

# QUALITATIVE SURVEY ON ISSUES IN GIRLS' EDUCATION IN TAJIKISTAN:

## An In-Depth Analysis of the Reasons Girls Drop Out of School



Ministry of Education,  
Republic of Tajikistan

**unicef**   
For every child  
Health, Education, Equality, Protection  
ADVANCE HUMANITY

The Survey was developed and conducted by  
the National Thematic Working Group on Girls' Education  
under the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan  
with active support and in close cooperation with  
**Dr. Nouchine Yavari d`Hellencourt,**  
UNICEF International Consultant,  
Who has prepared whith Report

## CONTENTS

Abbreviations, Acronyms and Special Terms.....	vi
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSITION, GENDER AND EDUCATION .....	9
I. SURVEY RELEVANCE AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH .....	12
A. The Justification for the Qualitative Survey.....	12
B. Methodological Approach.....	14
II. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.....	18
A. Girls, Boys and Teachers at School.....	18
B. Girls Out of School .....	23
III. INFLUENCES ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS.....	30
A. Family Expenditure Priorities in a Context of Poverty.....	30
B. Gender Socialization .....	31
C. The Roles and Functions of School within a Gender Perspective.....	31
D. Religion: Buttress of Community Integration, Pretext for Gender Discrimination.....	32
IV. CONCLUSIONS .....	34
V. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	36
A. The Reevaluation and Protection of Teachers and Schools .....	36
B. Awareness-Raising among Communities and throughout Society.....	36
C. Drawing Girls out of Isolation.....	37
D. Alternative Education for Girls who Drop out of School or Risk Doing so .....	37
E. Support Poor Families .....	37
F. Human Rights, Gender Issues and Violence against Children and Women .....	38
G. Better Coordination.....	38



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tajikistan is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It has established the National Commission on Child Protection and developed the National Plan of Action for Children. The Government has declared that the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education is to be achieved by 2015. Thus, education is a major concern in Tajikistan.

Nonetheless, since the independence of the country in 1991, the central Government and local authorities have not possessed sufficient financial and structural resources to guarantee the satisfactory operation of the public educational system. Schools are unable to offer a suitable, fulfilling environment for teachers and pupils. Teachers have had difficulty assuming their role of helping pupils become well integrated into the school system. Parents are failing to ensure that their children take part in compulsory schooling. Children are ending their formal education earlier and earlier. Boys are seeking jobs in the informal economy, and girls are staying home. These and other consequences of the deterioration in education are affecting all children and young people of school age.

This report examines one element in this troubling situation: the decline revealed by official statistics in the proportion of girls who remain in school.

UNICEF focuses strategically on the protection of the right of girls to education as a priority within the Millennium Development Goals and the objective of education for all. Given the growing concern about the decline in school attendance and in learning attainment among girls in Tajikistan, UNICEF and its partners are assisting in the development of national policies in the education of girls and have been undertaking awareness-raising among parents and local and national leaders.

As part of this effort and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the technical working group on girls education, UNICEF designed and carried out the 'Qualitative Survey on Issues in Girls Education' in 2003 specifically to 'identify factors explaining the drop-out rate among girls before the end of compulsory schooling'.

The results of the survey should not be taken necessarily to refer to all schools in the towns visited and even less to all schools nationwide. They represent, instead, a first step in a wider inquiry that would cover a greater diversity of geographical, regional, ethnic and socio-economic variables and would explore the full range of factors influencing the schooling rate among girls. Ultimately, the survey is a preliminary effort in the elaboration of a strategic plan to achieve education for all.

The survey was conceived and designed in mid-2003. Twenty interviewers were selected from among two groups of experts: experienced teachers belonging to the Dushanbe Teachers Union and trainers for national non-governmental organizations specialized in gender issues. The interviewers were given methodological training in qualitative survey techniques before the start of the fieldwork.

Two sets of survey sites were chosen. One set consisted of two poor districts in Dushanbe, the capital; the other consisted of Hisor and Vahdat, two towns in the periphery of the capital that had been particularly affected by post-independence events, especially the 1992-97 civil war.

The survey took place in November and December 2003 among schools in the survey sites and among the families of girls who had quit these schools before they had completed compulsory education. The data were collected through individual interviews, focus group discussions and observation in the survey sites, as well as informal talks with community leaders and local government officials. The present report is based upon analysis and interpretation of these data.

Following a short description of the process of political and economic transition that forms the context of the problems in education being experienced in the country, the report presents a portrait of the theoretical dynamics around which 'gender and education' are articulated in Tajikistan. It then explains the need for and the significance of the survey, outlines the survey methodology and the investigation techniques and offers details on the survey sites and the survey population. This 'population' was composed of about 100 teachers, 200 current pupils (girls

and boys), 42 girls who had dropped out of school, and 41 of the parents of these girls who were living together with them. The data that were collected during the fieldwork are then treated separately according to this population breakdown. Finally, there is a synthesis of the obstacles to the education of girls in schools.

The focus group discussions highlighted the frustrations and feelings of powerlessness among the teachers and the declining recognition of their work. The low wages of the teachers and the poverty of the teaching environment, including the lack of adequate infrastructure and equipment and of appropriate teaching aids and updated tools for the transmission of knowledge, lead many teachers to feel they are being neglected by the Government and are not respected by society.

Among the pupils, social norms and traditional values are being well assimilated, notably by boys, but girls, especially when they are opposed by their parents and the full weight of the community, are experiencing great difficulty in the identification of strategies to realize positive individual goals, particularly those related to the pursuit of their studies.

The interviews with girls who left school early, as well as with their mothers, indicate that 'socialization' is based on a strict differentiation between the roles of men and boys and the roles of women and girls and that this differentiation fosters gender discrimination. The absence among parents of professional and social ambitions for their daughters is encouraging the girls to remain at home with their

parents and then, after they have married, at the homes of their parents-in-law where they typically do the housework.

Despite their apparent acceptance of this situation, women suffer from their confinement to a world in which they have contact only with family members and a few neighbour women who are usually in the same situation. This circumscription of the physical universe of women has a determining effect on the psychological, social and intellectual development of girls. Their prospects for the future are generally limited only to those opportunities that are offered by tradition. In short, they are confined in their homes as potential housewives and mothers.

The analysis finds that, despite what parents may say, poverty alone does not constitute the main obstacle to the education of girls. The main obstacle consists, in fact, of a combination of poverty and the gender inequality that is prominent and readily tolerated in traditional culture.

The analysis also illustrates that, beyond the actions to be undertaken by the Government, civil society in Tajikistan must establish new priorities in 'gender and education', while seeking the renewal of cultural institutions that can confront the difficulties of the political and economic transition.

The report concludes with recommendations that are the first to be established on the basis of fieldwork on these issues in Tajikistan. The recommendations represent, nonetheless, only an initial step in understanding the deeper reasons for the problems in the education of girls in the country.







# INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSITION, GENDER AND EDUCATION

A political and economic transition is difficult to manage in any post-conflict context, but the transition in Tajikistan has been particularly disconcerting.

The highly centralized Soviet state was not only the financial provider in Tajikistan, one of the poorest republics in the Soviet Union, but it also administered the political system, planned agricultural and industrial output, controlled economic exchanges, oversaw public service provision and attempted to shape all political and cultural expression.

The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a dramatic drop in the government budget, confusion among government entities and public services, a near paralysis in economic and commercial exchanges, a political vacuum and the loss of ideological reference points. The civil war, which began soon after independence, rendered these troubles even more dramatic.<sup>1</sup>

Tens of thousands men were killed during the civil war, but women and children were, as ever, the main victims in many other ways. Women lost fathers, husbands and sons, and women and children suffered from the physical and psychological violence of the war. Many of these people carry traces today of the trauma they experienced then.

The economic and social consequences of the transition worsened in the course of the decade following independence, and women and children were very badly affected in this case, too. The deterioration in public services had a particular impact on

women due to their special health care needs (notably pre- and postnatal care) and on children, who experienced deprivation as a result of the inadequacies in health care, but also in education, that were caused by the deteriorations due to the transition.

The education sector was battered during the transition. The loss of Soviet financial support, an important part of which was devoted to education, was followed by the severe material losses caused by the civil war: 20 per cent of schools were destroyed or severely damaged. Numerous schools became unusable. Many pupils stopped going to school because of the poor security in the country.

The effects of the civil war included an unexpected rise in the number of early marriages,<sup>2</sup> preventing the girls involved from staying in school. Deep-rooted cultural practices such as early marriage that began reemerging as a result of the civil war have not disappeared entirely since the war ended. Early marriage<sup>3</sup> and shortened schooling have persisted.

War and poverty have also generated a social phenomenon that was previously unknown in Tajikistan: street children. Most of these children work in big cities like Dushanbe or Khujand, the capital of Sughd oblast (region), where they carry luggage at the airport or shopping bags at the market, wash cars, or sell cigarettes. Many of them continue to attend school, which is organized in half-day periods in most places, but they may drop out before lower secondary school graduation.

1 The five-year civil war caused considerable misery among the population. There were around 60,000 deaths (about 1 per cent of the population), creating tens of thousands of widows and many more orphans. The material damage has been estimated at \$7 billion. There was also massive emigration among professionals and the middle class (ethnic Tajiks and resident nationals, especially Russians, from other parts of the former Soviet Union), thus reducing appreciably the human resources available in the country. Natural disasters, including several years of drought, helped prolong the political and economic crisis and the insecurity.

2 Economic deprivation encouraged many families to marry off their daughters at a very early age. In some oblasts (regions), Khatlon, for example, girls were being married off from age 13 in order to hinder rape and kidnapping (focus group discussion on 'Gender Issues and Violence against Women' in Kurgan Teppe and Shahrtuz, Khatlon oblast, during a project of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in 2000).

3 One can rely only on direct observation during the fieldwork for confirmation. The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 (with exceptions allowed for 17-year-old girls). An early marriage and the birth of a child born to a mother under 18 are therefore not registered until the bride or the mother is at least 18.

Relative to countries in a comparable economic situation, the number of teachers is falling in Tajikistan. Teacher salaries are low, and this encourages teachers to seek work in other sectors, especially business and trade. In numerous schools, some subjects, such as physics, chemistry, Russian and English, are no longer being taught for lack of qualified teachers. The outdated knowledge of older teachers – only 20 per cent have taken refresher courses in their specialties – and the inadequate training of younger ones, coupled with the lack of educational tools, prevent teachers from fulfilling their responsibilities satisfactorily. The shortage of textbooks and the age of textbooks when they are available mean that pupils are not receiving quality education that is adapted to the world around them. Moreover, many schools do not provide an appropriate environment for teaching and learning. Many are unsanitary and have no water or electricity.

According to a World Bank estimate, the number of school-age children in Tajikistan will increase by 50 per cent between 2000 and 2015. The steady growth in the school population will make it even more complicated for the Government to accomplish its ambition of providing free, quality compulsory education.

However, despite the needs, only 2.6 per cent of gross domestic product goes to the education sector,<sup>4</sup> which, relative to international and regional averages, is low and cannot answer the needs of school-age children and adolescents, as well as university-age students (altogether around 70 per cent of the population).

According to the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, basic education enrolments have fallen from over 90 per cent to less than 80 per cent since 1992. The available data reveal that boys outnumber girls in school, that the number of girls in general education is decreasing steadily from one grade to the next and that girls are dropping out before the end of compulsory schooling in greater numbers than boys. Though there are no reliable statistical data on which to base a more precise assessment of the decline in school attendance among girls or to situate the decline in terms of age and grade, it appears that the gender gap in education has widened in recent years and is much larger than indicated in the official data, which show that 75 per cent of girls complete nine years of schooling, while 90 per cent of boys do so.

This renders more difficult the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives of education for all and gender equality. Considering the magnitude of the problems and in order to attain the objective of education for all, the Government, with the cooperation of the United Nations and other international organizations, began seeking solutions. At the same time, UNICEF, wishing to support efforts to restore the right to education for all children in Tajikistan, undertook a qualitative survey to inquire into the root causes of the fall in the schooling rate and the rising drop-out rate among girls.

---

4 IMF (2003), 'Republic of Tajikistan, Selected Issues and Statistics', January, page 79, International Monetary Fund: Washington, DC.



# SURVEY RELEVANCE AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

## A. The Justification for the Qualitative Survey

The general educational system in Tajikistan is divided into three levels: two compulsory levels and a post-compulsory level. School is compulsory for children from the ages of 7 to 15. This basic education covers four years of primary education and then five years of lower secondary education. Schools must accept children for the year corresponding to each child's level as long as the child is no more than three years behind in its schooling. After the first two compulsory levels (nine forms or grades in all), another two years (forms 10 and 11) are offered in a third, post-compulsory secondary level that prepares students who wish to continue on to higher education.<sup>5</sup>

The statistics show that Tajikistan is a very young

country. Young people under 30 represent 4.5 million individuals, or about 70 per cent of the population (Table 1). If children under 3 are excluded, the population catered for by kindergartens, primary and lower secondary schools and vocational training centres is still almost 4.0 million, or more than 60 per cent of the population. Of the population aged 7 to 19, the period of life when there is intense physical and intellectual development and individuals require education and training, 1.6 million (aged 7 to 15), or about one fourth of the population, are children and adolescents for whom the state is supposed to provide free education in the primary and lower secondary school systems. Moreover, although compulsory schooling is aimed at children up to age 15, more children and young people are, in fact, involved since pupils must be accepted as long as they are no more than three years behind in their schooling.

Table 1: Population under 30 by Gender and Age Group, 2003

Age Group	Males	Females	Total	Comments
0-2	245,225	241,682	486,907	Boys outnumber girls (+3,543). The gap may be due to disparities in the non-registration of births before school entry. (These disparities are less for the 3-6 and, especially, the over-6 age groups.)
3-6	349,672	337,607	687,279	Boys greatly outnumber girls (+12,065).
7-15	802,499	778,836	1,581,335	Boys greatly outnumber girls (+17,782).
7-16	887,840	862,390	1,750,230	Boys greatly outnumber girls (+25,450).
17-19	225,063	220,090	445,153	Boys still outnumber girls, but the difference is now less important (+4,973).
20-24	304,560	299,997	604,557	Young men outnumber young women, but the difference is less important (+4,563).
25-29	241,218	246,840	488,058	Women outnumber men (+5,622).
0-29	2,253,578	2,208,606	4,462,184	Children and young people constitute 68% of the population.
3-29	2,008,353	1,966,924	3,975,277	61% of the population is in the age range likely to be involved in education.
3-19	1,462,575	1,420,087	3,002,824	46% of the population. There are more boys than girls (+42,488).
Population	3,262,132	3,244,357	6,506,489	Women are outnumbered by men in the total population (-17,775).

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data of the Ministry of Education.

<sup>5</sup> However, students who leave after the ninth form and who decide then to continue into higher education may prepare for the entrance exam through private institutions.

Meanwhile, the number of school-age children is actually something of an enigma in Tajikistan, and the number of such children is probably much higher than the number of children in school. Because of various factors, including cultural practices among families regarding marriage and birth registration, the Government is unable to provide a reliable demographic picture, especially about the number of births, marriages and divorces.

The official statistics, which are based on the census taken every ten years and government estimates each non-census year, show a continuous trend: a steadily increasing population. The population in January 2003 was estimated at 6.5 million. This represents a rise of more than one million since independence.<sup>6</sup> According to the United Nations Population Fund, the fertility rate, 3.1 births per woman, has been falling the last few years.

The problem is that many marriages remain unregistered, and the children born into these unions

are not registered either. The non-registration of marriages does not involve only early or polygamous marriages, which are forbidden and therefore cannot be registered, though they are quite common, especially, but not exclusively, in rural areas. Even if a marriage is not polygamous or early, it may be celebrated through the nikoh,<sup>7</sup> which is not recognized by the law and has no legal standing. If they occur at home, the births of most of the children issuing from these unions are not registered<sup>8</sup> unless and until the children enter school.

Women constitute less than half the total population. The yearly estimates show that the number of women is falling. From 1989 to 1997, women were becoming fewer, though there were still more women than men (Table 2). The gap between the number of women and the number of men was reversed in 1998. Between 1998 and 2003, the gap between the number of men and the number of women widened from 5,792 to 17,775 (Table 3).

Table 2: Gender and Demography, 1989-97

	Positive Gap: More Women
1989	+32,266
1990	+29,338
1991	+23,875
1992	+17,307
1993	+9,201
1994	+1,197
1995	+4,678
1996	+3,212
1997	+3,183

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data of the Ministry of Education.

The steady drop year after year cannot be attributed to miscalculation or methodological flaws. There is no scientific analysis available to explain the reversal in the sex ratio. One may hypothesize that it has resulted from a combination of several factors. The first concerns the deterioration in living conditions that affect women, most significantly the insufficient provision of health services, particularly during the pre- and postnatal periods. The massive emigration of men also left behind greater workloads

Table 3: Gender and Demography, 1998-2003

	Negative Gap: Less Women
1998	-5,792
1999	-8,111
2000	-10,591
2001	-12,095
2002	-14,836
2003	-17,775

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data of the Ministry of Education.

and greater family responsibilities among women. The absence of more than 620,000 men,<sup>9</sup> most of whom are married, means that many women face a difficult economic situation, which may affect their health and life expectancy.

One might also consider other factors, such as the rising number of suicides, the growing impact of prostitution, and greater trafficking in women and girls, which often goes unreported by families.

Statistical data analysed in a gender perspective suggest the following comments.

6 During the period, a significant number of people, mostly ethnic Russians and individuals belonging to other ethnic groups or coming from other former republics of the Soviet Union, left the country because of the civil war, which also caused an important number of deaths and a substantial outflow of Tajik refugees, many of whom never returned to the country.  
 7 Nikoh is a religious rite whereby the sacred character of a marriage is confirmed in the Muslim community.  
 8 About half of all deliveries take place at home. Babies born at home are likewise frequently not registered no matter the legal status of the union from which they issue.  
 9 IOM (2003), 'Labour Migration from Tajikistan', International Organization for Migration: Geneva.

The main justification for a qualitative survey on the factors explaining the falling rate of schooling and the rising drop-out rate among girls rests on the interest and importance of the distinction between demographic trends and the observations from fieldwork. The trends in education should not be explained solely based on demographic factors (the declining proportion of women and girls). Instead, the very specific demographic imbalance represents an invitation to look into the inadequacies in the education of girls as a symptom of a more general gender inequality, and the demographic trend itself should be scrutinized from the perspective of gender equality. A qualitative survey based upon a field inquiry seems indispensable in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the causes beyond the data.

Our knowledge of the society of Tajikistan and of the dynamics of post-Soviet culture that are at play have therefore led us to focus our research on the relationships among the cultural attitudes, social behaviours and economic difficulties of families in order to identify the mechanisms that are preventing girls

from attending school or causing them to drop out of school.

## B. Methodological Approach

The inquiry was conceived and designed in mid-2003. In line with budget and time constraints and following consultation with the Ministry of Education, it was decided to limit the investigation, at least during the first phase, to the decline in the schooling rate among girls in general compulsory education and to schools in and around Dushanbe. Apart from the easy access and facilitated logistics, this latter choice was also guided by an analysis of the statistical data. The data indicated that Dushanbe, the capital, exhibits the lowest rate of schooling among girls (Table 4). Hisor and Vahdat, two towns not far from Dushanbe, in the Region of Republican Subordination (the oblast geographically surrounding, but not including Dushanbe), were chosen in order to introduce diversity in the administrative and social settings being examined.

Table 4: Regional Breakdown: Share of Girls in Enrolments

	Enrolments (year start)	Girls	
		Number	%
Region of Republican Subordination	340,625	157,798	46.0
Dushanbe	123,746	52,583	42.4
Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast	53,387	25,768	48.0
Khatlon	574,272	261,729	45.5
Sughd	466,210	224,355	48.0

Source: Based on 2002 data of the Ministry of Education.

After several field visits, two schools in two deprived districts in Dushanbe and one school each in the towns of Hisor and Vahdat were selected for the survey. The two towns were among the most affected by the war, and the trauma suffered by the populations there was still apparent. In spite of the proximity to the capital, the environment in the two towns is predominantly rural. There was thus also a potential interest in the results of a comparison of the findings in the two towns and in the urban environment of Dushanbe.

There were fewer girls than boys in each of the four schools (Table 5), and the share of girls was declining steadily as the class cohorts passed from one

grade or form to the next. In the four schools studied, the proportion of girls ranged from 42 to 50 per cent in primary school and from 38 to 44 per cent in lower secondary school. In the last two years of secondary schooling, which serve as preparation for higher education, the proportion ranged from 23 to 37 per cent.

To undertake the fieldwork, 20 interviewers were chosen from among two groups of experts: teachers belonging to the Dushanbe Teachers Union and trainers belonging to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in gender issues. Before the onset of the fieldwork, the interviewers received a five-day training course on qualitative survey meth-

odologies, including the subject of the inquiry, the selection of the sites and the population and the tools of the investigation, and on survey techniques, such

as observation, focus group discussions, individual interviews and the distribution and analysis of questionnaires.

**Table 5: Share of Girls in the Schools Surveyed, by Grade Level, 2003-04 (%)**

Schools	Primary (forms 1-4)	Lower Secondary (forms 5-9)	Secondary (forms 10-11)	Total
Dushanbe I	49	44	37	46
Dushanbe II	47	41	31	43
Hisor	42	38	23	39
Vahdat	50	40	24	43

*Source: Survey data.*

The objective of the inquiry, to discover factors explaining why girls are dropping out before they complete compulsory schooling, does not mean that the survey data are representative of all schools in the places visited and even less of all schools nationwide. Moreover, the tools constructed for the fieldwork are not necessarily appropriate for an in-depth examination of the influence of the full range of factors affecting the schooling rate among girls in a variety of contexts.

Nonetheless, the inquiry does provide the beginnings of an understanding of the cultural and socio-economic determinants of the drop-out rate among girls and is a first step in a wider exploration that could cover a greater diversity of geographical, regional, ethnic and socio-economic variables influencing the schooling rate among girls in Tajikistan.

The survey population was defined so as to include all the actors involved in girls education within schools and in families: teachers, pupils (girls and boys), girls who had left school and parents of these girls.<sup>10</sup> Information was collected from these participants through focus group discussions and individual interviews, as well as observations at schools and homes and in the neighbourhoods where the girls who had left school were living. Informal interviews were also conducted with local officials and community leaders.

Three sets of guidelines for the focus group discussions were developed: one set for girls, one for boys and one for teachers. In each school, the discussions were held among volunteer groups of 20

to 25 teachers and 20 to 25 pupils who were in the last three years of compulsory education (forms 7 through 9). The groups among the pupils were assembled according to gender.<sup>11</sup> The focus group discussions among the girls and boys were preceded by a game involving word associations. This was meant to put them at ease, but also to gather information about the ways they might organize their thoughts and discourse. Altogether, over 100 teachers and 200 pupils took part in these focus group discussions.

To help find the girls who had left school before the end of the ninth form, the school directors provided each girl's name, age, school level reached and last known address. Those girls who could thus be located and who were willing were interviewed individually at their homes. Their parents were interviewed separately, also at home.

Two questionnaires were prepared for the girls and parents separately, and a general questionnaire was drawn up to gather basic sociological data about housing, living conditions and household characteristics. Regular formal employment is seldom the only source of money income among families. However, temporary or full-time jobs in the informal sector were usually not acknowledged by interviewees. This means that information provided on the economic situation of the families may not have been entirely accurate. It was thus important to observe the home and the surroundings systematically in order to record the housing conditions and the furniture, utilities and comforts available (water, electricity, bathroom facilities, kitchen and so on), as well as other details

<sup>10</sup> In this first stage, it was generally not possible to interview the fathers, too. (In many cases, they were not living at the homes of the girls and the mothers.) However, it would be worthwhile to include fathers in the population of a future survey. Older brothers might also be included since the survey found that they are often a determining factor in the decision that girls should stop attending school.

<sup>11</sup> It was decided to separate the girls and the boys for this survey, but a future survey might compose mixed focus groups as well. This might change the dynamics and lead to interesting insights based on the interactions between the girls and boys.

permitting the interviewers to gain a fairly objective idea of the lifestyle and the economic situation of the families. Altogether, 83 persons – 42 girls and 41 parents – were individually interviewed (Table 6).

Table 6: The Girls who had Dropped Out (number)

	Dushanbe I	Dushanbe II	Hisor	Vahdat	Total*
Girls 10 to 16 years old	15	9	9	9	42
Mothers	14	8	9	8	39
Total*	29	17	18	17	81

Source: Survey data.

\*One father and one uncle were also interviewed in place of 'absent' mothers, for a total of 41 'parents' and an overall total of 83 interviews.

The interviewers were divided into two groups of ten. Each group was in charge of one school in Dushanbe and one school in one of the two towns in the periphery. This allowed all interviewers to become familiar with the two types of survey settings.

The field survey was completed in mid-December 2003. A preliminary report was drafted on the basis of the initial survey data in February 2004 and was

presented to the interviewers, the technical working group and the Ministry of Education in order to learn their reactions and hear their comments. A thorough study of documents on education in Tajikistan, recent statistical data and the analyses of the individual interviews was carried out in February and March 2004.





# THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

**This section offers a brief description of the perceptions, attitudes, expectations, frustrations and hopes of the teachers and teenagers about school that resulted from the survey. It then supplies an analysis of the words, thoughts and beliefs of the girls who had left school and their families. The data on which these analyses are based were collected during the focus groups discussions with teachers and pupils and through individual interviews with the girls who had dropped out of school and their mothers. The focus group discussions were held at the schools, while the interviews were conducted at the homes of the interviewees.**

## **A. Girls, Boys and Teachers at School Teachers and their jobs**

Teachers are the main actors in education. Their attitudes and behaviour determine the quality of their teaching and the relationships they have with their pupils and students. The analysis of what they say, perceive and feel about school, their working conditions and also what they expect from the educational system and society is essential to an understanding of their personal and collective investment in educational institutions.

Data were collected from teachers in four schools: two in Dushanbe and one each in the towns of Hisor and Vahdat. The data have been organized around the most relevant themes in the discussions with the teachers.

1. A negative image of one's self and of one's job. The focus group discussions with approximately 100 teachers in the four schools surveyed highlight clearly the existence of a severely negative social and professional image of the teaching profession. Teachers suspect that they have been abandoned by society and the Government, and they feel powerless to solve the problems of their pupils and students.

The first topic during the focus group discussions with the teachers concerned a question about the difficulties involved in being a teacher. The question provoked an immediate collective reaction among the teachers in all four schools that revealed their disappointment and frustration in their work. The

list of difficulties they encounter is a long one: lack of respect, low pay, absence or inadequacy of teaching materials. They interpret these difficulties as evidence that the Government and society are not interested in them, their work, or their students. Even though they are dedicated to their work, their bitterness is such that some of them say they regret having chosen to become teachers. They compare their situation and their image within society before and since independence.

'The honour and respect towards teachers were substantial during the Soviet period, and the working conditions were good,' was a typical comment. 'But, today, teachers are no longer respected, and they have lost their place in society.' They all demand that their profession be revitalized and that an effort should be made to enhance their image. They want to enjoy a standard of living commiserate with their position and importance. They want the Government to legislate an upgrade in the role and position of teachers in society.

The teachers believe that the negative image of their profession is due to the political, economic, professional and sociocultural realities of the post-independence transition. The economic situation is one of the most important factors. The poverty of the government budget for education, rising prices and the low wage level in public teaching (despite a recent increase) do not promise a quick turnaround, and the teachers are forced to supplement their pay by doing double shifts, teaching extra hours outside school, or working second jobs in the informal sec-

tor. This is often still insufficient to allow the teachers to live decently and ensure the future of their families.

During the Soviet period, the people benefited from free public education of relatively good quality, and the state also met essential needs in housing, employment, welfare and so on. The loss of these advantages since independence has placed the people in a new situation. Neither the Government post-independence, nor emerging civil society organizations can provide the same advantages to the population as did the Soviet state. One must now pay for everything: school (paper, notebooks, tuition), university, hospital care and all other public services. Money is king and can solve any problem as long as one has enough for the bribes. The value of an activity, a project, or even a person is measured only by the money they represent.

The low wages they earn thus diminish teachers in the eyes of pupils and parents alike. None of the participants in the focus group discussions with pupils in the four schools wished to become a teacher, and they all justified their rejection of the profession by citing the low wages and the poor working conditions.

Teachers suffer because of this poor image of themselves that they meet in the eyes of everyone around them not least because the economic difficulties are very real. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to expect them to communicate great receptiveness to their pupils or apply much creativity in the performance of their profession.

Two other factors contribute to the professional and personal problems teachers face because of their jobs.

- The lack of adequate and appropriate teaching materials (textbooks, other reading materials, teaching aids and classroom equipment) restricts their ability to fulfil their pedagogical role. Working all day in often hard physical conditions (no water, no electricity, no toilets, no heating) does not help the teachers feel appreciated, but, above all, they find it particularly depressing to witness the daily troubles of the pupils to whom they cannot offer a better education that would ensure promising careers.

- Their own, frequently inadequate pedagogical and professional training makes them feel unfit for the job or, at least, not up to date with effective teaching methods. The younger teachers who went to university after independence know that they did not receive quality training, and the older ones have no opportunity to refresh their knowledge and methods.

The management of public services in Tajikistan during the Soviet period was highly centralized. This caused employees to become especially dependent on the decisions of the state and reduced their capacity for innovative thinking. This administrative legacy was part of the difficulties of the transition after independence. Like other employees of the state, teachers were more used to receiving direction than in taking individual or collective initiative. Rather than trying to change their living or working conditions on their own, they thus consider themselves trapped by the Government's inability to meet its responsibilities in finance and management and by their own incapacity to transform working conditions.<sup>12</sup>

During the Soviet period, teachers belonged to the elite. They were respected and enjoyed various advantages. The extent of their frustration now is in proportion to the professional decline they have experienced since independence.

2. Perspectives on gender among teachers. The survey team decided that no questions would be asked about gender disparities directly in order to avoid hearing commonplace, conventional discourses about gender equality. Instead, interviewees were brought to the subject through a series of questions on the relations among pupils and between pupils and teachers and on the management of conflicts among girls and boys at school. Observation and analysis during these group sessions with the teachers clearly revealed the existence of stereotypes and prejudices, rooted in the traditional culture, that maintain and strengthen gender inequality and the gender division of roles in society.

The most convincing example was provided by a teacher who wanted to explain how she manages conflicts between girls and boys.

'I try to reason with the boy and tell him that

---

<sup>12</sup> In one of the schools, the geography teacher complained that he could not do his job properly because he did not have maps appropriate to the areas of the world he was discussing in his courses. Yet, most of the time, the lack of material should not constitute an obstacle to teaching. One might imagine that, in another context, a geography teacher aware of the shortage of school materials in his country would teach his pupils by creating the maps with them or use the problem as an incentive to motivate them to seek out substitute materials elsewhere on their own.

it's not important because girls don't think, and they don't know what they're doing,' she explained. 'But I say the same thing to the girl,' she added, apparently embarrassed by the reaction of the interviewers. 'I explain to her that boys are such and such, so as to reconcile them.'

This and other examples lead one to consider that the strategy of the teachers in the management of conflicts between girls and boys bears little relation to education. The teachers simply try to restore calm and negotiate a reconciliation so as to ease the tensions without trying to clarify the specific causes or contexts of the conflicts.

Seen in this light, the approach is comparable to the approach adopted by families and law enforcement officials to solve the problem of violence against women. Whether dealing with domestic violence or with rape, they do not try to defend the victim or punish the offender, nor to give an example to educate people and society in general and thereby to eliminate the causes of acts of violence against women. Rather, they merely attempt to restore calm and send everyone away using ill-considered phrases such as 'let's not dishonour the family' as an excuse not to confront a case of rape or 'don't let's besmirch the image of the father of your children' as an excuse not to confront domestic violence.

## Pupils caught between stereotypes and challenges

The focus group discussions with the pupils involved more than 200 pupils in two poor districts in Dushanbe and in the towns of Hisor and Vahdat. There were eight groups altogether: one group of girls and one group of boys in each of the four schools. In collaboration with the school directors and teachers, the groups were organized according to grade levels (lower secondary forms 7 through 9). Though girls represented appreciably less than half the pupils at these levels in the four schools (see Table 5), the focus groups were constituted with the same number of girls and boys: 20 to 25 pupils in each.

Mixed groups of boys and girls were avoided since it was felt that this would have complicated the group dynamics, though, in future survey initiatives, the mixed groups might be tried. A team of three interviewers was assigned to each group. (These teams were mixed, however.)

Following a preliminary segment devoted to word association games to stimulate the reactions of the pupils, the subjects of the focus group discussions were introduced. The sessions each lasted over three hours.

The groups of girls were more active and dynamic than the boys, who were more controlled and restrained. The boys often appeared to view themselves as representatives of their schools, and, for some of them, it was difficult to show spontaneity. The girls communicated more openly and clearly manifested their desire to express their perceptions about the subjects.

The structural dimensions of the interventions of the pupils mainly revolved around defending the image of their schools, protecting the image of their families, describing their dreams and worries and affirming their identities.

I. School: roles and functions. Despite the inadequacies of their schools, the pupils appreciate school for the knowledge it brings them, the way it helps broaden their visions of the world and the social life it facilitates with their schoolmates. However, they all disapprove of the low wages that force their teachers to work extra hours so as to earn more. They object at the lack of teachers in certain subjects. They say they get on well with their teachers. For them, good teachers are those who know their subjects and who are kind to their pupils. They would like their teachers to respect them more and avoid humiliating them in public.

They want better school equipment and more adequate learning environments. They are frustrated because of the shortages of electricity. The computers are often down because of these shortages, but also because they are not kept in good working order. They would like their school buildings to be more well maintained. They would like the classrooms to be warmer and less humid in the winter.

On the whole, boys and girls all stress the social inequalities among the pupils, the disputes among classmates and the lack of respect they sometimes feel for teachers.

The girls would like their schools and society in general to be more egalitarian in terms of both gender and social class. Rather than talking about the abstract value of knowledge and science, the girls expressed the need to attend school in terms of practical learning, making and talking with friends,

recreation and being able to get out of the house or escape boredom. They would be depressed if they could not go to school.

2. Friendship. Meaningful relationships between girls and boys are limited. For boys, girls are too shy. Boys show respect for girls provided they reciprocate. They think girls have a poor sense of humor and dislike teasing.

'They complain that boys hit them, and they go tell the teacher all the time,' is how one boy put it.

According to the girls, the main reason boys are aggressive towards them is because boys consider them 'telltale or sneaks' and feel threatened. In general, girls appreciate the support and cooperation provided by the boys who carry their bags, walk them home and help them during sports activities. The girls, in turn, help the boys in class and lend them books. Boys also say they help girls with their lessons, but they insist girls do this less.

The girls think the boys do not always behave as they should. Tensions sometimes erupt, and the girls complain about the violent behaviour of boys, but it does not seem very serious, and, on the whole, the girls are rather understanding in their attitudes towards boys.

3. Family relations. The pupils describe their relations with their families as good, and they seem very close to their brothers and sisters. They say they are proud of their parents even if misunderstandings sometimes occur. They believe one should not be condescending towards parents. They communicate with their parents, and they turn to family members or close friends when they have problems.

On the subject of family life, girls and boys alike wish to protect their parents. They try to show comprehension about tensions at home, which they attribute mainly to problems caused by the lack of money. Most of them say they do not interfere in conflicts between their parents because they are afraid to do so. Despite these tensions they describe, the pupils want their home lives when they are married generally to resemble their family lives now, though without some of the negatives.

The father is viewed as the family decision-maker, and he also appears at the root of the tensions. Despite the tensions, most of the pupils do not reject the accepted parental models of mothers and fathers and say they would not change much in their families.

Though mostly fathers take the important decisions, it is the mothers who are more globally respected by a majority of the boys. Fathers and grandparents come next. Girls and boys both seem to prefer the company of their mothers to that of other family members. The relationships between girls and their mothers are close, though clashes are frequent. When the girls have problems, they speak about them first with their mothers. The relationships with fathers are more respectful and distant.

Girls experience more pressure to do housework and more family control over their activities outside the home, but they do not overdramatize what they know are accepted practices within the dominant culture. For the boys, tensions with parents erupt when they behave badly, do not tidy up their rooms, or do not study well in school; with girls, the tensions occur when they stay out too long with their friends or fail to do their household chores. Girls say their brothers are at the origin of conflicts when their fathers are absent.

4. Studies. The large majority of girls and boys would like to go on to university and prepare themselves for a profession.

The ideal jobs for the boys are pilot, engineer, medical doctor, 'spaceman' and lawyer. Some want to focus on religious studies or at least pursue them in parallel with another subject. They are aware of how difficult it is to enter and study at university. They wish their fathers had jobs that would allow them to study longer.

The majority of girls say they want to study until the end of secondary schooling (form II). Many of them would like to enter a university, but they also understand the obstacles, especially the financial barriers and the opposition of their families. For girls, the most valued jobs are medical doctor, journalist, translator, judge, midwife, dressmaker and civil servant.

Those pupils who doubt they can continue very long in school mention the cost. Girls also mention the opposition of parents or older brothers. The strategy adopted by some girls in order to continue their studies seems to consist in being hardworking and docile in order to convince their parents and neutralize the influence of the older brothers.

5. Marriage. For girls, the ideal husband should be independent and educated and show respect for his

parents. He should respect his family, love his children, provide for the family and be 'modern' (progressive). He should be kind to his wife, and he should be good-looking as well. He should not be a womanizer. The girls would like to choose their own husbands and then consult with their parents about the choice.

Boys are more divided as regards the selection of their future spouses. Some think their parents have more experience and will make the best choice, while others want to choose on their own. The ideal wife should suit them, as well as their parents. She should be a good housewife, respect her parents and parents-in-law and help them in their old age. She should be hardworking and good-looking, and she should bear healthy children.

Stereotypes emerged among all the groups during the discussions about the ideal wife or husband. Beauty, good housekeeping and child-rearing skills and special care for the in-laws were the most valued qualities of a good wife, while higher education, 'modernity' and a good job were the qualities most appreciated in the ideal husband.

Their views on the proper age for marriage may be a good indicator that the pupils have internalized their acceptance of some gender disparities that reflect dominant traditional values. Girls and boys alike consider that the ideal age for marriage is, for a girl, between 18 and 20, which corresponds to the end of secondary school, but, for a boy, between 25 and 27, which corresponds to the age when one might be expected to have completed higher education and already be working.

6. Underlying tensions and open conflicts. The focus group discussions with the pupils revealed the existence of three main criteria of distinction among pupils: school level, socio-economic standing of the household and district or 'socio-ethnic' background. School level is used by the pupils as a criterion of identity, but it does not seem to represent a source of perceivable tension. The socio-economic and 'socio-ethnic' criteria do seem to constitute sources of tension and sometimes even of open conflict.

In the two schools in Dushanbe, the distinction based on the socio-economic standing of the family appeared often to be accompanied by the most significant tensions. The pupils clearly seemed to judge

others through a division into two groups: the boi ('rich') and the kambaqal ('poor'). Even though some of the families are 'rich' exclusively in relative terms in these places, there is a big difference between families in which the fathers or brothers are working in Russia and are able to send money home and families in which the parents are jobless or have low-income jobs. The poorest households are typically those headed by women with children and no partners.

The bitterness about their poverty among the pupils from the poorer households is expressed differently by the boys and girls. The girls refer to the effects of poverty on their appearance (the quality of their clothes), while the boys regret the lost possibilities to use the Internet or play video games. The children in poor families are prevented from using the computers in Internet cafés because of the cost (around \$1.00 per hour).

In the schools in Hisor and Vahdat, meanwhile, there was no reference to video games, and the 'socio-ethnic' factor seemed to be the main source of tensions among pupils. Actually, though it is perceived as ethnically oriented (Guriz, Kazakh, Russian), this criterion is actually more social and geographical than ethnic. Thus, the pupils in the two schools in Hisor and Vahdat tended to focus the distinction on the 'community' – qeshloq ('village') or qarm ('region of origin') – to which their classmates belong. The distinction was considered a subject to be avoided in order to prevent conflicts among pupils.

7. Gender-based conflicts at school. Gender-based relationships constitute another of the sources of tension among pupils. According to the girls, the more numerous they are in the class, the easier their relations are with the boys.<sup>13</sup> When they are not especially numerous, which is often the case in the higher forms, grades 7 through 9, they feel less supported and tend more to fear the attention and attitude of the boys.

The relationships between boys and girls are also less tense when the boys and girls are in the same class. Boys seem to feel more respect for girls in their own class than they do for other girls, and girls appreciate the protection of their boy classmates when the girls are confronted by boys from other classes who fail to respect them. Indeed, class alliances often seem to overcome gender divisions in the sense that

<sup>13</sup> The focus group discussions with teachers also stressed that, when the girls outnumber the boys, the relationships between the genders are more peaceful, as are the teacher-pupil relationships.

most of the girls complained about boys from other classes rather than about their own boy classmates. However, the boys do complain about girl classmates who tell the teacher when they leave school to play outside or, in Dushanbe, when they go to an Internet café to play video games.

In the schools in Hisor and Vahdat, the tensions between girls and boys are less readily expressed than in Dushanbe. This is probably the result of a greater respect among the pupils for traditions and a closer control over pupils by the community. It may also be due to the fact that the families in these towns show greater socio-economic homogeneity.

8. Conformity to cultural values. It is apparent from the talk of the pupils that they privilege compliance with the dominant norms and inhibit their own critical thinking, particularly as regards gender. It is obvious they live in a more restrictive, traditional cultural environment. The individual is still under considerable pressure to be a loyal member of the community and to respect its values. Community spirit is a structuring dimension in the socialization of children in Tajikistan and elsewhere in the region.

The strength of traditional values is also a consequence of the limited contacts with the outside world. Few newspapers are available, and few young children read them. Young people can watch only a few television stations. Local television programmes are very conservative, and the programmes on Russian television are out of tune with life in Tajikistan. Foreign videos and video games, which boys and girls love to use when they are available, introduce them into a fictitious and frustrating universe, which does not help them widen their vision of the world.

Of course, a better knowledge of their own society, coupled with a critical approach towards outdated norms in their culture, is as indispensable for these young people as a critical assessment of the new values that are entering massively into their environment. In order to help them develop their minds and to enable them to manage social change and build their own future, schools must provide them with appropriate tools so that they can situate themselves properly within their society and in the world.

## B. Girls Out of School

This section is based on the results of 83 individual interviews. The interviews were conducted among 42 girls between 10 and 16 years of age who had dropped out of school between third and eighth grade. The interviewees were all contacted at home. (Some were not on the lists provided by the school directors. They had been introduced to the interviewers by friends or neighbours who knew that they were not going to school.) Interviewed separately were 39 mothers, one father and one uncle of these girls. (In two of the families, the mothers were not living at home.)

Each interview was conducted by a two-person team; one person did the interview, while the other took notes.<sup>14</sup> The interviews were rounded out through a questionnaire for the collection of basic sociological and economic data (Appendix 6), and a sheet containing direct observations was prepared on each household by one of the interviewers. This questionnaire, complemented by the direct observations, helped assess the standard of living of the families through a factual record aimed at a description of the state of the dwelling, including the objects in it, and the amenities and additional property or assets, such as cultivated land, farm animals and an adjoining stand to sell produce so as to help improve the situation of the family.

### The families

The families were composed of between 4 and 14 members, including between two and nine children. The households usually consisted of a nuclear family only, though, in some families, one of the married sons (usually the oldest) and his wife or one of the married daughters (often separated from her husband or divorced) lived in the household, together with their children.

With only a few exceptions, the mothers had reached the end of secondary school during the Soviet period (ten years of education at that time). Some fathers had completed technical training (also ten years at that time) or had attained a higher level

14 Budget and time constraints did not permit the use of tape recorders. Recorded interviews would have provided more complete information, allowing a more refined analysis, but the transcription of 83 interviews was not possible given the survey budget and would have delayed the production of the report.

of education.

A majority were living in apartments in Dushanbe or in houses in Hisor and Vahdat. The condition of the apartments or houses and the quantity and quality of the furnishings were very different among the survey population. Most families had at least the traditional kurpatcha (light cotton mattresses), a television and radio, kitchen appliances, a heater and several very modest carpets. Most had no tables or chairs. They had access to water (sometimes outside the home). The families living outside Dushanbe city had electricity only for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. In Hisor and Vahdat, the families occasionally possessed small adjacent plots of cultivated land and several animals (cows, hens, etc.).

The economic situation varied widely from one family to the next. The monthly household incomes ranged from 12 somoni (\$4.00) to more than 400 somoni (\$135), but all of the families were spending more than their income. Their estimate of a monthly income which would allow them to lead decent lives was between 80 and 800 somoni (about \$25 to \$270). Households that consist of several men (husband and sons) working temporarily or permanently in Russia enjoy a relatively better economic situation.

Family members were close to one another, but several women mentioned that their husbands were sometimes violent with them, though not with their children.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the families regularly practised their religion, Islam. They would pray regularly and fast during Ramadan. The men went to the mosques, and the women knew the religious leaders of their communities, though they did not consult with them.

Most of the families with daughters who had dropped out of school had at least one or two children who were still attending school, usually primary school. The older children who were in school were boys. The parents said they hoped their sons would continue to study until university, but, for the daughters, they had no such desire. For their daughters, they generally envisaged marriage, having children and keeping house. The aspiration of parents for their daughters revolved around finding good husbands who would take care of them, have several

children with them, stay with them, respect them and not be violent.

This does not mean that the education of daughters was not an important concern. The parents were usually very attentive about the behavior of their daughters. They supervised their friendships in the neighbourhood and did not allow the daughters to go alone or freely in the streets. Many parents send their daughters to take religious lessons with a bihatun (woman mullah) and provide their children with religious books.

The general passivity of parents in regards to their daughters only appears in terms of school. The parents seem willing to allow their daughters to drop out of school, whatever the reason. Health problems, the difficulty of providing adequate shoes and clothing, the distance to school, or the wishes of the girls themselves in the face of the influences and pressures of the neighbourhood constitute the reasons the parents said their girls had stopped going to school.

1. Explicit reasons given by the parents for keeping girls at home: Poverty. Some parents explained that their daughters had dropped out of school as a result of insecurity, the distance to school, the hostile attitude of the school towards their daughter, a decision of the father or an older brother, or the poor health of the daughter or the mother.

Beyond these specific motives, the main reason put forward by the majority of parents was *bebizoati* ('poverty') and its effects, which were often expressed in terms of lack of adequate clothing, though this reason clearly did not apply to boys. The same families that had withdrawn their daughters from school because of poverty continued to send their sons to school and, indeed, hoped that the sons would go on to higher education.

In countries in transition, it is often difficult to assess the level of poverty among families. Reliable data on jobs and salaries are generally lacking, and the significance of the informal sector, of occasional incomes and of other, more or less legal sources of cash can only be estimated. This shifts the focus to other criteria, such as health status, educational level, access to utilities and services (water, electricity, transportation), type and quality of housing, ame-

<sup>15</sup> The family questionnaire did not focus on this aspect of family life, which requires other methods of investigation. There were, however, several questions on domestic violence. Usually, the women would not speak readily about the topic, though a few of them volunteered the information that their husbands lacked respect for them and sometimes used physical violence. The phenomenon is almost certainly more widespread than has been revealed in the survey.



nities and comforts in the household (space, light, sanitation) and leisure goods (television, radio, tape-recorder, bicycles, games for children). These are the criteria that help distinguish among the poor, those who are not so poor and the very poor.

While some families appeared really to be living in poverty, making it impossible for them to cover the school expenses of their children, others appeared to be using their financial difficulties as an excuse to withdraw their daughters from school. In fact, it was often the spending priorities rather than the poverty that was most relevant in the discourse, and spending on the education of girls was not a priority among these families. This was reinforced because education had been free for more than 70 years in the Soviet system, and families were not used to setting aside money for education.

In a country where over 80 per cent of the population may be living below the poverty line, it is obvious that a majority of families face extreme difficulties in meeting the cost of educating all their children. Nonetheless, the question remains: why, when confronted with real economic difficulties, is it always girls whom parents chose to withdraw from school?

2. The devaluation of school as a tool for socio-economic advancement. The view of families on the effectiveness of school as a means for their children to gain worthwhile employment is a determining factor in the value they assign to education. During the transition, because of poverty and the economic problems of the country, school has lost its significance as a method to ensure good future employment, and families and communities do not esteem the other fundamental functions of school sufficiently: the provision of access to knowledge, the broadening of the vision of the world, helping children to socialize and discover the diversity in others and the transmission of an appreciation of a sense of responsibility and the duties of citizenship. These are not considered adequate incentives to bear the burdens that sending their daughters to school represents. This is the more true since the education of girls has never been a priority among the population.

When parents were asked about the advantages of school, a large majority replied simply that they wanted their children to learn to read and write. Once their daughters had learned to read and write (sometimes after the third year of primary school),

many of the parents felt justified in withdrawing them from school so that they could perform household chores, look after little brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews at home and sometimes work in the fields if the family cultivates land. The girls were thus deprived of their right to education so that they could work in the household.

3. The duties of girls, the responsibilities of boys. The answers given by the parents to questions on the division of roles according to gender tended to confirm the generally traditional perspective: daughters were expected to devote themselves to household tasks and to serve their families. Girls were also considered much more useful at home because they could be much more easily managed and controlled than boys. For their daughters, the parents wished primarily for happiness and a good marriage. The girls were expected one day to leave home to serve their in-laws, to whom they would 'belong'.

In contrast, the son is traditionally in charge of looking after his parents. An early interruption of their schooling would not entail any substantial benefits for the family. The parents were not training their boys to perform household tasks, nor were the boys expected to stay at home all day. When asked about their wishes concerning the education of their sons, parents usually mentioned staying on at school, going on to higher education and finding a good job.

Thus, girls were not dropping out of school because of poverty alone, but also because of a gender division in labour and in roles in the family.

4. The girl's decision. During the fieldwork, when the parents, usually the mothers, but sometimes the fathers, too, were asked about the absence of their daughters from school, some of them said that the responsibility was on the shoulders of the girls themselves. The girls did not always disagree with this assessment during the individual interviews.

It is obvious, however, that the girls were not deciding such an important matter on their own. Particularly in traditional families in Tajikistan, parents tend to exercise their authority abundantly and may even use violence on their children to make them accept this authority. Parents know how to impose very controversial and difficult decisions on their daughters, such as the age of marriage and the choice of a husband. Even if one accepts that the girls decided on their own to quit school, it is almost certain that

they could do so because the parents did not oppose the decision. This is another reason for suspecting that the girls may not have been quitting school ultimately because of problems in school.<sup>16</sup> Why did the parents chose not to employ their legitimate authority to send their daughters back to school? This apparent passivity of the parents was most probably linked to the low value they attached to the schooling of their daughters and to their desire to have them stay home to help around the house.

## The girls: their relationship with school

It was obvious from the beginning of the survey that the problem of girls dropping out of school went beyond the suggestion in the official figures that girls under 16 were simply 'missing school'. The figures on the extent of the problem given by the school directors<sup>17</sup> did not correspond to the official figures compiled centrally by the Federation of Teachers Unions, and those numbers did not reflect the number of girls found to be absent from school during the fieldwork.

The fieldwork showed that some girls had never even been registered in their local district schools. Some girls had attended school for two or three years only. On the whole, for every girl whose address was given to the survey teams by the schools and who were contacted for individual interviews, there were another two, three, or more of school age in the same neighbourhoods who were not attending school either. The young interviewees, their friends or neighbours sometimes introduced these other girls to the survey teams. These girls, of whom the schools reported no trace, were sometimes members of the same families as the girls who were known by the schools no longer to be attending.

1. The views of the girls on school. In answer to questions about the difficulty of their classes, the girls mentioned challenging subjects, usually Russian or mathematics, but they generally stressed there were no problems with their teachers or the

other pupils. Their favourite school-related activities were talking and playing with their friends and taking part in singing and music lessons. (Some of the girls had dropped out several years previously, and these girls may have tended to remember the brighter moments.) The girls appreciated the wider social horizon and the greater freedom that school provided, particularly in relation to the isolation they were now experiencing.

Only three of the girls said that they did not feel frustrated to be excluded from education. The rest said that they liked school and wanted to return to school. Indeed, most believed they would return one day. Very few realized that it would be very difficult for them to return. Only a few understood that, if they were able to return, they would be in a classroom with younger children.

2. The reasons given for dropping out. Most of the girls said their parents were not able to pay for the notebooks and paper they needed for school. In a few cases, the girls said they had left school because a teacher had humiliated them before the class by declaring that their parents could not meet the costs. Other girls said they could not buy the appropriate shoes and clothing and that this had made them feel ashamed before their classmates and teachers. Their poverty had reduced the possibility for them to 'look good'. Many of the teenage girls admitted they had interrupted their education so as to avoid the psychological tensions and the feelings of mortification in front of their peers.

This reaction of the girls was encouraged because of the cultural concept whereby girls, much more than boys, must reflect the idealized models of beauty and appearance within their age group. All the school directors, teachers, pupils and parents mentioned the importance the community attached to the looks of adolescent girls.<sup>18</sup> This problem of the intolerance or lack of acceptance of girls who dress poorly revolves around the reactions of the communities to 'difference' more generally. School is one of the most important spaces in which children are engaged in the construction of their social identity, but

16 The discussion here refers to girls who quit school when they were in classes corresponding to their age group and not to the specific problem of girls who, having missed school for a long period for one reason or another, had to attend classes in which the other pupils were much younger.

17 The four schools in the survey provided information on girls they knew were no longer attending classes.

18 It has often been suggested that one reason many of the girls stopped going to school in the spring was that, while they can cover their poor dresses with an overcoat during the winter, they can no longer hide their dresses in this way during the spring.

it is also an important space for the reinforcement of the dominant values in a community.

The reintroduction among all students of the school uniform that was used in Soviet times, perhaps now provided without charge to poor families, might represent a temporary solution to the psychological tensions being suffered specifically by young girls because of their poor clothing. However, the issue of appearance does not involve only clothing.

The standardization under the Soviet system meant that tolerance for 'difference', marginality and diversity was not particularly extensive. Moreover, Tajikistan experienced isolation even as a Soviet republic. The geographical situation of this rural country has not made contacts and communications with the rest of the world much easier today (a problem that is shared to some extent with other countries in Central Asia). The tolerance for variance from the norms and values of the group is still quite weak.

The pressure to conform with the group, typically strong in any case among children of a certain age, may therefore weigh a little more heavily in Tajikistan. Children who differ from others, for whatever reason, but especially for reasons that are beyond their control, may thus be slightly more substantial.

As for looks and clothes, this seems dramatically to affect children, notably girls, who are relatively overweight or who suffer from a physical disability or a visible disease. Not only their peers, but also their teachers may make them feel as if they stand out.

The interviews revealed, for example, that some of the girls had stopped going to school because of health problems. Most of the time, the parents or the girls would mention money problems first. The health problems would be referred to only subsequently. The 'health problems' (perhaps obesity or a skin disease) usually did not represent a serious barrier to schooling, and the girls did not have any problems studying and remained frustrated at their exclusion from a world they felt they needed in order to grow. Nonetheless, the daily humiliation was too hard for them and their parents, and the girls decided they could not continue to face a hostile environment everyday.

An essential issue here is the role of school in terms of moral and civic education and the transmission of ethical values, respect for others and tolerance towards differences. The schools of the young girls we met had not been able to protect them.

This is less surprising, but perhaps no less worrying in the case of the girls who said the decision they would quit school had been made by their fathers or their oldest brothers. Though most parents said they had helped their daughters with homework, the main obstacle, in fact, seemed to be the families, which generally took a critical view of school. When school is not truly valued by the parents or the older brothers, it is difficult for the children to consider education as an opportunity for the future or a 'chance' to marry a little later, to bear fewer children (who will receive better care), to become more involved in the social and political worlds and to enjoy, irrespective of their job prospects, a better quality of life for their families.

## The girls: their relationship with home

1. The daily routine. The daily lives of the 10-to-16-year-old girls who had dropped out of school was organized around domestic work. They would wake up between 5 and 7 in the morning, start by preparing breakfast for everyone and then wash and take care of the little children if there were any (their own brothers and sisters or the children of their oldest brothers living with their families).

'I am alone the whole day,' said a 13-year-old girl. 'I don't do anything useful for myself. From 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., I'm cleaning, washing and cooking.'

Some of the girls had stopped school very early and could not read, write, or make calculations. Others who studied until the third or fourth form at school had forgotten most of what they had learned. Some of the girls who could read would read the school books of their younger sisters or brothers who were in school, and the girls who were taking private courses in religion would read the religious books. (Most of the girls prayed regularly and fasted during Ramadan.) A very few girls would occasionally read a newspaper.

Usually, in their free time, once they had completed their household chores, the girls would listen to music (if they had the equipment) or watch television (if the television worked, and if there was electricity). Television was the unique window open for them onto the world outside their communities. However, the nature of the programmes was such that they were only confronted with inaccessible dreams or the representation of a reality that

was foreign to them. The series and games on Russian television that all the girls watch, even in Hisor and Vahdat, provided them with nothing they could use to enhance their understanding of their own circumstances. Most of the time, because of their poor knowledge of Russian, they watched the images on the screen quite passively. The Tajik-language programmes began later in the day, and, moreover, young girls did not have the experiences that might have acted as keys to help them benefit more fully from the few programmes relating to their more immediate environment. They watched mostly light entertainment programmes. Radio might have been more mind-broadening, but radios were not always so available or so appealing.

The fact that the media did not play a more significant role in the socialization of these young people was unfortunate, for the girls otherwise lived in a closed, limited and constrained physical and psychological space. The exchange of ideas and information was much reduced with respect to their peers in school. They did not go out except to visit friends in the neighbourhood, often girls who were also no longer in school. They did not go food shopping. (Their fathers and brothers usually did this.) They did not go to the city. The girls in Hisor and Vahdat who had relatives in Dushanbe had been to Dushanbe with their parents for family visits, but very rarely. Among the girls living in the two districts in Dushanbe, only a few had been to the city centre. Only two of the girls had ever gone to a park for a walk. Only one of them had ever been to the movies or a theatre. Most of them said they 'don't know what that is'. The majority had never been to a doctor. The only recreation outside the home available to most of them was to take part in ceremonies such as marriages and circumcisions held in their neighbourhoods. The sole 'outing' of significance for most of the girls was to go with their mothers to the clothing market during Ramadan to buy a new dress.

This isolation of girls in the reduced space of the home and their confinement within the community environment generally limited their vision of life and the world to a few hundred square metres. Their only regular exchanges were with members of their families, and this rendered these exchanges fundamental to their prospects and their happiness.

2. Absent men. The home environment was nearly always exclusively female during the day. Girls who

were not attending school, daughters-in-law and mothers were all left on their own at home. Like the tendency to conformity among children of a certain age, this feminine character of home-life during the daylight hours was typical in many places around the world, but it had particularly strong cultural roots in Tajikistan. Entitlements acquired during the Soviet period such as education among girls and the opening up of the labour force to participation by women had not radically altered the embedded cultural practices that confined women to the household. After independence, women's participation in labour outside the home was viewed as a necessity or desirable because of the supplementary income and the enhanced possibilities gained for the families, but it was not regarded as a right. The primary contribution of women to society was considered to consist in the provision of services to the family within the household.

Among the families encountered during the interviews, the fathers were usually at work or out looking for work during the day. The brothers were at school, at work, or looking for work. Otherwise, they were visiting friends or shopping. Their movements were not controlled as were those of their sisters. They had their own networks of friends, and their sisters were not included. Their relationships with their sisters were not based on sharing or friendship, but on 'protection' and control, which reflected the norm for such relationships in the community. This control became more significant in those families in which the fathers were off working as migrant labourers in Russia.

In the evening, when the men returned home, the women were busy preparing dinner, and there were not many exchanges of news or views within the family. Television had now filled the place that once might have been taken up by such exchanges. Anyway, the men could not have been very positive mediators between the home and the outside world, for their experiences of social and professional life were not very gratifying. Many of these families were so very poor, and there were all sorts of troubles.

This absence of men from the home during the day was not specific to Tajikistan. In some traditional societies, men are the only members of the household who go to work or to the market and who are not at home with any regularity. But, in such societies, women have not attended school or worked in the fields, the markets, the factories and the offices

for more than three generations, as they have in Tajikistan, and they do not have the same constitutional rights as men either. Thus, despite the culture, there is some tension in this regard in Tajikistan.

3. A quiet, sometimes tense home environment. Most of the girls usually had good relationships with their families, particularly their mothers, with whom they talked often, usually about the family and the household. Conflicts with their mothers or older brothers occurred mostly when the girls would fail to perform their household tasks well or on time, when they would leave the house without permission, talk too long with neighbours on the street, or talk with boys. The fathers and older brothers were sometimes sources of violence in the household. Particularly the mothers were the victims of the violence of the fathers. The pressures of the patriarchal tradition were typically very strong.

Most of the girls who discussed the subject thought that the tension between their parents and the domestic violence were generated because of the difficulties of the lives of the fathers, especially their frustrations related to poverty. Nonetheless, it is well known that, in Tajikistan, as in other societies, domestic violence against women is not a characteristic of any one group, such as the poor, but occurs in families across the full range of segments in the population.

4. Prospects. Marriage was not a subject the girls would discuss with their parents. They thought a good age for marriage was around 20 or 21, though some said they would wait as long as possible. The ideal husband would be a nice man who was highly educated and respectful towards them and their parents, while the ideal wife would be *sarkham* ('submissive', 'self-effacing') and a hard worker who would serve her husband and give him love and lots of children. Only one of the girls said she would accept being the second wife in a polygamous household, though they were much more divided about how they would feel if their husbands would marry another woman after marrying them. Some of them said they did not know what to think; others said they would put up with the situation and that it was a husband's decision to make, and still others said they would consult with their parents about what to do. Most of the girls thought that parents should choose a husband for them because parents had more experience.

The girls dreamed about becoming doctors, law-

yers, researchers, or accountants, but they knew these were only dreams. Given the fact that they had stopped going to school, some of them several years before, these professions would likely be closed to them in the future. So, except for a few of the girls, they all wanted to be seamstresses or dressmakers, or they wanted to work in the fields. Their more practical desire was usually for their fathers and brothers to find good jobs or be able to go to Russia to work and send money home to fix up the house and make it nicer. Aside from one girl who expressed a wish that her family would understand her, none of the girls had any very tangible desires concerning their own lives.

The girls thereby revealed passive attitudes vis-à-vis the limitations on their social contacts, their economic difficulties and the relationships in their families. When asked what they would like to change, most of the girls replied that they would change nothing.

When they were asked the question, the mothers produced answers that were surprisingly uninspired. Even some of the women who had admitted to the humiliation and violence they faced from their husbands said they did not want to change anything.

Had they felt more positively about their capacity to change something or had they been more optimistic about the opportunities available to them, perhaps these mothers and daughters would have been more imaginative in their responses. However, in order to envisage change, one must be able to perceive a feasible alternative to the status quo.

The mothers who had known violence at the hands of their husbands, for instance, certainly suffered because of the violence and may not have accepted the idea that they should be victims, but they had no expectation that they could do anything about it. They lacked knowledge about the outside world, which narrows considerably their familiarity with possible discourses about the rights of wives and the duties of husbands. Furthermore, the women's choices of action were constrained more fundamentally because the weight of the surrounding culture came down in favour of the view that it is reasonable and permissible for men to use violence against women in their families. Meanwhile, according to most of the mothers and girls who were interviewed, it was important for a wife to be *sarkham*. Girls learn this behaviour early. This privileging of attitudes of acceptance and docility among women represents, indeed, an enormous obstacle to change.

# INFLUENCES ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS

The analysis of the individual interviews and the focus group discussions shows four major underlying themes in the data collected. These themes confirm that the attitudes of families vis-à-vis the education of girls are root causes of the exclusion of girls from school. These themes are: family expenditure priorities in a context of poverty, gender socialization, the roles and functions of school within a gender perspective and religion as a buttress of community integration and a pretext for gender discrimination.

## A. Family Expenditure Priorities in a Context of Poverty

The large majority of families in Tajikistan are very poor. However, the survey found that the link between poverty and the absence of girls from school was far more complex than suggested by general public opinion and the views expressed by teachers and parents.

Thus, those parents who did not respect one of the most fundamental rights of children and their legal duty to ensure the school attendance of their offspring until the age of 15 were not always the poorest.

Likewise, the impact of poverty, social change and political events on individuals varies depending on the position of the individuals in the family, their education and their health. In the families that were the target of the survey, girls appeared to be much more vulnerable than boys to the effects of poverty. It is true that most of the families faced difficulties in sending all their children to school for the same duration and that the reasons they gave were often connected to the extra payments to teachers and the costs for paper, clothing and, notably, shoes, as well as the refusal of children to attend school if they are poorly dressed.<sup>19</sup> Still, the parents decided that the girls, not the boys, would cease going to school, usually after the girls had completed primary education (the first four years of the school system). The

absence of girls at school was therefore clearly due not merely to the economic factor, but also to the decisions of their families about expenditure priorities.

The obligation to include education in household expenditure priorities did not exist during the Soviet period. Families had free access to all basic public services such as education, health care and housing, and there was no employment problem. Extra income was spent instead on, for example, community activities and the celebration of marriages, births, circumcisions and funerals. Religious ceremonies were all the more important during Soviet times because they provided occasions to reassert and reinforce the identity of the community.

Today, the state no longer provides free public services, and family expenditures must provide for the costs of health care, housing and education, all in the context of a paralysed job market and generalized poverty. Meanwhile, the share of family incomes spent on community activities and religious ceremonies is huge and very often involves going into heavy debt, but honour within the community requires it.

So that children can continue their studies as long as possible and girls do not have to drop out of school early, family expenditure priorities must be reassessed. This may mean altering expenditures on traditional cultural practices among families, which is not an easy goal.

<sup>19</sup> Only very rarely did the parents say that their daughters were missing school so that they could work and help their families financially. Nonetheless, though the girls were usually used as a domestic labour force, some were also working in the cotton fields and in other agricultural activities.

## B. Gender Socialization

Among the important factors in the absence of girls from school in Tajikistan are two characteristics of the traditional culture. First is the gender disparity in the roles imposed by the culture upon girls and boys. Gender inequality is deeply rooted in the culture, and boys and girls are raised and socialized differently within the family. The main sphere of the lives of girls and women is the home, where they are responsible for housework, childbearing, child-rearing and the maintenance of the family.

The education of girls and the professional activity of women were never significant claims of civil society in Tajikistan before they were introduced by the Soviet system. The lack of impact of the extensive efforts of the Soviet state to lessen the gender disparity was striking. Families allowed their girls to attend school and work in the cotton fields, but only because they were obliged by the state to do so. This explains the continuity of traditional approaches to the socialization of girls inside the family during the Soviet period and the tendency to return more openly to a traditional attitude towards the education of girls since the collapse of the Soviet system.

The second cultural characteristic that is a factor in the absence of girls from school is the social and economic function of women and men within the community. The purpose of education in the traditional culture is not the same for girls and boys. Sons are raised to support their families and take care of their parents when they are old, while daughters are raised to serve their future in-laws. Daughters are thus temporary members of their own families, and, until they come of age, they are charged with caring for the home. When they are old enough, parents are eager to have them married off. Then, the daughters will bear offspring and contribute economically to the sole benefit of the families of their husbands.

The costs of the education of the sons will be recovered sooner or later, while any expenditure towards the education of daughters will only profit others. This ancestral role division is still lively and is one of the main reasons for the minimal interest that families take in the performance or permanence of their daughters in school.

## C. The Roles and Functions of School within a Gender Perspective

The costs, the shortages of educational materials and the problems in the pay and the quality of the teachers have damaged the image of schools in the eyes of parents. But the main reason schools are not valued any more is related to jobs: they no longer guarantee future employment. Since girls are to be married and serve their in-laws, parents have minimal expectations about their attendance in school. Parents are satisfied if schools teach their daughters to read and write.

Likewise, if girls did not perceive schools merely as places where they will learn to read and write, but also as places where they can construct an identity and develop themselves personally for the sake of a better life in the future, their attitude towards education might become more positive. They might not abandon school so readily because of the poor quality of the clothes they wear.

Many of the parents who were interviewed and whose daughters had withdrawn from school, sometimes because the girls themselves wanted to do so, said that, after all, it was not necessary for a girl to pursue an education. Mothers, many of whom had, under the Soviet system, completed secondary education, but who now found themselves in an extremely difficult economic situation, said they did not believe they could insist, in their own thoughts and in exchanges with their daughters, on the need to attend school. Daughters were hidden away in the home.

Most of these families did not address the affirmation that is at the very heart of the international community's mobilization: to exclude their daughters from education not only deprives these girls of a right, but it also reduces considerably the chance that the children (both boys and girls) of these same daughters will gain access to education and, through education, to more rewarding lives.

Moreover, during the research, the mothers were the exceptions who did not say that school and even university studies were among their main desires for their sons or their sons-in-law. The boy was seen as a social being who must present himself before society. His personal qualities must be highlighted so that they can be viewed. This appeared to suggest that, despite the explicit devaluation of schools and the consciousness that schools did not guarantee good jobs as they once had, a good education was still an indication at least of social prestige and personal accomplishment.

## D. Religion: Buttress of Community Integration, Pretext for Gender Discrimination

A vehicle for community integration

Fasting by parents and children was the rule during the month of Ramadan, and most members of the family also prayed. Fathers and sons went to the mosque, and most women knew the local mullah and consulted him when necessary. The number of young girls who said that they prayed is surprising if one considers the pressures against such practices during Soviet rule.

In some families, girls were removed from public school at a very early age to undertake alternative, private education with the bihatun. A lot of girls, particularly in Hisor and Vahdat, attended or had attended lessons given by a bihatun during which they read the Koran and studied the precepts and practices of their religion. Some of the bihatun also taught sewing and embroidery. Attendance at these lessons was facilitated because the bihatun did not require a fixed fee, but allowed parents to give what they could in cash or in kind. The transmission of religious knowledge by the bihatun to the girls represented a support for traditional spiritual values and was reassuring and satisfying for the parents.

This alternative education offered girls who had already dropped out of school an opportunity to become integrated in another sort of learning environment. However, it tended to nurture identity with the community rather than a social identity.

An inquiry into the actual and potential role and influence of the bihatun and religious actors more generally in the education of girls might prove worthwhile. If the religious actors, particularly the bihatun, could be encouraged to improve their educational abilities and widen the scope of their teaching into areas of knowledge that are more centred on youth in terms of social and professional integration and health care so that they could provide useful practical skills to young girls, the religious network might become a good means to supply some education to girls who have dropped out of school.

In a modern democratic society, alternative solutions in the educational field should:

- respond to the needs of youth and families that are unable to rely on the formal educational system;
- not exclude or marginalize the young people who choose them; and
- offer a path to return to the formal educational system.

These conditions can be fulfilled only if the state certifies these alternative forms of private education, promotes the training of the teachers and supervises the quality of the courses provided to youth.

The impact of popular religion on discriminatory practices

Community life in Tajikistan is founded on strongly patriarchal traditions that are associated in the popular mind with religion. As elsewhere, religious culture is combined with non-Islamic local cultural traditions that bear traces of ancient values. The secularization of Central Asia during the Soviet period and the break with the Muslim world outside the Soviet Union considerably constrained open religious reflection and prevented religious renewal in the region. Nonetheless, as in other aspects of life, the Soviet approach towards religious matters and the 'official' religious leaders had little impact on the fundamental beliefs of communities in Tajikistan. The people presented two faces: one superficial and turned towards the authorities; the other, private and profound, turned towards the inside and ruling, almost in a clandestine way, the life of the community.

Religion still rules the rhythm of private, family and community life and still appears to condone most of the discriminatory practices in terms of gender: the control by men over women's social life, women's consignment to the home and to housework, forced marriages, domestic violence, and the exclusion of women from inheritance. The patriarchal traditions seem to possess legitimacy from both culture and the religion.

A reassessment of religious principles and practices regarding the rights of women, notably the right of girls to education, seems indispensable. It can only take place if the religious actors and the women themselves become involved and cooperate with other social actors and with experts in Islamic law.





# CONCLUSIONS

**A series of conclusions have been drawn from the research, and they have been used as a basis for the formulation of recommendations.**

1. Dilapidated schools and the frustration of teachers. In addition to the dilapidated school buildings, the lack of sanitation and hygiene and the shortage of adequate educational materials and teaching tools, the core problem is the frustration the teachers feel as a result of their depreciated social position and their poor standard of living. An important effort should be made to improve the social and economic standing of teachers.
2. The relevance of the gender issue and gender training. The focus group discussions conducted with the directors, teachers and pupils (girls and boys) in the four schools selected for the survey highlighted the relevance of the gender issue in the decisions of parents to accept or impose a halt in the education of their daughters. They also demonstrated the significant presence of gender stereotyping among adolescent girls and boys who were still in school or who had dropped out of school. The discussions indicated that more study must be undertaken on gender relations in the context of education. The school, the family and the community must be the main targets, but society as a whole needs to become more aware of the negative implications of many widely accepted behaviours and traditional practices that are particularly unequal in terms of gender. There is a huge need for gender training among all actors in education: teachers, pupils, drop-outs, parents, and community and religious leaders. The tools that teachers and trainers will need to promote gender equality in education must be provided.
3. An awareness campaign. Most parents did not feel their daughters had to stay on in school, but they wanted their sons to reach higher education. Thus, it seems necessary to launch an information campaign to convince parents that girls should also be able to continue on in school and enter higher education if they so wish. Such a campaign should be accompanied by training seminars or workshops at the community level, particularly in poor districts where the number of girl drop-outs is high.
4. Help young girls break out of their isolation. Isolation in the household and confinement in the restrictive social environment of families and a few neighbours are particularly damaging for the development of personality and intellect among children and adolescents. Girls caught in this situation should be assisted in gaining more information about society at large. Outings to theatres or concerts, meetings to play games with girls from other districts and other activities with a cultural or educational dimension might be organized.
5. Alternative paths to education. The survey showed that many girls were taking lessons given by a bihautun. These girls were following language and religious literature classes and were also learning sewing and embroidery. Social actors in education should not ignore this alternative, private path to schooling. It should be examined and evaluated as a possible route to or model for diversification in education and the development for girls of vocational or professional training, as well as broader, more practical general knowledge. The knowledge and skills of community members could be tapped to offer training to teenagers. The existence of alternative, locally based schools could help mobilize communities in favour of better education for girls. Such community linkages could represent a new path towards the social integration of girls. Absence from school need not mean absence from education.
6. School equivalency and job training. The survey found that almost all the girls who had stopped going to school at an early age liked school and wanted to go back. One of the actions that could therefore be envisaged would be to accept them at school within the framework of an alternative programme specifically tailored for girls who are too old for the grades corresponding to their level. Most of the girls expressed the desire to prepare for a job. Local schools could thus also provide vocational training adapted to the wishes of the girls and the job market. This might attract some of the girls who have left school,

as well as help retain girls who are now in school, but who are thinking about leaving.

7. Adapting compulsory education. The economic difficulties of the population and the lack of a meaningful link between the job market and the courses taught in schools should be addressed. Not all pupils wish to undertake university studies, and many want to start working as soon as possible. A strategy of action can be developed in cooperation with the departments of education, health, and social protection and employment, with professional organizations and with NGOs in order to promote a new, additional type of school education based on fresh methods and subjects that are useful for the learning of a trade.

Compulsory education can be adapted along two axes in order to respond to the urgent needs of the population during this difficult phase of the

transition. One axis would involve the supply of extra resources, capacity and equipment to schools so they can be used to carry out additional, special programmes that are targeted at adolescents who do not wish to continue courses included in the general curriculum. The other axis would focus on vocational training that reflects a balance between the demands of adolescents and the demands of the regional and national job markets in foreign languages, small business administration and management, marketing and communication, various crafts and so on. This solution presents the advantage of helping to draw girls, who are more likely to stop attending school, from isolation within the domestic space and from early marriages. It would maintain the integration of girls in school and in the social life of other children or teenagers of their age, while allowing them to receive education and professional training.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## A. The Reevaluation and Protection of Teachers and Schools

1. Establish an efficient administrative mechanism for more effective communication and coordination among schools, local authorities and communities for the school registration of all school-age children.
2. In consultation with the Ministry of Education and donor agencies, provide uniforms to schools, at least in the most vulnerable areas, in order to reduce the tensions among children over issues of clothing. There should be no cost for the uniforms of the children in the poorest families. Children should be consulted about uniform design and colour.
3. Through the media and other public forums, improve the image of teachers.
4. Support teachers through non-monetary benefits for them or their families, such as free public services (gas, electricity, health care) and access to subsidized housing in urban areas or farmland in rural areas. (This could be accomplished within the framework of land reform.)
5. Supply training for primary school teachers in more than one or two subjects; reorganize classes with more pupils per class, and reduce the number of teachers so that the education system can provide teachers with more income and better working conditions.
6. Create a national programme for the provision of training in order to update the knowledge and teaching methods of teachers and provide them with the working tools necessary to implement an interactive, participatory approach in the classroom.
7. Establish an intensive training programme involving a system of university grants so as to attract young people into teaching, particularly in subject areas in which the lack of teachers is the most significant.

8. Augment school budgets in poor areas in order to create better physical conditions, health care and sanitation in schools through a special temporary tax on the activities and enterprises that generate considerable profits and on wealthier individuals so as to support the rebuilding of the education sector. This effort could also involve the use of the media and other public forums to increase the sense of responsibility of the public and to attract local donors. Private sector actors who participate in this national campaign could receive tax benefits and other public assistance in their business activities.

## B. Awareness-Raising among Communities and throughout Society

1. With the help of community leaders and local authorities, mobilize districts in favour of the education of girls and carry out seminars and other awareness-raising activities among families in the locations where school drop-out rates are high. These activities should focus on helping parents to understand the nature of the transition and the multidimensional role of education. The activities must involve the active participation of communities. The main goal is to assist adults in understanding and developing a sense of responsibility towards schools so that adults will alter their approach and, gradually, their attitudes towards their children's education.
2. Identify an appropriate group of motivated press, radio and television journalists and provide them with background and regular information on the sociocultural problems at stake in the education of girls in Tajikistan. Negotiate with the state media to obtain air time on relevant themes, information-sharing and debates on the education of girls.
3. Organize periodic workshops with adolescents, parents and local community actors in order to identify the areas of alternative or vocational training that are needed and thereby facilitate the social and professional integration of adolescents.

4. Community groups, especially religious networks, should be encouraged to take part directly in advocacy for the education of girls. The constitution of networks among community and religious leaders for such education should be promoted. Building on participants in relevant training programmes, an appropriate training initiative should be provided for religious leaders. Mullahs and the bihatun will have to be drawn out of their isolation within traditional spaces of communication, such as mosques and the religious community, and given access to new forums, including the media and cultural and vocational activities in schools. It is essential to gain the support of the Government and concerned public officials in this effort.

## C. Drawing Girls out of Isolation

1. Begin to open up the prospects and the scope for interactions among pupils by promoting fresh environments where youngsters can meet. Young girls who have dropped out of school should be at the centre of such a project. Small groups of girls could be specially selected from poorer districts. They would be familiarized with the project and then would be sent around to participate in activities outside their districts and in other regions of Tajikistan. Cultural and leisure activities could be interspersed with training activities and discussion groups on gender equality, the rights of children and other themes of interest to the young people.

2. To open up young minds to the outside world, one must start with the immediate community. However, it is also important to expand this effort to include, as far as possible, contacts with young people of other cultures and countries. One might envisage study trips to neighbouring countries that have chosen different models for the education of girls. This would include countries outside the former Soviet Union, such as Iran and Turkey, which are obvious choices on the basis of geographical and cultural ties.

## D. Alternative Education for Girls who Drop out of School or Risk Doing so

1. Survey adolescents and evaluate their needs in terms of vocational training. The survey population should include young people, notably girls, who have

already been excluded from school, children with disabilities and the vulnerable.

2. With the help of teachers, researchers, public officials, economic actors, other national experts, community volunteers and groups of children, design an alternative educational system centred on the cultural and professional aspirations of pupils. This alternative system must be flexible enough to be adapted to specific contexts, but it must also be appropriate to existing educational structures. It might even involve a mobile component that could be used to respond to special needs within particular communities.

3. Maintain flexible links between alternative initiatives in education and the formal education system so that neither type of institution can become exclusive. Adapt the structure of the schools so that they can include alternative components and, likewise, establish flexible curricula and teacher agendas so as to allow pupils who are following alternative pathways to attend classes in the formal system and obtain credit for these classes in alternative or vocational courses of study.

## E. Support Poor Families

1. In collaboration with teachers, carry out a survey to determine the number of girls who have left school before the age of 16 and identify the specific difficulties of their families. As such a survey cannot be expected to cover the entire country, it would focus on deprived areas and areas which exhibit the highest drop-out rates. The results should be used in the development of community strategies to lower drop-out rates, especially among girls.

2. With the assistance of local authorities, the Government, NGOs and international organizations, locate appropriate material, financial and technical resources for the implementation of long-term development projects to ensure the economic survival of vulnerable families and enhance their well-being. Encourage the families to create or join associations so that they can work together to establish small agricultural, industrial, or handicraft businesses in poor areas that can also employ young people who have completed alternative education and vocational training programmes.

3. Implement a programme to support vulnerable families that is adapted to each community. The programme should target extremely poor, unemployed, or single-parent families, the families of disabled children, and orphans. It should provide active financial support, but also counselling and social guidance.

## **F. Human Rights, Gender Issues and Violence against Children and Women**

1. Constitute a group of national and regional experts, including social activists, lawyers, judges and members of parliament, to examine laws dealing with education in order to ascertain how they might be amended or otherwise revised so as to encompass a gender perspective and address, for example, violence against children and women. If necessary, proposals and recommendations for changes or amendments to the laws should be debated publicly before being submitted in Parliament or to the Government. Special attention should be paid to laws on the minimum age of marriage (lowered since independence), forced marriage, early marriage, child labour and violence against children.

2. Develop a gender and human rights education programme to help make pupils, parents and teachers more aware about the symptoms and effects of discriminatory practices in education, particularly the education of girls, and provide them with the tools they require to change their attitudes and their behaviour. The programme might involve sessions among small groups, role playing, information-sharing, roundtable discussions and debates on the socialization of girls (and boys) in primary, lower secondary and secondary schools and on the attitudes of boys and men towards girls and women. The vile consequences of gender discrimination should be analysed in a gender and human rights perspective and from the point of view of the national social, political and economic development process. The vicious circle that leads, generation after generation, to the reproduction of inequality between girls and boys should be highlighted.

3. Revise school textbooks at all levels of the education system from a gender perspective so as to introduce a focus on gender equality. The focus should be supported by texts drawn from the country's literary and historical heritage, as well as from modern

sources. The educational material on gender issues should be playful for children and attractive for teenagers. It should likewise be sensitive to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country. The related teaching would be more effective if it could be accompanied within the school by group activities such as art, musical and theatrical projects that promote the values of equality and cooperation between girls and boys. These projects should take into consideration the ages, economic backgrounds and urban or rural sociocultural environments of the pupils.

4. The development of education that is gender sensitive is a delicate process. This process should be conducted in collaboration with experts under the supervision of the Government (the Ministries of Education, Health and Culture) gradually and thoughtfully. One might start with a small number of schools selected because they reflect the range of sociocultural diversity in the country. Before attempting an expansion of the initiative, evaluations should be carried out to test the effectiveness of the relevant teacher training, the educational impacts among the pupils and the changes in awareness among families.

5. Design and implement a regional gender-sensitive education programme with the support of the deputy prime minister and relevant Government experts in the departments of education, health, social protection and employment, and industry and commerce. The programme would be carried out in schools and community centres and through local and regional media outlets.

## **G. Better Coordination**

1. As a follow-up on the findings of the Qualitative Survey on Issues in Girls Education, fresh initiatives should be undertaken to answer crucial questions that arise. The impact of these initiatives would be much more significant if they were to be coordinated and articulated within a coherent, planned approach based on a common strategy.

2. UNICEF should communicate to other international organizations the conclusions of the survey and take the lead in the coordination of programmes on gender and education. Strategic reflection groups and training seminars should be organized so that project managers can acquire a better understanding

of the linkages among gender, socialization and the education of girls in Tajikistan. Additional seminars in the Tajik and Russian languages could be offered to help train project managers of national NGOs, particularly in appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches to issues in gender and education.

3. The various projects focused on gender and education should be coordinated, and cooperation should be organized among the agencies involved, including the United Nations, NGOs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Protection and Labour in order to facilitate the exchange of data and information and prepare a common strategy for action.

4. Tajikistan is a highly centralized country. The support of central government officials is essential if projects and programmes are to be carried out in the regions. However, local authorities, including state women's committees and departments of education, health, and social protection and employment, can be extremely helpful, as they are often much closer to the population in communities. Experience has shown that, if they have the support of the central Government and if they are convinced of the utility of the programme for their region or district, these local authorities can greatly facilitate contacts with local NGOs and community leaders.

