

# Chapter 1. Tajikistan in Transition

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At Independence Tajikistan was the poorest of the republics of the former Soviet Union (FSU). Since then it has suffered not only from the impact of political, economic and social transition from a planned to market-led economy and the withdrawal subsidies from Moscow following the breakup of the FSU, but it has also experienced a civil war in 1992-93, followed by a long period of civil unrest. Women have been adversely affected by the lack of personal security following the war, and the economic impoverishment and declining political participation accompanying both war and transition. The transition has severely affected industries that employed a high proportion of women (textiles, manufacturing, agriculture), causing them to be among the first to lose their jobs. Other sectors where women predominate, such as health and education, are those where wages have been least likely to have been paid. The collapse of the state social safety net has exacerbated the number of women and families living in poverty, while the loss of quotas guaranteeing equal representation in political and governmental bodies has increasingly kept them out of decision-making positions. Furthermore, women and girls are increasingly facing discrimination in access to education and health care services.

The human costs of conflict and transition have been high for almost everyone in Tajikistan. However unless care is taken, it is likely that women and children will bear a disproportionate burden of these costs.

## 1.1 The Inheritance

Tajikistan was the poorest of all the Soviet Republics, with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita half that in Kazakhstan and two thirds elsewhere in the region. Nevertheless, at independence Tajikistan, in common with its Central Asian neighbors, had relatively high human development indicators, reflecting the legacy of economic and social development achieved during the Soviet period.

Despite a low level of real GDP, the Human Development Index (HDI) for Tajikistan was 0.629, which is comparable to the 0.649 averaged by countries classified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as "medium" income countries (Table 1.1). Life expectancy at birth averaged 70 years—significantly above that enjoyed in Pakistan and exceeding levels in the other Central Asian republics (CARs), Iran, and Turkey. Literacy was almost universal and well above other countries with comparable levels of per capita income.

**Table 1.1 Human Development Indicators in Central Asia and Other Selected Countries, 1991**

	Urban Pop. (%) in 1992	Pop. Growth (p.a.)	Life Expectancy at Birth (yrs)	Adult Literacy Rate (%)	Real GDP per Capita (PPP\$)	UNDP Human Development Index
Kazakhstan	58	1.8	69.0	97.5	4,490	0.774
Kyrgyz Republic	38	2.3	68.0	97.0	3,683	0.685
Tajikistan	31	3.1	70.0	96.7	2,180	0.629
Turkmenistan	45	2.8	66.0	97.7	3,540	0.697
Uzbekistan	40	2.9	69.0	97.2	2,790	0.664
Afghanistan	19	1.8	42.9	31.6	700	0.208
Iran	58	3.3	66.6	56.0	4,670	0.672
Pakistan	33	2.9	58.3	36.4	1,970	0.393
Medium HDI	-	-	68.0	80.4	3,420	0.649
Low HDI	-	-	55.8	47.4	1,170	0.355

Source: Table 1.1 Falkingham et al (1997).

GDP- gross domestic product, HDI - human development index, UNDP - United Nations Development Programme.

On the other hand Tajikistan at independence also shared some characteristics that are typically associated with a lower level of development. Levels of urbanization were low and similar to those in Pakistan. Over two thirds of the population continue to live in rural areas. Rates of population growth were also very high—the result of continuing high fertility combined with low mortality. Despite sharing some demographic features with its south Asian neighbors, the status of Tajik women was relatively good. Life expectancy at birth for women exceeded that for men by over five years, and women constituted 40 percent of the labour force and made up over a third of students in higher education (Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2 Gender Differentials in Key Indicators, 1991**

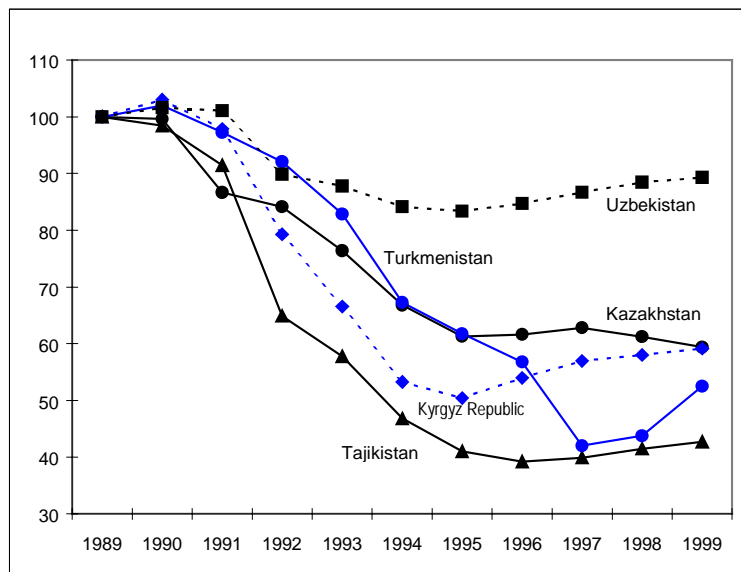
	Men	Women
Life expectancy	67.6	73.2
Age at first marriage	24.5	22.1
Share of economically active population (%)	60.0	40.0
Share of all students enrolled in tertiary education (%)	66.0	34.0

Source: UNDP 2000.

## 1.2 Trends Since 1991

Tajikistan inherited high levels of human capital. Education and health care were free and there were extensive social services and transfers. However, Tajikistan also inherited economic structures that were heavily dependent on Soviet supply and trade networks. Transport and other infrastructure was designed with the view to meeting the needs of the Union and not those of the local economy. For example, Tajikistan was home to one the largest aluminium smelters in the FSU. Russia was the main source of inputs and the main market for outputs. High social spending was also supported by large budgetary transfers from Moscow. It is estimated that in the late 1980s such transfers were worth as much as 40 percent of GDP. With the interruption of inter-republican trade and the cessation of transfers immediately following independence, GDP in Tajikistan declined precipitously and inflation soared (Figure 1.1).

**Figure 1.1 Trends in Real GDP in Central Asia**  
(1989=100)



Source: Falkingham, 1999.

The decline in output in Tajikistan has been much sharper and more sustained than elsewhere in the region. By 1996 it was estimated that real GDP was worth less than 40 percent of its value in 1989. Although there have been recent signs of a recovery, with positive growth for the second year running, GDP per capita continues to decline as the growth in the population outstrips economic growth. In 1998 GDP per capita was estimated to be just \$215.4 (UNDP 2000), which makes Tajikistan one of the poorest countries in the world.

The ability of the Government to respond to depressed economic activity by simply increasing public expenditure has been severely constrained by the loss of Union budget

transfers, the erosion of the tax base associated with declining output, the interruption of economic activity due to the war, and the growth in informal sector economic activity. In fact, the fall in GDP has been accompanied by a growing *incapacity* of governments throughout the region to mobilize resources. As a result, central government expenditures as a share of GDP have fallen sharply. Between 1991 and 1998 government expenditures as a share of GDP in Tajikistan fell by nearly two thirds, from 50 percent to under 16 percent (Table 1.3). This has reduced the Government's ability to protect vulnerable people and to provide basic services such as health and education. It is estimated that public expenditures on education and health are less than a *quarter* of pre-independence levels in real terms. As a percentage of GDP, spending on health (1 percent) and education (2.1 percent) in 1998 is lower than in any of the other CARs.

**Table 1.3 Selected Macroeconomic Indicators, Tajikistan 1991-1999**

Year	Percent Change in Real GDP	Annual Average % Change in CPI	Central Government Expenditure (% GDP)
1991	-7.1	112	49.6
1992	-29.0	1,157	65.7
1993	-11.0	2,195	60.7
1994	-18.9	350	61.4
1995	-12.5	609	29.4
1996	-4.4	418	17.9
1997	1.7	88	17.0
1998	5.3	43	15.8
1999	5.0 (est)	30 (est.)	na

Source: EBRD 1999.

### 1.3 The Human Costs of Transition in Tajikistan

The high human cost of economic transition, exacerbated by civil conflict and natural disasters, is reflected in the trends in Table 1.4. The HDI has slumped from 0.629 in 1991 to 0.540 in 1998, with the result that Tajikistan is now ranked 108<sup>th</sup> out of 174 countries. The decline in the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) between 1995 and 1998 also indicates that the *relative* position of women in Tajikistan has deteriorated. The following chapters examine how political, economic and social transition, and civil war, have affected women—both in the private and public spheres.

**Table 1.4 Recent Trends in Human Development**

	1995	1996	1997	1998
HDI	0.555	0.537	0.528	0.540
Life expectancy	0.721	0.707	0.688	0.723
Adult literacy ratio	na	0.651	0.651	0.651
Enrolment ratio	na	0.226	0.208	0.226
Knowledge index	0.911	0.877	0.859	0.877
Real GDP	0.013	0.036	0.025	0.025
GDI	0.571			0.534

Source: UNDP 2000.

GDI - Gender-related Development Index (GDI),

GDP - gross domestic product, HDI - Human Development

Index, na - not available.

Changes in women's productive and reproductive roles are intimately inter-related and the distinction between the public and private spheres is often ambiguous. However, for ease of exposition, Chapter 2 examines the impact of transition on the changing role of women within the family and the household, while Chapter 3 discusses recent changes in women's political and social representation and participation in the labor market. Violence against women is addressed under the private sphere in Chapter 2, although violence during the civil war is most obviously outside of the domestic sphere. Similarly the gender division of unpaid labor encompasses both private and public domains, but is discussed within the wider context of the intensification of women's workloads in Chapter 3. Gender roles are in part a function of the differential capabilities of men and women. Thus, Chapter 4 investigates the gender implications of recent trends in the social sectors of education and health. Chapter 5 then draws together the evidence from the previous chapters to examine recent trends in poverty and living standards in Tajikistan. Finally, Chapter 6 presents recommendations and suggestions on how the gender concerns raised in the preceding discussions can be addressed.