that the market is the institution that saves them from starvation, because many people make a living by retail trade.

In their attempts to cope with poverty, the informants access international organizations. The informants of the sites studied named such organizations as the Soros Foundation - Kyrgyzstan, *Helvetas* foundation (Switzerland), the Peace Corps, Mercy Corps, the Red Cross, *Meerim* foundation headed by the First Lady of Kyrgyzstan, and the Counterpart Consortium.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is one of the institutions that actively works on poverty alleviation. The informants named this organizations among other institutions that they may access for support. Informants of Kok Yangak town began cooperation with the regional office of UNDP. Refugees access regional branches of UNHCR.

The government appears to be the primary institution on which the informants rely and which they ask for support. They believe that without governmental support poverty in the country can not be alleviated. Another institution that supports the poor is the post office which is responsible for delivery of pensions and social benefits and allows people to stay in touch with their relatives.

The informants are aware of the *Araket* state initiative aimed at poverty alleviation. Local officials appear to be better informed about it than the rest of the community, and have copies of the programmes on their desks and book shelves.

In 1997, Kyrgyzstan was the first of the CIS countries to adopt the National Strategy of Sustainable Human Development and based on it the Strategy of Poverty Alleviation. On 11 February 1998 the Presidential Decree "On Measures for Poverty Alleviation in the Kyrgyz Republic in 1998 - 2005" was signed. Within the framework of this national strategy, short-term programmes (1998-2000. Labor Market and Employment) and long-term programmes (2000-2005 *Emgek* (programme) have been adopted.

The purpose of the *Araket* national programme is to help people transform their senseless, dead end situations into sensible and encouraging active work. According to the Annual Report on Implementation of the *Araket* programme aimed at poverty alleviation, foundations for poverty alleviation have been created and support to the poor households is being provided in the regions surveyed. However, informants of the sites surveyed in the course of the Consultations with the Poor study could not say anything concrete about the *Araket* initiative.

In the framework of the *Araket* initiative, the total number of the poor is being assessed by regular visits to individual households. Currently, the first version of a social passport has been tested in all village councils, and on the basis of the data received in the course of the testing, a new social passport is being drafted. Introduction of social passports is aimed at the increase of targeted support.

Analysis of the results of the work of the *Araket* national programme aimed at poverty alleviation allowed development of the following recommendations for improvement of living standards in the regions:

- take urgent measures for development of high quality legislation and legal documents for the creation of favourable conditions in the field of social protection, labor, and employment in the country;
- pay special attention to the creation of an efficient system of microcrediting, additional incentives for the unemployed, and support to the poor and the disabled;
- provide social guarantees to the poor on a beneficial basis, and ensure free access of the poor to the social services; and
- increase work on alleviation of rural poverty by gradual reform of agrarian and land sectors of the national economy.

(Annual report on implementation of the Araket national programme aimed at poverty alleviation in the Kyrgyz Republic, 1999)

Within the framework of the *Araket* programme in 1999, it is planned to create poverty alleviation foundations, poverty maps, and a national database on the poverty structure, draft a Law on Population, develop a programme of gradual systematisation of social benefits based on actual capacities of the national budget, develop targeted programmes of support to families and children and social support to the disabled, and implement several World Bank Projects, including "Supplementary Agricultural Services" and "Sheep Herding Development." The programme attends to gender differences which is reflected in plans of the development of the network of consultation services on maternity issues, alleviation of maternity mortality, and support of rural business women.

The southern regions of Kyrgyzstan are being constantly affected by landslides and floods, which require the government to raise a lot of money to cope with the crisis, and thus cause wage arrears. All state companies and agencies transfer the amount of one- or two-days wages into the Fund of Salvation and Crisis Liquidation. After-effects of the crisis situations are liquidated with participation of the military, police, volunteers, doctors, and divisions of the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

National commissions are created to assess the amount of damage incurred by the state and develop complex of measures for coping with ecological crisis. Thus, residents of Achy village which is being affected by landslides were provided with loans for construction of houses in a safe area. However, informants of Tash Bulak site believe that, due to the misdirected policy of local authorities the community had to move the village to the least convenient area. The elderly informants from this site said that they could find a better place themselves, and then the

community would not have even half of the problems that it currently has (lack of drinking and irrigation water, barren soil).

Based on the above, the following conclusions can be made.

The institutions existing in the regions surveyed are inefficient and hardly accessible for the poor.

The informants tend to rely too much on the government, but at the same time they do not trust local authorities.

Social initiatives by the government aimed at rehabilitation and adjustment of socially vulnerable groups are poorly implemented in the regions.

Activities of the local institutions are not open.

Commercialisation of formal institutions is viewed by all informants as a negative factor.

Tax issues need to be resolved on the local level with greater flexibility.

It is necessary to improve the performance of law enforcement agencies.

Local authorities are not interested in the development of the third sector. The informants of the regions surveyed are hardly aware of opportunities and existing practices of coping with crisis.

Many of the informants act based on hearsay rather than on their own experience, and do not approach institutions that might help them.

Microcrediting in the sites surveyed is undeveloped, and the informants do not know where and how loans can be obtained.

Local authorities do not encourage development of private businesses and charitable activities of business people.

No facts of social partnership have been observed in the course of the study. Informants are ignorant of their rights, which limits their access to various institutions.

What needs to be done in this situation?

There is a need to call the attention of state officials to the problems of the poor and to provide training programmes on social support of the poor.

Both the officials and general public need to be motivated to realise that they are part and parcel of the national well-being.

Civil, ecological, and legal education must be provided to the poor.

A Network of informal local institutions needs to be developed, and the general public needs to be encouraged to participate in this work.

Official institutions in the regions need to establish links with the general public.

Local leaders from among the most active and educated members of local communities need to be promoted.

An information network targeted on practice of coping with crisis needs to be created.

Access to resource centers must be increased.

6. Gender Relations

6.1. Changes in Position of Women as Compared with the Soviet Past

The situation faced nowadays by women in Kyrgyzstan is contradictory and influenced by various factors. A concept of a modern Kyrgyz women is formed based on the following three factors: (1) secularised Islamic tradition; (2) traditional value system of the Kyrgyz, historically a nomadic nation where women played an important role both on a household and on a community level; and (3) Soviet heritage of gender equality promotion.

Kyrgyz women have always been independent, which was explained by nomadic life of the Kyrgyz, rather than their democratic values. The responsibilities of Kyrgyz women required a certain freedom for their successful implementation; however, the destiny of women and children was always determined by men, and freedom enjoyed by Kyrgyz women was quite relative, even though it was much greater than that of Islamic women that belonged to non-nomadic nations and could strictly follow Islamic traditions without causing economic difficulties to their households.

It is necessary to remember that Kyrgyzstan has just begun to build a democratic society, and a long way to the true democracy is yet to be gone. Most people suffer from economic dependency, and the middle class is quite scarce. The current situation in Kyrgyzstan can be described as a democracy promoted by government decision. Such promotion of democracy “from above” can not be viewed as full-fledged democracy.

Women’s Rights

The rights and opportunities of women are given particular attention in the framework of the Strategy of Sustainable Human Development in Kyrgyzstan. The health and social status of women are directly related to such issues as maternity and health of children. Women account for the majority of the population in the country, so there is a great need to create the conditions that would encourage the active participation of women in the political, social, and spiritual life of the country. The National Report “Women of Kyrgyzstan for Equality, Development, and Peace” lists the following achievements by women of the country: absence of open discrimination by gender and ethnicity, high level of education, free political will, and active participation in production.

The rights and interests of women are protected by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Labor Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Matrimonial Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Civil Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Laws of the Kyrgyz Republic “On State Benefits to Families with Children”, “On Protection of Health of People in the Kyrgyz Republic”. In addition, the Kyrgyz Republic has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Children adopted by the 44th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and the Convention of the World Labor Organization “On Establishment of International System of Maintaining the Rights for Social Protection” (1982). In January 1996 the Legislative Assembly of the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic ratified the following international conventions against discrimination of women’s rights: the Convention on Liquidation of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on Political Rights of Women, the Convention on Consent for Marriage, Marriage Age, and Marriage Registration, the Convention on Citizenship of Married Women, and the Convention on Protection of Maternity.

The Kyrgyz Republic has a legal environment that defines the rights and interests of women in compliance with international norms. Nevertheless, the rights women in Kyrgyzstan still can not be viewed as equal to the rights of men. Women's attempts to achieve true equality are hindered by growing unemployment and poverty, the low level of social protection, the decrease of participation of women in decision making and property distribution, and the high level of diseases. Many women are poorly informed about their rights, and stereotypes and traditions formed by the patriarchal way of living are still strong in the society. The legal environment still needs improvement aimed at broadening the scope of legal institutions and increasing the efficiency of court decision enforcement.

The political rights and freedoms of women, unlike their personal rights and freedoms, are aimed primarily at active participation in the life of the society, rather than independence within it. These rights create the conditions required for strengthening links between individuals and the society, citizens and the state. Equal participation of men and women in decision making will create the balance and better reflect the composition of the society, thus strengthening the democratic changes in the country.

Equal participation of men and women in the political life of the country is critical for further improvement of women's lives and can be viewed as a necessary component of the protection of women's interests.

Political rights and freedoms include, first of all, the right to vote. State power and local self-governance in Kyrgyzstan are elected. The new election system in Kyrgyzstan has affected a percentage of women in the parliament of the country. In the Soviet past, there were official quotas of women that had to be represented in the Soviets of various levels thus ensuring the active participation of women in political life. After the cessation of this practice the number of women in the Kyrgyz parliament has decreased significantly, and only 5 of 82 women were elected. Currently there are only 4 women in the two chambers of the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament), which is 4.7% of the total number of votes. In regional *Keneshes* women represent 14% of the total number of members, in *Keneshes* of district level they account for 25% of members, and in *keneshes* of village level -- for 31-34%.

In the Soviet times, public organizations of women did exist; they were funded by the government and promoted government policy. These organizations did not show any public initiative and reported to the Communist Party authorities.

Women's non-governmental organizations and foundations in support of women, families, and children began to appear in Kyrgyzstan as part of independence and democracy building that began in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Currently many of these organizations are completely independent from the government, they do not receive government funding, and feel no pressure by the government in their activities, which makes them different from women's organizations of the Soviet type. The system of protection of women, children, and families has changed dramatically in the post-Soviet environment, and research on gender issues has become more active. The main factor hindering the implementation of women's initiatives nowadays is lack of financing for their projects. The growing activity of women is proven by the fact that as many as 134 women's NGOs have been registered in Kyrgyzstan, including 35 NGOs in Bishkek (26.1%), 26 in Osh region (19.4%), 20 in Issyk Kul region (14.9%), 16 in Naryn region (11.9%), 16 in Jalal Abad region (11.9%), 11 in Chui region (8.2%), and 10 in Talas region (7.5%) as of April 1999.

The activities of many women's NGOs are aimed at support to the socially vulnerable groups of women and children, and the establishment of gender balance, especially in the resolution of unemployment and poverty problems.

The situation of women's labor in Kyrgyzstan was shaped in Soviet times when women accounted for a large part of the workforce, and their employment was promoted by Soviet ideology of gender equality at the labor market. By 1990, 83% of women in Kyrgyzstan were officially registered as permanently employed. The Soviet government provided funded kindergartens and medical institutions and provided paid maternity leave to women who could work efficiently both within and outside their households.

Another factor inherited from the Soviet past is broad governmental funding of education programmes for women. In 1950 a number of educational institutions were created specifically for women. Literacy in Kyrgyzstan in 1989 was as high as 97%, a great majority of women had school education, and 34% of women had undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The proportion of women was particularly high in the fields of education, health care, the textile and food industry, banking, and engineering. Women accounted for 13.6% of managers and officials.

The collapse of the Soviet Union entailed the cessation of government allocations, a dramatic decline of the national economy and a decrease in individual income, and a great increase in the number of poor. The need in social support and social safety has increased as the social safety net now has to cover a majority of the population. Limited financial resources and inefficient performance of tax authorities resulted in the decrease of allocations for social purposes, which further aggravated the situation. Due to the loss of social benefits, unemployment, and the high inflation rate, more than half of the population found themselves below the poverty line.

6.2. Responsibilities of Men and Women Within Household

Traditionally, men, being heads of their households, were responsible for financial stability and the safety of their families, while women were responsible for raising children and doing housework. The Soviet system supported this arrangement. In the post-Soviet period, the closure of production companies and the downsizing of state agencies caused mass unemployment among men. Women have proven to be more mobile than their husbands and began to trade, which was one of the few ways for them to survive and feed their children.

Comment 1: The social safety net and status of women in the Soviet period

The Government provided compulsory education for women, guaranteed their employment, paid for their year-long maternity leaves, provided free health care in clinics and free medical treatment at sanatoriums for children with chronic diseases, paid benefits for young children and family. The system of social objects, such as kindergartens, baby kitchens, canteens, sports facilities, laundry, and dry cleaning facilities.

The current economic crises is a great burden for women who live under stress all the time and lack confidence about their future. The old social safety net has deteriorated completely, and women feel that they are not protected from the viewpoint of health care, education, employment, and health care for their children.

Informants of most sites agree that responsibilities of men and women have changed and the national customs and traditions are undermined.

“The unemployed men are frustrated, because they no longer can play the part of family providers and protectors. They live on the money made by their wives, and feel humiliated because of that. Suicides among young men have become more frequent.”
(An elderly woman from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

The Independence of Kyrgyzstan and changes in its political, economic, and social life have entailed mass unemployment and the downsizing of the service companies where women accounted for a great part of the workforce. These factors changed the status of women. Women have lost many of their formal achievements, such as a stable place in the economic structure and the political life of the country. Women are now among the groups that suffer most seriously from decrease of social indexes. At the same time, women are singularly active at the informal labor market and are the core of the force fostering economic changes in the country. Women have managed to create a flexible system of employment for themselves and increase income for their families.

Since 1993 women have been involved in trade known also as “bazaar economy” and *chelnochny business* (that of travelling to other towns and even countries to purchase goods and products for re-sale). The liberalisation of the economy that is under way in the country creates better opportunities for trade. Urban and, to some extent, rural women travel to Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and even more remote countries, such as India, Iran, Syria, Arabic Emirates, Thailand, Italy, Pakistan, Korea, and Turkey, tour the shops, purchase goods and re-sell them in Kyrgyzstan. The women who speak foreign languages and have an aptitude for trade use the opportunities of developing a market economy to a greater extent than men. However, these opportunities are not accessible to everybody. Trade activities reached their peak in 1993-1998, while now a certain decline can be observed. Thus, one of the biggest wholesale markets of Central Asia, *Dordoi* market in Bishkek, is undergoing difficult times, and the focus of wholesale trade has shifted to the neighboring town of Almaty (Kazakhstan). In the past, a great number of buses of Russian, Uzbek, and Kazakh traders came to *Dordoi* market to buy goods, while now, due to objective reasons such as a strict customs policy introduced by Uzbekistan, high customs taxes in Kazakhstan, and the devaluation of the Kyrgyz national currency, traders are facing difficulties. The purchasing power of the citizens of Kyrgyzstan has gone down, and many women traders have run out of business. Many people now survive by selling small food items which are always in demand.

The above factors affect the rural areas as well as the urban. The purchasing power of people in the rural regions is even lower than that of the urban residents. Usually, villagers have money in autumn, after their harvest is cropped, but that is only true if the crop is good and agricultural products and livestock are easy to sell. The rest of the time people in the rural areas purchase goods in the private local shops on credit and repay the debt when they manage to get some cash. State-owned shops no longer exist in the rural area.

An 18-year old informant of At Bashi village said that most members of her community are somehow or other involved in trade: the wealthy go to Russia and buy high quality clothes and food there for re-sale, less wealthy traders go to China for goods of lower quality, average women traders go to Bishkek, and the poorest of the traders buy small items in the town of Naryn and re-sell in their home village.

Informants of all focus groups, both in the urban and in the rural area, believe that the situation currently faced by women is much more difficult than it was in the past.

Focus groups in Bishkek are composed mostly of migrants who came in the early 1990s from rural areas of Kyrgyzstan and settled at the outskirts of its capital city in the hope of finding a job and improving their living conditions. At the time Soviet infrastructure began to deteriorate, the collective farm system collapsed, and the mass privatisation of state property started. The situation of the migrants hardly improved as they moved to the urban areas. Thus, women of Archa Beishik district of Bishkek make a living by selling small items at open air markets, and men do occasional hard manual work at the markets or go to the informal labor exchanges that exist in Bishkek. At such “labor exchanges” men of different ages and different professions offer their services to the wealthy people who need workers for a short time (one or several days).

As it has been mentioned above, women feel unprotected in all fields of their lives.

A young woman said that in the past, if a woman was about to give birth, it did not create problems for her family: she was taken to the maternity ward by an ambulance car and returned with a baby in a few days. Now women have to take necessary medicines, syringes, baby clothes, bedclothes, and money for the medical treatment with them to the clinic. Their family members need to bring them food every day, because catering in clinics is inadequate. When a woman leaves the clinic, her family members must bring presents to the doctors and nurses.

In the rural sites surveyed, the traditional distribution of responsibilities within a household where men are viewed as the primary income earners and family providers, is still in place. The situation is different in the sites where people have no vegetable gardens, land plots, and livestock, and have to trade in order to survive.

Older women from Ak Kiya (Naryn region) say: *Ayal bazarda, erkek kazanda* (women are at the market [trading], and men are in the kitchen [cooking])

“In the past, women were responsible for the home, and men provided for the family, and everything was clear. Now women trade at the market no matter what the weather is like, because they need to provide for the family, and men stay at home, take care of children and do other female work. It’s not right, it’s no good.”
(Older man from Kenesh village, Talas region)

Facilitators made an attempt to find out and systematise the factors that prevent men from trading. The responses of informants of different age, gender, and social background, include the following reasons why men do not trade:

1. In the past, trade was not viewed by the Kyrgyz as a prestigious occupation, and traders, especially women traders, do not have a high social status now (informants of Achy, Jalal Abad region).
2. Many men have no experience in trading. Informants of most sites said that business skills and experience are critical for successful trade.
3. According to the informants of most regions, tax and custom officials and law enforcement officers are for the most part men, and they tend to be more strict with men traders than with women.
4. Men traders are more frequently robbed than women, even though there are cases where women traders are robbed, too.
5. Men are not likely to save the money they earn, because they have a lot of friends and can not oppose various temptations (male informants of Beisheke, Talas region).

In towns, as well as in some villages, men now stay at home and do the work that traditionally is considered “female”. Responsibilities within households are distributed between men and women in a different way; men are more likely to take care of children, cook, and do the laundry. This is particularly true for the families where women spend long hours at the markets selling goods or leave for long shop tours. Men do try to find some work. Thus, wealthy community members who are aware of the hopeless situation of the unemployed hire them for a very low payment, or even for food and shelter. In some cases, the employers give their old clothes as payment to their workers.

“My husband used to work as a herder, and now he is unemployed. He does different work for the wealthy, but he earns very little.”

(A 30-year old woman from Tash Bulak village, Jalal Abad region)

In some households women play the role of family providers, which traditionally belonged to men. Women nowadays have a broader scope of rights and are more independent, but they can not pay much attention to their families and children. These functions are now performed by their unemployed husbands who have to put up with this new role. Traditionally, the authority of men in Kyrgyz families was never questioned, while now, as men lose their status of family providers, their position in the family changes, too.

According to an elderly women from Beisheke village (Talas region), *echtemke tappak erkek suuk korunun kalat eken* (men who do not earn money have no authority)

Relations between men and women have become more difficult during the transition, and many of the old values have lost all their sense. Such changes in priorities is never easy, but there are some positive features of such transition, too. Thus, Kurdish women from Beisheke village (Talas region) said:

“Now we have more rights than we did in the Socialist times. Then all men worked, and families were never short of money. Now all Kurd women of this village have to work, knit socks for sale [to support their families].”

Historically, due to the nomadic life that required women to share men’s responsibilities and hardships, Kyrgyz women were respected by men, and never veiled their faces.

The role of women in the family was always appreciated: *ayal uidun kutu* (a woman is the wealth of the family).

Different focus groups expressed polar opinions about the current status of men. Informants of older age argued that men are still heads of the households, while middle-aged men and women said that women are family providers and therefore play the key role in the household.

“Now wives govern their husbands. Even the President is governed by his wife -- so what can we do? We just have to put up with it.”

(A young poor man from Bishkek)

Rural informants believe that the status of women is determined by the traditional way of living - the patriarchal mentality of the villagers. Rural women, unlike urban, do not view their housework as a burden, because most of them are housewives; however, working women are overburdened by the responsibilities that they have in the household. Women teachers from

Uchkun village (Naryn region) said: “In the towns, women can relax after work, they have houses with all necessary utilities (cold and hot water, gas, washing machine), while we have to do all this work in the vegetable garden, cook, do the laundry, carry water for it, take care of the children. And, most importantly, we are not paid our wages [at school] regularly.” Young and middle-aged women from Achy village (Jalal Abad region) say that it is better to stay at home than trade and constantly face danger and humiliation.

The growing problem of unemployment and changes in the labor market have affected women in the age of 18-29 more than others. Currently, many young rural women have to limit their activities to traditional housework, and a growing number of women have become economically dependent on their relatives. Young women married to the youngest sons in the family or the only sons, traditionally have to take care of the ageing mother and father-in-law. Nowadays, however, there are situations where the pension of the old parents is the only source of income not only for them, but for the families of their adult children, too.

Sabyr Abdykadyrov, a 67-year old pensioner with serious eyesight problems said indignantly: “Is it acceptable that the elderly have to support the young? Sometimes my sons find occasional employment, but it does not happen often.”
(At Bashi village, Talas region)

In the course of focus group discussions held in Uchkun village (Naryn region) the study team met the youngest informant, a poor woman of 18. She was quite frustrated and unlikely to open up, and she could not speak freely. From an individual conversation with her, the study team found out that her husband is 10 years her senior, and that they live with her husband’s elderly father whose pension is their only source of income. It was apparent from the conversation that the woman has no say in her family and has to do the hardest work. This is an example of *kelin*, a humble daughter-in-law.

The descriptions of household responsibilities given by informants of most focus groups are very similar, and most of the housework, according to the informants, is done by women. The only exceptions were the responses given by youth and schoolchildren from Urmalar and the special group of Kenesh (both villages are in Talas region). Informants of these groups believe that responsibilities within households are primarily men’s responsibilities (according to their responses, women have 40, 30, and 40% of all household responsibilities, and men -- 60, 70, and 60%).

Elderly informants from the village of Achy (Jalal Abad region) tend to be more patriarchal in their views about family life. They were quite categorical in their comments about the responsibilities within households and said that now, as well as in the Soviet times, housework is a responsibility of women. Younger poor women from At Bashi village (Naryn region) who are single, divorced, or widowed, do 100% of housework within their households.

However, a tendency towards an increase of involvement of men in housework can also be observed. Middle-aged men from the village of Ak Kiya (Naryn region) said that they participate in housework as much as their wives do. Poor women from Achy village (Jalal Abad region) believe that they and their husbands have equal shares of housework. In the mixed groups of At Bashi village (Naryn region) there was a heated discussion of this issue. The women said that they did most of the housework, while men did not agree, because the responsibilities of livestock herding, barn cleaning, haymaking, and grain grinding were primarily men’s.

“The responsibilities of women on a household level are higher now than they were in the past. Women raise children. In the past, the Young Pioneer League, the school, and the society as a whole were of help in this process. Now men earn very little, and women have to somehow feed their family members, find clothes and footwear for everybody, and preserve the family.”
(Older poor men from the village of Kenesh, Talas region)

According to some of the informants, in the Soviet times responsibilities on a household level were equally shared by men and women, because women had full-time jobs. This opinion was expressed by most of the focus groups.

6.3. Responsibilities of Women on a Community Level

The informants believe that people were not morally or psychologically prepared to such drastic changes as the collapse of the Soviet Union, collapse of the collective farm system, and unfair privatisation of state property.

“I don’t think that we have democracy. Everything that we used to have is now destroyed. I don’t understand why collective farm system had to be destroyed. We saw on TV that in Chui region they left collective farms the way they were, and the farms work all right, employ young people. And what is going on here? It’s done deliberately by those who profiteer on it. Young healthy guys are wandering about idly all winter long, because work here is seasonal, they are only busy in summer and autumn, when they sow and crop the harvest, and the rest of the time they have nothing to do but drink vodka.”
(An older woman from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

The collapse of the collective farm system has indeed caused unemployment among rural residents capable of work. Some of these people migrate to the urban areas, including Bishkek. On one hand, this process can be viewed as positive, because it reflects urbanisation trends. On the other hand, such migration is caused primarily by inadequate rural development. The intense outflow of the best educated and most active young people from villages results in a worsened social and professional structure of rural communities and hinders socio-economic progress in the rural areas. Nowadays the process of migration back to the rural area caused by lack of jobs in the towns and the need of a good education and a high professional level to obtain a job; however, such migrants are not very numerous. Migrants from rural areas usually do not officially register as permanent residents of the towns to which they move, have no professional training, and thus add to the number of unemployed and increase concerns about the crime rate.

In the past, most of the rural men worked as mechanics, tractor drivers and combine harvester operators, drivers, sheep herders, and accountants. These professions were among the most prestigious and best paid. Currently, men in the rural area have seasonal employment. They work in spring, when agricultural work begins, in summer, when the crops need irrigation, haymaking and livestock herding is under way, and in autumn, when the crops are being harvested, livestock is being sold, and preparations for winter are being made. When men work in the field, women have to cook and bring food to the field on a regular basis. In winter, rural men are not so busy, they take care of the livestock, and the rest of the time “drink vodka, play cards and backgammon.” Currently some men may be hired in summer to do work on house remodelling or construction, and channel construction, and men from the village of Beisheke (Talas region) find jobs through the Forestry Department.

Older men from Uchkun village (Naryn region) said that in the past women did hard work, such as haymaking and construction of barns up in the mountains, and now they for the most part are busy with housework. In the past, all kinds of work was well-paid, and women were sure that their family and children would have enough food. Now women are ready to do any work to earn some money.

6.4. Participation of Men and Women in Decision Making on a Household Level

Kyrgyz men have always taken into consideration the opinion of their wives which can be proven by the following Kyrgyz proverbs about women: “A good wife will make something [good] out of nothing, and a bad wife will waste all the good things she has”, “Health is the greatest treasure, and a wife is the second greatest treasure”, “If a wife is good, her husband is good, and if an advisor is good, his ruler is good”. At the same time, there is a Kyrgyz proverb “*Ayaldyn chachy uzun, aklyly kyzka*” (a woman’s hair is long, but she is short of brain).

The participation of women and men in decision making on a household level was viewed differently by different informants and caused heated discussion in all focus groups.

In the Soviet times, men and women were more or less equal in decision making on a household level.

Urban women are better educated, and many of them are financially independent of their husbands. Informants of urban sites believe that educated men demonstrate greater respect to women.

“We work in clinics, schools, and other institutions. Our salaries are very low, but we are still afraid to lose our jobs. Employment is important for us because it elevates our status in the family, but it hurts our husbands.”

(Women from the town of Kok Yangak, Jalal Abad region)

Many men fear the financial independence of their women and their ability to make a career, and oppose it. Such men, especially when they are unemployed, view success of their wives as their own failure. Gender analysis of the situation existing in both urban and rural sites shows that roles of men and women have not changed much on a household level, and patriarchal way of living is still strong.

At the same time, there is the other tendency which has been mentioned above. In some villages women now are involved in trade and play the role of primary income earners and family providers who have the last say in decision making, especially when financial issues are involved.

Youth, elderly informants, and informants from the special group of one of Talas region sites believe that “ability to earn money gives women more confidence and decisiveness.”

The informants said that the main issues on which decisions within households are made are family budgeting, raising children, family planning, and maintaining links with relatives. The study shows that informants of all sites believe that these decisions are made by women rather than men, because “women know better.” Some of the informants said that the idea of “influential” family members is directly related to their ability to earn money. The spouse who makes more money is more “influential.”

“On a family level the member who is influential is the leader. Women traders who make good money are leaders in their families, that’s for sure.”

(A 45-year old man from Tash Bulak village, Jalal Abad region)

Many of the rural women who have been raised in a strong patriarchal traditions where it is unthinkable to oppose a husband do not understand the current changes. They think nothing good can result from an attempt to oppose traditional rules of the family, and even view it as a bad omen. Women who do not experience financial difficulties have difficulty understanding women who leave for urban areas.

A woman has to submit to her husband. A husband is the head of the family and father of the children. The elderly used to say: don’t look your husband strait in the face, don’t raise your voice against him, or else you’ll go to hell. Women can not even pass by the place where men are sitting, they have to find another way. Girls are taught to be submissive, always wear scarves over their heads when they are outside the house, wear long dresses. And now we see girls wear trousers, and women leave for towns to earn money. I don’t understand it. Everything is such a mess, there’s that anxiety about everything, these things can not end well. I obeyed my husband all my life, even though the man was worthless.”

A 50-year old woman from Tash Bulak village, Jalal Abad region

Focus groups in which there were men expressed a variety of views, including the view that “a man always has the last say.”

6.5. Participation of Men and Women in Decision Making on a Community Level

Many of the informants are nostalgic about the past when the government had a lot of responsibilities: guaranteed jobs and provided recreation for people, took care of social safety net, free education and health care. Some people still have the mentality of parasitism and believe that Soviet standards still must be followed, even though it is clear that the Soviet Union can never be restored.

“Those who don’t feel sorry about collapse of the Soviet Union have no heart, but those who think that it may be restored have no brain.”

(An elderly informant from At Bashi village, Naryn region)

Gender problems do exist in the sites surveyed, but they are not clearly worded as problems. After the questions asked by the study team about relations between men and women many informants began to think about these issues. They lived in the tradition inherited from the older generations and believed that women’s role in the family is secondary. Many women have nothing against this and raise their daughters in this tradition believing that a daughter is but a guest in the family: *chykkan kyz chiiden tyshkary* (a married daughter belongs to a different family, and her problems must be resolved in that family). The informants never thought about the need of women to have rights equal with men’s in making decisions on political, economic, and other issues.

The society needs open discussion of traditions and customs with participation of men and women in the way that will allow to better protect women’s rights.

Middle-aged and elderly women of all sites studied expressed their views more freely and appeared more socially active, which can be explained by the fact that they were born and raised in the Soviet times, received a good education, and had jobs.

“The Soviet system raised us as equal members of the society, and I don’t think that we’re any worse than men.”

(An elderly woman from Uchkun village, Naryn region)

However, these women are now losing their status and ability to participate in social life.

“Collective farm meetings were never held without women, we had the right to vote on many issues that had to do with our village. And now nobody cares what we think.”

(Middle-aged and elderly women from Talas region)

Young rural women are quite different. They are very shy, unlikely to open, difficult to talk to. A lot of effort is needed to make them participate in a dialogue.

Women of Kenesh village (Talas region) said: “Who needs our opinion? Who is going to listen to it?”

The very low self-esteem of these women is caused by the attitude of their communities towards them. In Kyrgyz communities, the rights of young women may be violated not only by their husbands, but also by their mothers-in-law.

Men of the rural sites studied expressed the opinion that nobody ever limits women’s initiatives, but women themselves do not have any. However, both men and women agree that their communities are dominated by men. An elderly woman said that a household dominated by a woman can not be happy. According to middle-aged poor women, “all responsibilities in Muslim families are undertaken by men, and the men have always had the last say in the matter and are not going to change this tradition”.

Basically all of the informants expressed the opinion that due to lack of jobs in the rural area most women are busy with housework and do not show much interest to the life of the community.

6.6. Abuse of Women’s Rights on a Household Level

The Soviet system invented a method of protection of wives against physical abuse in their families: a woman could complain about her husband to the Communist Party Committee of his employing organization. Such a complaint was followed by a discussion of the husband’s behaviour at a meeting and a reproach or punishment for “amoral behaviour.” Women willingly used this method because it was efficient, and they did not know any better.

Domestic abuse may have hidden forms, so it is difficult to prevent or punish. Cases of domestic abuse are viewed as highly personal and intimate, so women are unlikely to discuss these issues. Women do not share these problem for fear of their personal safety and the safety of their family.

In some cultures the right of men to beat their wives is encouraged, while in others it is viewed as a private issue that should not be discussed on public. Even though the problem of domestic abuse is not officially acknowledged, there are shelters for abused women, crisis centers under women’s NGOs, such as *Umut* and *Sezim* in Bishkek and *Tendesh* in Naryn.

Domestic abuse is a constant psychological (verbal, emotional), physical, and/or sexual harassment. Each of these components is equally painful for women, so it appears hardly possible to rank their seriousness. An example of psychological harassment is a threat of physical or sexual abuse. Domestic abuse is frequently defined as threats, force, terrorism, and physical abuse or its spoken or unspoken threat in the future. Men often refer to physical abuse of their wives as acts of “training” or “love”. People tend to believe that “he who beats a lot loves a lot” and “he who is jealous loves a lot.” In reality, though, it is crime rather than love. Many women do not know or do not want to know that such acts violate the law.

Many of the women from Urmalar village (Talas region) said that a man, whatever he is like, still has a higher status than a woman. When asked why they think so, the informants answered with a Kyrgyz proverb: *altyn bashtuu ayaldan, baka bashtuu erkek jakshy* (a man with a frog’s head is still better than a woman with a head of gold).

The society is not very friendly towards single women with children. Women who suffer from domestic abuse believe that it is better to be beaten by husbands than to raise children alone, and that humiliation that can not be seen by other people is better than the status of a single woman. Relatives and friends often influence the abused wives telling them to be patient. Women get used to domestic abuse, and it becomes part of their everyday life. Single women living in a dormitory in the village of At Bashi (Naryn region) said that their children can be abused and insulted by any community member and are treated as second-rate people. Women are taught that a failed marriage equals failure in life, and women without men are worth nothing. Some women prefer hardships of family life to which they see no alternative.

Law enforcement agencies are informed of not more than 10% of domestic abuse cases, because relatives try to conceal such facts from outsiders in the fear for reputation or the career of the family terrorist. In addition, some women tend to believe that women are creatures of lower level than men.

According to Shirin, a 44-year old informant from Urmalar village (Talas region), the men of her community beat their wives every now and then, referring to the proverb *eri bar ayal tayak jeit, maly bar ayal kuiruk jeit* (a married woman gets beaten just like a woman who has livestock gets meat). Men can beat their wives for disobedience or out of jealousy.

The tendency to conceal domestic abuse and failure to punish it are quite dangerous, because they invite further violence and crime. Violence is used as a way to boost one’s self-esteem and has a strong psychological component.

“Very few women go to the health care center if they get beaten by their husbands. If there is an apparent trace of beating on a woman’s face, she would rather invent some story than admit that she was abused.”

Gulsara, an informant from Uchkun village, Naryn region

6.7. Abuse of Women’s Rights on a Community Level

The process of gender inequality promotion has three strong sources: first, the age-old patriarchal life of Central Asian nations with its ideas of superiority of men and inferiority of women, second, the attitude towards women as cheap labor that can be used both within and outside

household inherited from the Soviet times, and, third, a relatively new tendency to promote role of women as sexual objects represented in the worst examples of mass culture and pornography.

Freshmen of Arabaev university in Bishkek whose opinions were surveyed in the course of the study said: "Prostitution is a growing problem among young women, especially students who explain it by the need to earn money for education" (annual tuition fee is 2,500 *som* to \$1,000).

The media, such as *Vecherny Bishkek* newspaper, openly publish advertisements like "Young, beautiful, free of complexes women needed".

The preference to men that exists in the mentality of the Kyrgyz results in a seamless system of raising male children. Boys are educated to behave in certain ways on a family and a community level, and their initiation as men, circumcision, is viewed as a big event celebrated by the community.

As for girls, their role on both family and community level has traditionally been secondary. At the age of 6 or 7, girls begin to actively participate in housework. Boys in Kyrgyz communities are viewed as the future of the family, and girls -- as temporary members of the family and the community. As a result, the social status of girls and women on a community level is less stable than that of boys and men. In poor families that can not afford school education for all children parents prefer to send to school boys, rather than girls.

"We don't have enough money, so only the two boys attend school, and the three girls don't. I am really afraid that they will be illiterate."

(A 30-year mother of five, Tash-Bulak village, Jalal Abad region)

It is necessary to mention the age-old tradition of women's rights abuse: bride abduction. Some people view bride abduction as an admirable habit of following old traditions, so this act is not strongly opposed by the society. The tradition was explained by historical factors. Since brides were "sold" by their parents for *kalym* (payment for the bride), some girls fled from their homes with the men they loved. However, there was also another form of this tradition, where the bride was actually abducted against her will by a young man with the support of his relatives, friends, and even girlfriends of the bride. Such a violation is viewed as an old tradition with which married life begins for a woman. In some cases brides are abducted with their consent, but more frequently the custom is followed due to a desire of men to marry and neglect women's will. Interestingly, in the Soviet times bride abduction was viewed as a crime and was subject to criminal prosecution. This provision of law is still in place, but it is not enforced, because police are only involved in very rare cases.

The traditional myth about inferiority of women who are allegedly good for nothing but doing housework and serving men, children, and the elderly, is very popular among men of Central Asia.

Abuse of women's rights is fostered by historically unequal relations between men and women, domination of men and discrimination of women. These factors hinder improvement of the situation currently faced by women.

Abuse of women's rights is caused by cultural traditions and entails inferior positions of women in their families, communities, and at work. The situation is aggravated by social pressure, belief of the women that sharing information about this problem would mean disgrace for them, poor

access to legal information and protection, insufficiency of work on distribution of relevant legal information by state authorities, inadequate law enforcement, and lack of public education on prevention and alleviation of domestic abuse.

A middle aged man from the village of Tash Bulak (Jalal Abad region), formerly an active member of the Communist Party, said that rights of men and women in his community are equally violated by the government.

A society where ideas of men's superiority are prevalent can only be transformed by strong laws and state authority. The hopes for "re-education" of men by means of "enlightenment" is a dangerous illusion used to cover up failure of the authorities to take care of the problem and their tolerance to direct and indirect abuse of women's rights happening on a large scale in the society. The need to change the mentality of men represent only one side of the problem. Equally serious changes in women's mentality are needed, too, because it is the women who raise children and make them follow stereotypes. This vicious circle can only be broken if work is done both from men's and women's side.

According to Omor Ake, a 65-year old informant from Tash Bulak village (Jalal Abad region), the society is facing the problem of corruption, nobody fights crime, and the rights of both men and women are increasingly abused: "Now murderers get away with what they've done, and it's a common practices, because law enforcement officials are also guilty in such crimes." Zulfiya, a 54-year old informant from the same community, said that "once President Akaev promised that Kyrgyzstan would become "Switzerland of Central Asia." I heard that crime rate in Switzerland is as low as 3%, and here it's growing every hour. Kyrgyzstan will never become like Switzerland."

Kyrgyz communities bear no responsibility for health of women of fertile age. Financial needs of families make women who have just given birth not only do the full amount of housework, but also find work outside the household, and such work is both hard and poorly paid. Another sign of neglect of women is the fact that in many families women can not make family planning decisions, their health concerns are not taken into account, and they are forced to get pregnant. In reality, it becomes "sexual murder." The health problems of Kyrgyz women at the early stage of their joining new family and community are so frequent that it can be said that they are prematurely biologically worn out. This problem can be very well observed in the communities that live in severe climate or geographical isolation. In the observation of the study team, in most sites Kyrgyz women look 10 or more years older than their actual age, basically all women over 30 have few teeth left, are tired and poorly dressed.

6.8. Women's Perception of their Increased/Decreased Power

According to the data of National Statistical Committee Survey on work and life of women held in March 1996, women spend 6 hours of every 10 hours on housework on their days off. As a result of the closure of schools and pre-school institutions, women's responsibilities of child raising and reproductive work on a household level increased, while possibilities to participate in economic, social, and political development decreased. While men get paid for their work, women do a great part of their work for free. Their responsibilities include making clothes for family members, working in the garden and vegetable garden, cooking, doing the laundry, washing up, and raising children. This work is very time-consuming and is rarely appreciated by other family members. Not more than 27% of women who have children of pre-school age use services of kindergartens. According to the women themselves, the primary reasons for which

rural children do not attend kindergartens are high price of the service, remote location, and inadequate care of children. In Kyrgyzstan, the closure of charitable social programmes has strongly affected families with many children, and especially mothers with many children. The government is no longer capable of providing vulnerable groups with social guarantees, such as benefits for young children, minimal pensions, social benefits to the poor. The minimal amount of a social pension in 1997 was 80.2 *som* and the minimal amount of unemployment benefit - 99 *som*, while the minimal consumption level was 690, 57 *som* a month per capita. Even the extremely low social benefits and are the only source of income and way to survive for some of the households. In the rural areas, families with pensioners, young children eligible for benefits, and even with the disabled are viewed as lucky.

The process of privatisation in the country practically did not affect women. Most of the women did not have the tools and resources needed to become owners of big objects of property. Participation of women in state governance is very low. Women account for 35.8% of state officials, but most of them are intermediate level officials. The situation with access of women to entrepreneurship is similar. Thus, in 1996 as few as 24,000 women had small businesses. The existing situation at the labor and service market makes women try work in the formal and informal sector as a strategy of survival.

The situation faced by women in Kyrgyzstan is further worsened by reform of agricultural companies and their privatisation in which women did not participate. Very few women managed to create their own farms and privatise part of agricultural property. The number of women who participated in privatisation of non-production companies (within the period from 1991 to 1996 as many as 428 objects of state property, or 34.2% of it, were privatised and 1913 service companies were denationalised).

The difficult situation has made women actively change gender stereotypes. Social and economic changes that have taken place on a household level and on the national level have made women's contributions to the family budget an absolute must. The migration of men to other towns and areas in the search for jobs and/or loss of the jobs that men previously had in the formal sector put women in the position of the only family providers. In the families where men are unemployed or poor, women act as mediators, do their best to make the shock of the current situation easier to sustain, decrease their own consumption level, and increase their work. Many women join the informal sector.

The informal sector has a number of characteristics that make participation of women in economic development, especially that at the grassroots level, easier. This field is dominated by women.

Unlike their formal sector counterparts, entrepreneurs of the informal sector start their businesses due to acute economic need. Informal businesspeople tend to use only very basic workforce usually represented by themselves and one or two of their family members who help them for free.

Women meet a number of obstacles in this field. Since their informal businesses are not officially registered and therefore may be viewed as illegal, they can not access loans issued by institutional funds. The financial needs of informal businesses are usually low, but banks prefer not to issue even small loans for them, because this work is inexpedient and troublesome. The relatively low education of women who have businesses in the informal sector makes it difficult for them to do all paperwork and follow all administrative procedures required to obtain a loan. Lack of land or other property [to secure a loan] also limits access of these women to formal loans.

The role of women in the formal sector is hardly noticeable and does not change much with time. Women are not active at borrowing money in banks, do not know much about investment raising, stock exchanges, or export associations, do not participate in international business clubs, and, therefore, are excluded from the field of formal private entrepreneurship. Business activities of women in the formal sector is focused on trade (women specialise on sale of food, basic clothes, toys for children, and construction materials). In the service market women who have necessary professional skills and tools provide consulting services, open health care centers, education centers, and law firms, even though the latter are less frequent. The proportion of women is relatively high in artisan production, services (beauty salons, tailoring services, restaurants), and trade.

The limitations of the formal sector faced by women are different than those of the informal sector and include the following factors.

1. In many cases women do not have access to loans. Frequently their access is limited by lack of property to secure the loan.
2. Representatives of the formal sector have to waste a lot of time and money on the due to the confusion arising in the process of state regulation of their activities. In this situation, links to government bureaucrats, including the corrupt officials, are the best resource possible. These resources are less accessible for women than for men, so many women are squeezed out of the formal sector.
3. Most of the formal sector entrepreneurs are professionals who have been trained in business and have experience of work in state agencies. These criteria are most frequently met by men, while women lack managerial skills and knowledge.
4. Women are dependent on the public opinion which is rather conservative about gender roles.
5. Access of women to ongoing support of the government and donor organizations through a legal network for women development is still limited, even though the government and the donors increase their support to women entrepreneurs of the formal sector.

To institutionalise support to women in Kyrgyzstan, a number of important measures has been taken: the State Commission on the Issues of Family, Women, and Youth was created, the network of non-governmental organizations is being strengthened, and mechanism of review of legislation from the gender viewpoint is in place.

Ayalzat national programme which is aimed at principal improvement of women's situation by the year 2000 has been developed. The programme creates the necessary preconditions for real equality between men and women and reflects all 12 priorities of the Action Platform adopted in 1995 at the International Conference in Beijing. At the same time, the State Commission on the Issues of Family, Women, and Youth does not have a clear mission statement or adequate funding and therefore has a marginal status among public agencies. The Commission does not have adequate powers required to coordinate all scope of economic, institutional, legislative, and educational measures required for protection of women's rights. Efficiency of the activities of the Commission is further decreased by absence of its offices in the region, insufficient human and financial resources.

The Kyrgyz Republic has ratified a number of international conventions and covenants and adopted laws that promote gender equality; nevertheless, in reality, women's situation from the standpoint of poverty and entrepreneurship is not the same as men's. Until recently, the government tended to underestimate activities of women and limited its support to women to payment of social benefits, rather than creation of opportunities to participate in economic life. As

a result, women were often treated just as means for reproduction of workforce, and their education and development was oriented primarily on family life and well-being.

7. Conclusions and Observations

Well-Being

Results of the study show that the informants understand well-being (*tyn jashoo*) as good life (*jashoo*) and wealth (*bailyk*); however, they do not think that well-being is limited to these tangible components, and believe that well-being is impossible without tolerance, peace, family, and children. The informants think that the basis of well-being is good health, peace in the family and in the society; in their opinion, wealth, which is an important component of well-being, can only be gained if these conditions are present. Most of the informants define well-being as stability on a household and society level and ability to satisfy one's material and spiritual needs.

Ill-being is understood by informants as problems in life. The informants very rarely used the word "poverty" when discussing ill-being; instead, they spoke of such specific components of ill-being as lack of livestock, lack of agricultural equipment, inability to work on one's land, wage and pension arrears, payment of pensions and social benefits in-kind, by overpriced food, absence of a house and need to rent a flat, no cash in hand, lack of food and clothes, inability of children to attend school, inability of high school graduates to continue their education in universities, family conflicts, and poor health.

There is no particular difference between definitions of good life given by urban and rural informants. Definitions given by different informants are usually very much alike. However, there is a certain difference between well-being definitions given by rural and urban informants, which can be explained by difference in the way of living of residents of towns vs. villages and, therefore, difference in their financial and spiritual needs.

In the informants' opinion, majority of people now fall under the category of poor and meet the following criteria of poverty: lack of a house and need to rent a flat, lack of a permanent job, constant lack of money, inability to buy adequate clothes, malnutrition and hunger, inability of children to obtain a good education.

According to the rural informants, the poor are the households that do not own any livestock or own not more than one cow, 1-2 sheep, and several chicken, are short of basic food and clothes, can not afford school education for children, live in a poor old house or a rented flat, and constantly have family conflicts caused by financial problems.

There is also a category of people who live in extreme poverty. The informants used the words *nischii* (beggar) and *bomzh* (Russian abbreviation for "homeless"). The basic criteria of this category are unemployment, lack of a house (rural informants, however, believe that people who live in extreme poverty do have at least very basic shelter), hunger, lack of clothes/old, worn out clothes, inability of children to attend school because of the lack of basic clothes and footwear. This category includes the elderly who have nobody to support them; however, there are not many such lonely elderly in the Kyrgyz communities, because the Kyrgyz highly disapprove adult children who live their parents and elderly relatives without support.

The informants named a variety of factors that, in their opinion, cause poverty in their communities. Some of the factors are common for urban and rural sites, while others are site-specific. Depending on living conditions and characteristics of their site, and depending on their age and gender, the informants named different causes of poverty.

In the informants' opinion, the main causes of poverty in Kyrgyzstan are unemployment, high prices, wage and pension arrears, payment of pensions and social benefits in-kind (by flour, oil, sometimes hosiery). These factors are caused by the transition and limited state budget. These causes of poverty were named by informants of all focus groups both in the urban and in the rural area. Urban informants believe that unemployment is caused by closure of factories, mines, companies, and some public agencies.

According to the informants of Naryn region, poverty causes that are particularly serious for the region are lack of arable land, severe climate, and the residents' lack of aptitude for trade. It can be explained by the fact that Naryn region is located high in the mountains, where winter is long and severe, arable land is scarce, and very few kinds of agricultural products can be grown. According to the informants from Naryn region, transition to the market economy is very difficult for them, because they are not used to trade and have no history of trade. There are no region-specific effects of poverty.

In Talas region the study revealed such specific cause of poverty as inadequate performance of customs offices on Kyrgyz-Kazakh border. Residents of Talas region of Kyrgyzstan have been selling their agricultural products in the town of Taraz (Jambul region of the neighboring Kazakhstan). Currently, lack of awareness of customs requirements, such as the requirement to provide quality certificates for food transported across the border, and customs officers' abuse of their power many people can not go to the market of Taraz.

Responses of the informants do not reveal any effects of poverty that are unique for Talas region.

Sites of Jalal Abad region are different than the rest of the sites studied. Thus, the town of Kok Yangak was a town of miners supported by Moscow and supplied with high quality products and goods directly from Moscow. Currently infrastructure of the town is destroyed, and in January 1999 the town was transferred to administrative supervision of Suzak district. Residents of Kok Yangak believe that the primary reason of their current poverty is collapse of the USSR which entailed liquidation of companies, isolation, lack of law and order, growing crime rate, divorces, and drug problem.

The village of Achy (Suzak district of Jalal Abad region) is also unique. Since 1990, the area has been frequently affected by landslides and mudslides. In 1994 10 families were killed by a landslide; after that, it was decided to move the village. Some of the residents built new houses in the valley, but others returned to the mountains. Since natural disasters present a serious problem for Achy community, informants from this community believe that their poverty is caused primarily by repeated mudslides and landslides and the need to move to other areas where conditions are inadequate for livestock herding, and have difficulty switching from herding to agriculture.

Tash Bulak village (Bazak Korgon district of Jalal Abad region) suffers from lack of drinking water and very high taxes on non-irrigated, barren land. The village is populated by refugees from Tajikistan who believe that their poverty is caused by natural disasters, lack of drinking water, infertile land, and severe climate. Among effects of poverty, the informants of this site named hunger which, in their opinion, is a real threat for 95% of the community, and diseases which have become more frequent in the past ten years.

Safety Guarantees

People define safety as confidence about the present and the future. In the past people felt more confident, because everything was guaranteed by the government: a strong social safety net was in place, people had permanent jobs, and were paid pensions and social benefits in a timely manner. The system of law enforcement worked well, and crime rate was lower than it is now. Now people feel less safe, because they face economic difficulties, so, in case of a problem, they can not protect themselves from either financial or moral viewpoint.

Currently people face risk to lose all they have and feel no protection of the government. Risk is defined by rural informants as a possibility to lose one's wealth and social status. Currently people face this risk all the time, because governmental support is not nearly as strong as it used to be in the Soviet times. Support of relatives and neighbors, and support of the community, is also weakening. One of the informants said that people are afraid to take the risk of starting their own business, because a lot of money needs to be invested, and there is no guarantee that the business would not fail because of the outside factors such as high inflation rate. The government is trying to implement the policy of reform, undertaking initiatives on social protection, but people down in the regions are not covered by them due to lack of initiative, decisiveness, and professionalism on the part of local authorities.

The informants believe that now they have better opportunities to improve their financial situation than they used to have in the Soviet times. Under the Soviet regime, everybody tended to "stay in the middle", not to go above the average level of well-being, because all sources of income were strictly controlled by the government. The government guaranteed stable jobs for everybody, but at the same time it controlled the maximum amount of wages and salaries and the number of livestock that people in the rural areas could own. Therefore, possibilities to improve one's financial situation were limited due to the state policy that promoted equality. However, many people lack initiative or have no opportunity to start their own business.

Currently there are no serious violations in the rural area, even though younger generation do occasionally commit crime. There are no conflicts on a community level, but a social unrest is possible if the crisis continues. According to one of the informants, a "revolution" is a possibility, because the poor have nothing to lose and can do anything out of desperation.

The informants appear to realise that, if people do not do something about their current problems themselves, nobody will help them. People who have realised it are now trying to start their businesses, increase their wealth, and improve their living conditions. They face a lot of difficulties in this process, because there is no governmental support to rely on, no loans to be issued. Therefore, other group of people has put up with the decrease in the living standards and believe that nothing can be done about it without governmental support. Despite the economic crisis of the transition, the government may guarantee protection of the poor by creating favourable condition for development of their initiatives.

Informants of all regions believe that categories of well-being have changed significantly in ten years. There were no "very rich" people in the past, proportion of the "rich" was much smaller than it is now, and proportion of the "middle class" was much higher. The "poor" accounted for a very small percentage of population. The slogan of equality prevented people from earning more than others and going beyond the limits established by the governments. Relations between people reflected Soviet ideology that promoted equality.

Changes in the proportion of different categories of households were mentioned both by rural and by urban informants. According to the urban informants, in the past the proportion of “very rich” was extremely low, most people had “average” living conditions, there were some wealthy people and some poor people, and the government supported the latter.

Criteria of well-being have also changed within the past several years. Thus, the main criteria of the “rich” in the past were power, prestigious jobs, powerful relatives and connections; among the current criteria that characterise the “rich”, the informants named money, livestock, private firms, two-storied houses, foreign cars, hired workers and servants. For the rural informants livestock, land, agricultural equipment, and ability to afford hired workers are the main criteria of wealth.

All of the informants tend to agree that in the past overwhelming majority of people could be qualified as “middle class”. Currently, the proportion of the “middle class” is decreasing. In the past this category was represented by white-collar workers (teachers, doctors, and others) and was characterised by permanent jobs with stable wages, houses, and ability to give children a university education. According to the forecasts, many representatives of the middle class may become broke, and proportion of the poor may increase. It is known that middle class is a guarantor of stability in any society, and its absence causes increased social tension and creates preconditions for social unrest. Discussing this as the worst possible scenario, informants emphasised peace and tolerance as their top priorities.

The situation that currently exists in Kyrgyzstan testifies to the desire of people to adjust to market economy, improve their financial situation by their own work, and create conditions of well-being for themselves. Some of the extremely poor people who lack such initiative still rely on the outside support, such as support of the government, while more active members of the society rely only on themselves and their work.

Priorities of the Poor

Collapse of the Soviet Union and transition to the market economy increased the old and introduced the new problems for people in Kyrgyzstan. Many of such problems result from the changes in economy; others existed in the centrally planned economy as well. Some problems are caused by such objective reasons as site characteristics and inadequate legal environment; others result from subjective factors, such as misdirected staffing policy and inability of people to resolve their problems. Unresolved problems result in mass poverty, social isolation, and social tension. Many of the problems may be resolved without outside support, while others can only be resolved by involvement of the government or investments from outside.

Institutional Analysis

The institutions existing in the regions surveyed are inefficient and hardly accessible for the poor. The informants tend to rely too much on the government, but at the same time they do not trust local authorities. Social initiatives of the government aimed at rehabilitation and adjustment of socially vulnerable groups are poorly implemented in the regions. Activities of the local institutions are not open. Commercialisation of formal institutions is viewed by all informants as a negative factor. Tax issues need to be resolved on the local level with greater flexibility. It is necessary to improve performance of law enforcement agencies. Local authorities are not interested in development of the third sector. The informants of the regions surveyed are hardly aware of opportunities and existing practice of coping with crisis. Many of the informants act based on hearsay rather than on their own experience, and do not approach institutions that might help them. Microcrediting in the sites surveyed is undeveloped, and the informants do not know

where and how loans can be obtained. Local authorities do not encourage development of private businesses and charitable activities of business people. No facts of social partnership have been observed in the course of the study. Informants are ignorant of their rights, which limits their access to various institutions.

What needs to be done in this situation?

There is a need to call attention of state officials to the problems of the poor and to provide training programmes on social support of the poor. Both the officials and general public need to be motivated to realise that they are part and parcel of the national well-being. Civil, ecological, and legal education must be provided to the poor. Network of informal local institutions needs to be developed, and general public needs to be encouraged to participate in this work. Official institutions in the regions need to establish links with the general public. Local leaders from among the most active and educated members of local communities need to be promoted. An information network targeted on practice of coping with crisis needs to be created. Access to resource centers must be increased.

Gender Relations

- Women no longer rely on support of men. Responsibilities of women outside a household are undergoing serious changes, while their responsibilities within a household tend to stay the same. A modern woman is busy both at work and at home. Situation of women is particularly difficult within their families where they are supposed to do housework, to raise children, and to provide for the family, i.e., undertake all responsibilities.
- Legislation of Kyrgyzstan related to political rights and powers of women is limited to purely declarative statements, even though issues related to such rights and powers penetrate all fields of public life. Political rights and powers could allow women of Kyrgyzstan to improve not only their lives, but also lives of their children and the society as a whole. Therefore, relevant agencies need to provide concrete guarantees of women's participation in legal and political life regulated by adequate legislation on state agencies and electoral system.
- Even though the Convention on Liquidation of All Forms of Discrimination against Women does contain a definition of discrimination against women, national legislation might go further than these minimal standards and requirements set forth by the international documents. It appears appropriate to include the notion of discrimination into legislation of Kyrgyzstan, make it broader and more concrete. Women are constantly facing both open and hidden discrimination. The issue of liability of the parties guilty in such discrimination, especially the regular hidden discrimination, need further clarification.
- It can not be said that women of Kyrgyzstan enjoy rights equal to men's as they are supposed to under the existing legislation. Patriarchal traditions still limit freedom of women and choices that they make in their lives. Within the 7 years of independence on Kyrgyzstan women have become less active in the political life of the country, as they still can not use all their political rights and powers, including the right to express themselves and protect their interests.
- If quotas of minimal percentage of women in the state governance bodies are introduced, this minimal percentage might in fact become the absolute maximum of women represented, and, besides, such practice may lead to "showing off".
- Resources provided by the government for the needs of education system are insufficient and are further limited by the current economic crisis. This factor seriously affects the younger generation, which is quite a concern for Kyrgyzstan. Parents want their children to grown healthy and well-educated, employable and capable of making a career.

- It is necessary to take decisive state measures for support of families, women, and children. Mortality rate nowadays is higher than birth rate, divorces are frequent, women do not want to have children, and it appears next to impossible to give birth due to high price of medical treatment and poor conditions. Women's health becomes a serious concern.
- Diet of people in Kyrgyzstan, and especially its rural areas, lacks variety; in some cases households do not have even such basic product as bread.
- People face the problems of unemployment, suffer from delays in payment of wages, salaries, and social benefits, which delays may last for several months. Many companies nowadays prefer to hire men, rather than women, because women must be paid social benefits in addition to their wages.
- Many women can not find their niche in the formal sector, and therefore join the informal sector. Unlike their counterparts from the formal sector, they start businesses due to acute economic need.
- Various forms of abuse of women's rights have become more frequent both on a household and on a society level, regardless of economic and social background and cultural level.

Annexes

Annex I. Summary Results on Well-Being

Table 1: Categories, Criteria, and Proportion of Households by Well Being Criteria Developed in Four Focus Groups.

Matrices 1.1. and 1.2: Illustration of Major Trends

Matrix 1.3: Difference in the Categories of the Poor

Matrix 1.4: Difference in the Proportion of Households

Matrix 1.1.

Older poor women from Beisheke village, Talas region

Categories	Criteria	Proportion
1. Rich	A commercial kiosk, a big house, good health, a lot of livestock, several items of agricultural equipment	5
2. Middle class	Enough food, ability of children to attend school, a house, some livestock, enough clothes and footwear for children	35
3. Poor	Poor health, lack of food and clothes	50
4. Very poor	Malnutrition, illness, inferiority complex	10

Matrix 1.2.

Mixed group from At Bashi village, Naryn region

Categories	Criteria	Proportion
1. Rich	A family, a telephone, a car, livestock, land, a shop, property, peace and concord, humanity	10
2. Middle class	Livestock, land, pension, family, children	15
3. Poor	No livestock, no house, no job, no vegetable garden	75

Matrix 1.3.

Group of the elderly from Achy village, Jalal Abad region

Category	Criteria	Proportion of Households
1. <i>Sutkor</i> (a usurer)	Great wealth, white skin, beauty, a big house, several cars of foreign makes, a private company, imported furniture, bodyguards, hired workers, a lot of money, greed	10
2. <i>Aldamchybai</i> (a person who has made a fortune by dishonest means)	Unfair conduct with respect to the country and to people, shelter of income from taxation, a lot of good land, a good big house, 2-3 cars, several wives in different towns	10
3. <i>Peshene terbai</i> (the honest rich)	Good land, support to others, kindness, a good house, a car	5
4. <i>Orto jashagandar</i> (the middle class)	Good land, a decent house, enough for a living	20
5. <i>Kembagal</i> (the poor)	A poor house, lack of cattle, some land, lack of means to work on the land	45
6. <i>Alsyz kembagal</i> (the beggars)	No house, no land, no livestock, need to beg	10

Matrix 1.4

Group of older poor men from Uchkun village, Naryn region

Category	Criteria	Proportion
1. Rich	Money, a job, good health, lots of land, livestock	5
2. Middle class (<i>orto jashagandar</i>)	A house, some livestock, a vegetable garden, a job	50
3. Weak	No ability to work on land, no money to pay for water	35
4. Very weak	No property, no ability to work on land	10

Table 2: Proportion of the households/population in the poorest category/ies according to different groups at each site (Rural sites)

	Poor groups			Other groups			Comments
	Men	Women	Youth	Mixed	Elderly	Special	
At Bashi village	65	50	32	60	80	70	Younger generation is more optimistic, while the older generation keeps comparing the current situation with the Soviet past.
Ak Kiya village	45	64	20	60	85	75	According to the younger generation, poor are the people who beg for alms; this category does not exist in their community. The older generation compares current situation with the Soviet past
Uchkun village	48	35	85	35	45	85	According to the poor women, criteria of poverty are absence of livestock and land. There are few households that meet this criterion. Special group (teachers) believe that there are a lot of poor nowadays.
Beisheke village	55	55	65	55	70	30	The Kurd ethnic minority believe that there are few poor households in their community, while group of the elderly assess proportion of the poor as high.
Urmaral village	65	60	56	55	60	35	Special group (<i>Toloikon</i> extended family) increased the number of the middle class adding to it residents of the neighboring villages.
Kenesh village	41	30	50	57	60	74	Poor women do not believe that they qualify as poor, while at-risk youth think that they do.
Achy village	60	62	50	68	45	70	The elderly are well off and do not qualify themselves as poor. The special group (refugees) are of the opposite opinion.
Tash Bulak village	80	36	40	43	60	60	According to the youth, less than half of their community can be qualified as poor; according to the men, most people live in poverty.

Table 3.

Proportion of the households/population in the poorest category/ies according to different groups at each site (Urban sites)

	Poor groups			Other groups			Comments
	Men	Women	Youth	Mixed	Elderly	Special	
Bishkek city	43	75	60	70	60	55	Men believe that proportion of middle class is higher in the urban area than in the rural, while women are of the opinion that proportion of the poor in towns is higher than in villages due to unemployment
Kok Yangak town	55	78	65	35	75	45	Mixed group was represented by more wealthy members of the community. Women and the elderly believe that proportion of the poor has increased due to deterioration of the town.

Table 4. Major trends in poverty and well-being

Trends	Rural	Urban
Increased poverty	X	X
Minor increase in poverty		
No change		
Increased well-being		

Table 5. People's perceptions of main causes of poverty - Rural and Urban

Main causes of poverty	Rural	Urban
High tax rates	X	X
Lack of irrigated land	X	X
Low wages	X	X
Unemployment	X	X
High prices and lack of fuel	X	
Lack of aptitude for trade	X	
Inadequate results of reforms	X	
Poor health	X	
Absence of a family provider	X	X
Power abuse by police and customs officers and traffic inspectors	X	X
Dramatic division of the society into different categories, decrease in the proportion of the middle class, and increase in the proportion of the poor	X	
High financial and labor costs of agricultural work	X	

Unavailability of loans	X	
Unreasonable use of loans	X	X
High interest rates on loans	X	
Lack of loans on beneficial conditions	X	
Misdirected policy of loan issuance	X	
Lack of preparedness to the market economy	X	
Economic crisis	X	
Transition	X	
Poor crops	X	
Lack of sales markets for agricultural products	X	
Lack of seeds		
Low prices for agricultural products	X	
Remote location of the market	X	
Lack of processing facilities	X	
Severe climate	X	
Natural disasters (landslides, mudslides, earthquakes)	X	X
Misdirected privatisation policy	X	
Collapse of the collective farm system	X	
Collapse of the Soviet Union	X	
Misdirected policy of agrarian reform	X	
Misdirected policy of reform and its inadequate implementation	X	
Corruption	X	
Improper use of investments	X	
Bribery	X	X
Poor law enforcement	X	X
Lack of a house, need to rent a flat	X	
Weakness and inefficiency of the government authorities	X	X
Lack of supervision over government authorities	X	X
Family conflicts	X	
Excessive number of children	X	
Lack of initiative	X	
Laziness	X	X
Parasitism	X	
Low quality of food and clothes	X	
Lack of production companies	X	
Unfair distribution of humanitarian aid	X	
Lack of a garden/vegetable garden	X	
Market economy	X	
Deterioration of the social infrastructure	X	
Delays in payments of pensions and social benefits	X	X
Payment of pensions and social benefits in-kind, by overpriced oil, flour, candies, sugar, and hosiery	X	
Inadequate and expensive electric power supply	X	
High prices and short supply of medicines	X	X
Paid medical services	X	

High prices of basic utilities and construction materials	X	X
Lack of starting capital	X	
Lack of livestock	X	
Poor discipline and lack of order in the society	X	
Poor governance	X	X
Poor performance of government officials of the lower level, misdirected staffing policy	X	X
Mafia and organised economic crime	X	X
Lack of national ideology and goals	X	
Failure of the authorities to take care of people	X	
Irresponsible government authorities	X	X
Failure of the government to provide benefits for which ethnic Kurds who have suffered from Stalin deportation are eligible	X	
Lack of confidence about the future	X	X
Lack of indexing of savings	X	
Alcoholism	X	X
Lack of a family and children	X	X
Lack of a permanent source of income	X	
Disability, inability to work	X	
Lack of equipment	X	X
Lack of mineral fertilisers	X	
Information vacuum	X	X
Paid university education	X	
Excessive expenditures on national rituals and traditions	X	
Misdirected policy of issuance of loans to the households that have suffered from a natural disaster	X	
Younger people's lack of initiative	X	
Need to move out of the areas affected by landslides	X	
Remote location	X	
Poor financial resources of the government	X	
Lack of water	X	
Poor regulation of customs issues between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan	X	
Poor regulation of customs issues between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan	X	
Environmental problems	X	
Lack of education in the issues of market economy	X	
Lack of legal education	X	X
Lack of knowledge about democracy and poor understanding of democracy	X	X
Cheap labor	X	
Low morals, selfishness, unscrupulousness	X	
Lack of hope for the future	X	

War in Tajikistan	X	
Perestroika	X	
Theft of property	X	X
Misappropriation of state property		X
Drivers' neglect of the benefits that pensioners should have in public transportation		X
Lack of affordable public transportation within a town		X
Closure of mines and factories		X
Failure of the officials to attend to the needs of general public		X
Closure of the bus station and high prices of public transportation		X
Loss of the independent administrative status by the town of Kok Yangak		X
Lack of professionalism on the part of some employees of the local branch of the UN Development Programme		X
Inability to obtain an official status of a refugee		X
Lack of charitable activities		X

Table 6. People's perceptions of main causes of poverty - Groups of Men and Women, and other poverty groups in sample

Main causes of poverty	Men	Women	Special group (refugees from Tajikistan)	Special Group (Kurd national minority)
High tax rates	X	X		X
Lack of irrigated land	X	X	X	
Low wages	X	X		
Unemployment	X	X	X	
High prices and lack of fuel	X	X	X	
Lack of aptitude for trade				
Inadequate results of reforms		X		
Poor health	X	X		
Absence of a family provider		X		
Power abuse by police and customs officers and traffic inspectors	X			X
Dramatic division of the society into different categories, decrease in the proportion of the middle class, and increase in the proportion of the poor		X		
High financial and labor costs of agricultural work	X			
Unavailability of loans	X		X	
Unreasonable use of loans	X			

High interest rates on loans				
Lack of loans on beneficial conditions				
Misdirected policy of loan issuance	X			
Lack of preparedness to the market economy	X			
Economic crisis				
Transition		X		
Poor crops	X		X	
Lack of sales markets for agricultural products	X			
Lack of seeds				
Low prices for agricultural products	X			
Remote location of the market	X			
Lack of processing facilities	X			
Severe climate				
Natural disasters (landslides, mudslides, earthquakes)	X	X		
Misdirected privatisation policy	X	X		
Collapse of the collective farm system	X	X		X
Collapse of the Soviet Union	X	X		
Misdirected policy of agrarian reform				X
Misdirected policy of reform and its inadequate implementation	X	X		
Corruption	X			
Improper use of investments	X			
Bribery				
Poor law enforcement	X			
Lack of a house, need to rent a flat	X			
Weakness and inefficiency of the government authorities	X	X		
Lack of supervision over government authorities				
Family conflicts		X		
Excessive number of children	X	X		
Lack of initiative		X		
Laziness	X	X		
Parasitism	X			
Low quality of food and clothes	X			
Lack of production companies	X	X		X
Unfair distribution of humanitarian aid		X		
Lack of a garden/vegetable garden		X		
Market economy		X		
Deterioration of the social infrastructure	X	X		

Delays in payment of pensions and social benefits		X		
Wage arrears	X	X		
Payment of pensions and social benefits in-kind, by overpriced oil, flour, candies, sugar, and hosiery	X	X		
Inadequate and expensive electric power supply	X			
High prices and short supply of medicines	X	X		
Paid medical services	X	X		
High prices of basic utilities and construction materials	X			
Lack of starting capital				
Lack of livestock		X		
Poor discipline and lack of order in the society	X			
Poor governance	X			
Poor performance of government officials of the lower level, misdirected staffing policy	X			
Mafia and organised economic crime	X			
Lack of national ideology and goals				
Failure of the authorities to take care of people	X			
Irresponsible government authorities				
Failure of the government to provide benefits for which ethnic Kurds who have suffered from Stalin deportation are eligible				X
Lack of confidence about the future				
Lack of indexing of savings				X
Alcoholism	X	X	X	
Lack of a family and children				
Lack of a permanent source of income		X		
Disability, inability to work				
Lack of equipment	X	X		
Lack of mineral fertilisers				
Information vacuum	X			
Paid university education				
Excessive expenditures on national rituals and traditions	X	X		
Misdirected policy of issuance of loans to the households that have suffered from a natural disaster		X		
Younger people's lack of initiative	X			

Need to move out of the areas affected by landslides	X	X		
Remote location	X			
Poor financial resources of the government	X			
Lack of water		X		
Poor regulation of customs issues between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan	X			
Poor regulation of customs issues between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan	X			
Environmental problems		X		
Lack of education in the issues of market economy	X	X		
Lack of legal education				
Lack of knowledge about democracy and poor understanding of democracy				
Cheap labor	X	X		
Low morals, selfishness, unscrupulousness		X		
Lack of hope for the future		X		
War in Tajikistan			X	
Perestroika	X			
Theft of property	X			
Misappropriation of state property				
Lack of basic consumer goods	X			
Drivers' neglect of the benefits that pensioners should have in public transportation		X		
Lack public transportation		X		
Closure of mines and factories, lack of jobs		X		
Failure of the officials to attend to the needs of general public		X		
Closure of the bus station and high prices of public transportation	X	X		
Loss of the independent administrative status by the town of Kok Yangak		X		

Annex II. Summary Results on Priorities of the Poor

Table 1. Ranking of major problems of poor groups by site (rural sites)

Problems	At Bashi		Uchkun		Ak Kiya		Kenesh		Beisheke		Urmartal		Tash Bulak		Achy	
	1	1	1	1	1	4	4				2	6	2	5	12	2
Unemployment	4		3				3						6		6	11
Lack of agricultural equipment	2	2	1	1					1	4			9	9		
High prices of food and clothes						1										2
Malnutrition		3		3										10		4
Delays in payment of pensions and social benefits					5			3	2				1	5	3	
High electricity bills					8										11	
Natural disasters	3	4	2	3												3
Lack of governmental support					1	3			3							9
Lack of money									3	3						
Poor law enforcement					2										5	5
Lack of land												3	6	2	1	
Lack of access to loans issued on beneficial conditions		3		2					5	2	5	8				
Lack of sales markets	3		2		4		1	2			1	2	5	8		
High land taxes	5		4		5											
High prices of fuel	6				4	4	4					2				
Lack of irrigation water				6	7										9	2
Lack of fertilisers					3	3										
Lack of livestock					6											
Lack of weed chemicals																
Lack of seeds															7	
Lack of public bathing facilities					1		6	4	6	3			9	3		
Unavailability of health care	5		4				4	1			5	4	7	1	7	8

Diseases						2										
Lack of drinking water					5			7	1	3	1	1	2	1		
No radio							4	4	3							
No <i>klub</i> (institution holding cultural events in the rural area) and other entertainment facilities							7	5	5	6		10	8	8		
No shop								3				13				10
Poor roads									8			11	4	6		
No telephones												14	11	10		
Lack of transportation												13	7			5
Expensive transportation																7
Poor quality of school education						6										9
No school							2	1			4	2	4	3		
Lack of a library									5							
Lack of sports facilities							3		2	7		7				
Alcoholism		6		5												
No mosque												12		11		

Table 2. Ranking of major problems of poor groups by site (urban sites)

Problems	Bishkek		Kok Yangak	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Unemployment	2		3	1
Low wages	1		6	5
Inadequate legislation	5			3
Lack of discipline	2			
High tax rates	6			
Misappropriation of property by government officials	3			
Mafia and corruption	1			
Lack of information about loans	4			
Lack of irrigation water		4		
Lack of adequate land policy decisions		1	9	5
Unavailability of loans		12	4	
Lack of livestock			4	
Lack of legal education for general public	2			
Difficulties in raising investments and obtaining loans			2	
High prices for food and clothes			4	3
Accommodation problems			7	
Lack of official registration of residency in the town		10		
Lack of capable leaders			8	2
Paid medical services	3		1	4
Lack of health care centers		3		
Lack of bathing facilities		5		
Lack of electric power lines		6		
High electricity bills		7		
Poor roads		8		
Inadequate transportation		9	9	5
Diseases		11		
Lack of drinking water		2	8	
No shop		7		
Inadequate school facilities that do not meet current standards		1		

Lack of social benefits for children		2		
Poor conditions for development of children		4		
Lack of musical, athletic, and other training groups for children		5		
Lack of a kindergarten		6		
Poor quality of school education			8	7

Annex III. Summary Results on Institutional Analysis

Table 1. Ranking of institutions according to importance by groups of poor men and women (rural sites)

Institutions	At Bashi		Ak Kiya		Uchkun		Beisheke		Urmara l		Kenesh		Achy		Tash Bulak	
	m	f	m	w	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Parents		1				2		2		2		1	1	3	1	2
Relatives		2				5		3		3		3	2	2	3	5
Friends						4		4		5	3		3	4	4	3
Neighbors		2		1				2		2		3			4	3
Market	1						2		4					5		12
Mullah	2		5						3		3				7	
Mosque					2		9	6	3		3	4				
Court of the elderly	3				3		8	4	6	5				2	6	7
School	4	3	3	3	4	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	2	5	1
Teachers															8	
Kindergarten/day care		6												4		9
Clinic	4	2	3	4												3
Police	5						10		9	6	7	6				10
Block management committee		8														
Governor																
Head of state administration office	1	4		5										6		
Village council	2	7	3	8	5	6	5	5	7	4	6	6	6		10	8
Community leader			2	4	8	3							6		6	
Employment bureau		6														
<i>Klub</i> (institution holding cultural events in the rural area)			5	9	5											
Shop			5	6	8	2										
Mill			1	2	1		2	1								
Paramedic office					2	2	3	3	2	3	1	1	5	3	4	
Veterinary service														5		
Public baths														2		10
Carpet production shop														6		
Business people											5	6	4			
Social Service		8											7		11	9
Social Fund	5	2														
Post office			4	7	7	1	7	7	4	2	2	2				
Public telephone office											3	3				

Library				8					8	6	4	5				3
Commercial kiosk							4	4							10	4
Small enterprise							8								10	6
Women's council								8								8
Non-governmental organizations		5			6		6	2								2
Peasant farm									8						9	
Garage									5							
Tax inspector			6													

Table 2. Ranking of institutions according to importance by groups of poor men and women (urban sites)

Institution	Bishkek		Kok Yangak	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Parents			1	
Relatives			2	
Friends	2			
Neighbors			3	
Aksakal court	1	6	7	9
School	4	2	6	9
Clinic	3	4	4	4
Police	1	5		8
Head of state administration office	5	1	9	12
Village council	7	3		
Employment bureau			7	
Paramedic office		4		
Clairvoyant		9		
Business people, retail traders	2			
Social Service			7	7
Social Fund				
Post office	6		5	5
Commercial kiosk				
Small enterprise		8		11
Women's council		7		
Non-governmental organizations				2
Farm	4			
Mine			8	1
Bus station				10
Sanitary control				13
Hotel	5			
Government House	8			
Sewerage department				6

For the purposes of this Table, 1 – most important institution, 2 – second most important institution, etc.

Annex IV

Figure 1
Location of Kyrgyzstan among Asian countries



Figure 2
 Map of Kyrgyzstan with Sites Studied
 Kyrgyz Republic, Study Sites

