Gulnara Kurmanova has a PhD in Biological Sciences and is a researcher with over thirty years of experience. She specializes in the qualitative research of different social groups. Since 1996, Gulnara has been an active participant in the gender movement, and is a founder of a non-governmental organization for the development of the most vulnerable groups of women. She is an international expert who has undertaken more than twenty field studies in the countries of Central Asia, Russia and Lithuania for UNDP, UNAIDS and USAID. She is also an ex-member of the Programme Coordination Board of UNAIDS and the GFATM1 Board. Gulnara has authored several books devoted to the development of civil society, and the guide for teachers, “Healthy Lifestyle”, which has been translated into the Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages. Since 2013, she has been actively engaged in the development of rural areas.

Kazakhstan is a country in the heart of Central Asia; more than 90 percent of the country is mountainous terrain. There are 0.25 ha of arable land per person, of which 0.18 ha require irrigation. The total area of arable land, including irrigated land, is decreasing, despite measures taken by the government. Pasture land accounts for about 10 million hectares and pastures are managed by local pasture committees.

The permanent population of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2016 was six million people. Two-thirds (66 percent) of the permanent population lives in rural areas. Thirty-three percent of the total population are children and adolescents. Women are better represented in the older age population, because their life expectancy is higher than men's.

In 2015, GDP per capita in Kyrgyzstan was 2 400 United States dollars (USD). The average salary is about 200 USD per month. In 2015, the minimum subsistence level amounted to 5 212.95 KGS (approximately 70 USD). In 2014, 37 percent of the population lived below the poverty line; approximately 70 percent of this group resided in rural areas.

Kyrgyzstan has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.353. This means that the country has experienced a loss of potential human development equivalent to 35 percent, owing to disparities between female and male achievements, empowerment and economic status. However, Kyrgyzstan has more positive outcomes in particular dimensions (notably women’s political participation and education levels), compared with the average for the European and Central Asian regions combined.

Advanced gender legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic is based on the constitutional provision of equality of rights and opportunities for women and men and non-discrimination on the grounds of sex. It involves the rule of international law in national legislation and the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, “On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women” (2008). At the legislative level, women have the same rights as men in relation to land ownership and ownership of other agricultural resources.

1 The Global Fund to accelerate the end of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.
2 Acknowledgements: The author expresses her gratitude to Mrs Alma Usbekova, Communication officer, Central Asian Hub of Mountain Partnership, for her assistance in the identification of information sources and support in communication with experts.
4 Kerven et al., 2011, p. 41.
5 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015a, pp. 6–7.
6 Data available at Wikipedia, no date.
7 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2016.
8 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015c, p. 1.
De facto, however, the distribution of power by gender is quite asymmetrical. For example, women are less well represented as members of local Councils (see Figure 1). In general, it can also be argued that the traditional role of women is more pronounced in rural areas than it is in the city.

Women in rural communities also have little involvement in the development and implementation of programmes that affect them, and are not always able to openly voice their needs in order to work cohesively and strategically. Greater levels of support are needed in these areas.

Women and men in Kyrgyzstan have equal rights to work. The proportion of women within the economically active population is high, but the gap between male and female participation is significant (56 percent of women compared with 79.5 percent of men). In 2014, the share of men employed in agriculture was larger than the share of women (55.5 percent and 45.5 percent respectively), but the share of employed women has been increasing. External labour migration makes a substantial contribution to the country’s economy, yet simultaneously, it can result in a number of adverse social consequences. However, there is no robust quantitative data, disaggregated by sex, for rural areas.

At the same time, rural women often lack the opportunity to engage in productive paid work because their reproductive and domestic responsibilities restrict access to the necessary education and limit their time. On average, women spend 4.2 hours per day on household chores, which accounts for 17.4 percent of their time, compared with 5.7 percent of men’s time.

Access to kindergartens frees up time for mothers and reduces the amount of time that they spend on unpaid work. Despite the successes achieved in recent years in Kyrgyzstan in the promotion of pre-school education, only 29 percent of children have access to kindergartens; in rural areas the coverage is disproportionately smaller and is less than five percent (based on data available for 2010). These factors mean that rural women are extremely dependent on their husbands who are employed in paid labour.

The privatization of land has provided the rural population with an opportunity to generate income. This is essential to poverty reduction. However, the share of women owning land, vehicles and agricultural machinery, is substantially lower than the share of men. Men and women have different levels of access to economic resources; and women have fewer opportunities to do business and

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10 Figure 1 has been created by the author using data from FAO, 2016, pp. 54–55.
11 Ibid, p.10.
12 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015a, p. 61.
14 FAO, 2016, p. 32.
15 Benhard, 2016.
16 Tursunov, 2012.
to manage their family’s budget. According to research conducted at the local level, 64 percent of men and only five percent of women in Kyrgyzstan own land (see Figure 2).\textsuperscript{17} In relation to other important agricultural inputs, vehicles are owned by 36 percent of men and one percent of women; and agricultural machinery is owned by 20 percent of men and 1.6 percent of women.\textsuperscript{18} In 2015, women headed less than one-fifth (19.4 percent) of all peasant farms in the country.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Figure 2. Agricultural inputs and land ownership in rural households (%)\textsuperscript{20}}

In agriculture, unlike other sectors of Kyrgyzstan’s economy, women’s wages are almost equal to those of men, and in some years even exceeded them. For example, in 2014, the average monthly nominal wage of women was 6,193 KGS (approximately 90 USD), while the average wage of men was 6,074 KGS.\textsuperscript{21} This may be due to overall low wage levels, but further analysis of the reasons for this phenomenon is needed.

Because of unequal employment in paid activities, husbands make a larger contribution to the family budget than wives (see Figure 3).\textsuperscript{22} Accordingly, men more frequently make the decisions on distribution of income (see Figure 4).\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Figure 3. Contribution to the family budget by family members in rural households (%)\textsuperscript{24}}

\begin{itemize}
\item These data reflect the results of local studies, and may not be representative of the whole country.
\item GEF & UNDP, 2011, p. 17.
\item 74,531 peasant farms were headed by women, and 309,787 by men (National Statistical Committee, 2015d, p. 66).
\item GEF & UNDP, 2011, p. 17.
\item FAO, 2016, p. 59.
\item GEF & UNDP, 2011, p. 18.
\item Ibid, p. 19.
\item Ibid, p. 18.
\end{itemize}
In the Kyrgyz Republic, the right to housing is a constitutional right, equally applicable to women and men, and in a post-Soviet context, it is traditionally perceived as a basic social good. In practice, in rural areas, 66 percent of family houses are owned by men and only six percent by wives (see Figure 5). This places women in a particularly vulnerable position.

The main social resources in Kyrgyzstan are heating, electricity, water, sanitary infrastructure and information. Access to these resources is considered so important that it formed one of the main topics in a CEDAW Alternative report (2014). Women are affected more acutely by the lack of access to water than men, due to their physiological characteristics, and because of the need to carry out household chores, for example, cooking, cleaning, laundry and bathing children. The majority of rural households in Kyrgyzstan (81.8 percent) have access to improved drinking water sources. In general, however, access to these resources remains limited, which leads to an additional increase in the time that women spend on unpaid domestic labour, and in the transmission of diseases, primarily intestinal. Inadequate access to information is primarily associated with the inaccessibility of the Internet in rural areas. The impact of this on the status of women requires further study.

Although Kyrgyzstan is a poor country and can only provide its citizens with minimal social support, the structure of the social protection system has been preserved from the Soviet era and is still functional. An independent study shows that 45.3 percent of respondents in rural areas are covered by social protection, primarily in the form of pensions and children’s benefits.

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26 Ibid, p.15.
27 Ibid.
29 FAO, 2016, p.22.
Maternity payments have a clear focus on the alleviation of gender differences. The average size of benefits in relation to maternity leave for working women is 7 660 KGS (about 100 USD) for women engaged in entrepreneurial activities; for members of peasant farms and women having the official status of unemployed it is 3 500 KGS (about 50 USD).31

Women in Kyrgyzstan retire at 55 years of age, which is five years earlier than men. The proportion of pensioners in the total population of Kyrgyzstan for the last five years is around 11 percent. The share of women receiving a pension is 65 percent, and the share of men is 35 percent. However, the average size of calculated pension is higher for men than for women (4 553 and 4 222 KGS, respectively).32 The gender dimension of pension provision in rural areas remains unclear, but most probably reflects the situation in the country as a whole.

**Nutrition and food security**

The country has fulfilled and even exceeded its obligations to reduce poverty in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, and, although the number of undernourished is declining at a slower pace33, an overall improvement is evident. At the same time, a number of indicators on poor nutrition and the prevalence of diseases and conditions associated with poor nutrition, reveal clear gender differences. For example, women are more likely to be overweight (34.6 percent of women and 30.2 percent of men) and obese (11.1 percent of women and 8 percent of men).34 Rural women are also more likely to be overweight than urban women (38 and 32 percent, respectively).35

Some field observations demonstrate the prevalent rural practice of sending goods produced within the household (particularly milk) to market. This means that the necessary products are often absent at the family table.36 In the available data, the economy at household level and cultural patterns of nutrition are only superficially described and not sufficiently explored. Moreover, a paucity of statistics incorporating the respective indicators along the axes of “gender” and “city–village”, means that an overall picture of the nutritional status of women in rural areas is unavailable. FAO can play a critical role in addressing this information gap.

In conclusion, the following recommendations can be provided:

- **Kyrgyzstan needs more robust data reflecting the comparative advantages and gaps in promoting good living conditions and the development of women and men.** Governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, with the support of international organizations, could engage more systematically in the development of a national system of gender indicators for rural areas, harmonized with existing national and international systems, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. These need to be adopted and utilized by the National Statistical Committee.

- **Rural women and men in Kyrgyzstan should not merely be the subjects of research and interventions: they should participate in all decision-making processes that affect them.** Communities, local authorities, civil society and the government could significantly increase the participation of women and men in determining their own future at all levels, from family and local self-government to the highest levels of governance.

- **Studies on nutrition and food security in rural areas do not yet provide a clear picture of the situation, and therefore do not help us to understand what actions are needed and which stakeholders are required to improve it.** FAO could take the lead in supporting this research and in encouraging local researchers to contribute to an improved understanding of the needs of women and men in rural areas.

- **Recent trends in, for example, external migration, the changes in external and domestic markets and the new structure of the field of information – and their impact on women and men in Kyrgyzstan – are observable, but poorly understood.** The research community, with the support of international organizations, could carefully study these trends, in order to assess their impact on gender differences in rural areas. Knowledge about basic facts, estimates and forecasts in relation to gender differences in rural areas in Kyrgyzstan is restricted to a small network of experts from government and non-governmental organizations. It would benefit the whole society if the mass media (in particular, the mass media available in rural areas) expands its coverage of gender issues, using real-life examples and language that is comprehensible to members of the rural population.

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31 Programme of development of social protection of population in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015–2017, p.15.
33 FAO, 2016, p.22.
34 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015d, p. 80; see also, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & MEASURE DHS, 2013, pp. 206–207.
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