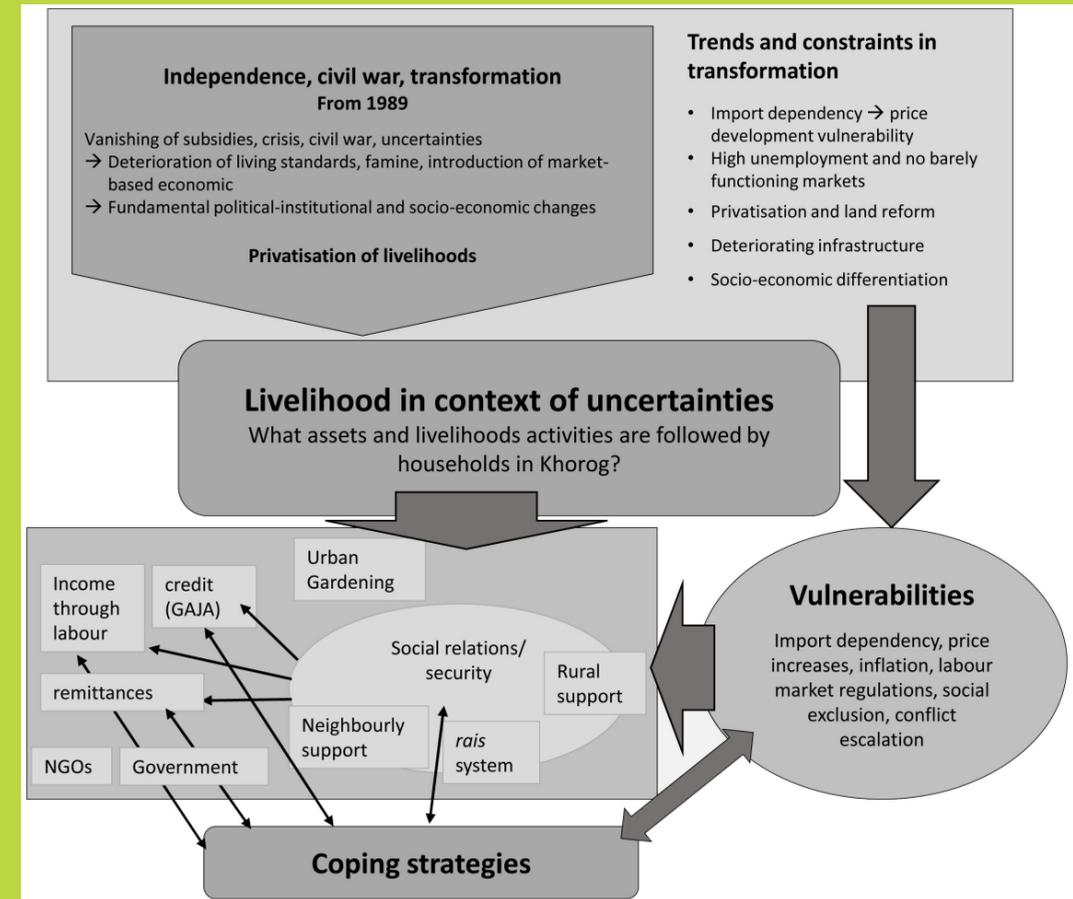


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Urban Livelihood Systems in Khorog



Lars-Hendrik Hertlein

Centre for Development Studies (ZELF)
 Institute of Geographical Sciences
 Freie Universität Berlin

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Prof. Dr. Hermann Kreutzmann

Contact

Centre for Development Studies (ZELF)

Institute of Geographical Sciences

Freie Universität Berlin

Malteserstr. 74-100

D-12249 Berlin

h.kreutzmann@fu-berlin.de

Tel: +49 - 30 - 838 70224

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Lars-Hendrik Hertlein

Centre for Development Studies (ZELF)
Institute of Geographical Sciences
Freie Universität Berlin

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1 Introduction – Livelihood research and transformation

The transformation of post-socialist societies after the breakdown of the Soviet Union is connected to fundamental changes not only in the political-economic macro sphere but also in the way households on a micro level do their daily businesses and secure a livelihood. These fundamental changes particularly affect the high-mountain societies in Gorno-Badakhshan and its urban centre Khorog in Tajikistan. This region, more than other post-Soviet regions, was hit hard from the dissolution and fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the resulting perishing of support and external supply from Moscow. In the following years, Tajikistan and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) experienced a sudden decline of living conditions as well as a civil war. These crises show the vulnerabilities of post-Soviet societies as well as the specific vulnerabilities of high mountain societies such as the in Gorno-Badakhshan (see Herbers 2001: 367; Kanji 2002: 138; Kreutzmann 2002: 31). Here, different challenges and context factors come into play. The relative isolation and inaccessibility are both consequence of the physical environment characterized by high mountains and adverse conditions as well as the deterioration of infrastructure following the breakdown of the Soviet Union (Herbers 2001: 368, 371). At the same time, the current import dependency is both consequence of limited arable agricultural land as well as consequence of the Soviet style agricultural politic that led to a decline in self-sufficiency. The severe deterioration of living conditions was only possible through the previous promotion of living conditions on the back of the Soviet style development project (Kreutzmann 2002: 40f.).

In this thesis, thus, I will deal with the broader topics of geographical development research of transformation and high-mountain societies. Thereby, normative assumptions on transformation (see Herbers 2006: 13) and simplistic approaches to high-mountain regions will be considered accordingly, as “the scope for understanding development trends in high-mountain regions has to be expanded beyond the linkages between population growth and potential food production by addressing social processes and politico-economic interrelationships” (Kreutzmann 2006: 51).

The ongoing transformation from the Soviet Union into a post-socialist sovereign state that is organised by a market economy also means the privatisation of livelihoods. While livelihoods under the Soviet regime were mostly taken care for, in a market style economy the organisation and maintaining of livelihoods is the responsibility of the individual (Maertens 2017: 160). How households deal with this aspect of transition in an environment characterised by challenges and limitations will be the central topic of this master thesis.

A livelihood framework will be used to identify and analyse the various factors determining the living standards of a household (Robinson & Guenther 2017: 360). Livelihood studies focus on how households securing their livelihoods and which ways, assets and strategies they use to survive in an environment characterised by difficulties and challenges such as the post-socialist context. An advantage of livelihood studies is the focus on the individual agency of households and its portrayal of households as active actors that are not merely victims of their environment but are able to use their available resources in an active way to improve or secure their living conditions. Livelihood studies, thus, are a suitable instrument for analysing the complex worlds of the everyday life of local actors. Nevertheless, the critics to conventional approaches on livelihood research rightfully point out the shortcomings of such approaches. A too strong focus on the micro world of individual households is likely to forget the structural historical, political and economic embeddedness that determines the livelihood opportunities of the individual. Likewise, the focus on the decisions and opportunities of the individual household takes only the responsibility of the individual into account and overlooks power relations and institutions (see de Haan & Zoomers 2003; Scoones 2009; Dame 2015).

In this master thesis, approaches to livelihood studies will be included that try to overcome the shortcomings of too static approaches to livelihoods and aims to examine livelihoods in a transformative society that are embedded in specific contexts and show trends of multi locality, diversification and the aspects of social relations that are key in securing livelihoods. It is intended to consider the agency of households as well as the structural factors which act as limiting context factors.

The leading research question is thus: How do local actors organise their livelihoods in context of limiting structural factors and the ongoing transformation which is characterised by uncertainty?

The hypothesis that are derived from the theoretical approaches and lay out the basis for the framework of analyses and the subordinate questions are as follows: (I) Livelihoods of local actors are embedded and only to be understood in the broader contexts of transformation and the structural changes it brings with it in all dimensions. Livelihood activities will reflect the structural uncertainties that are characterising for the transformation process. (II) The livelihood approach is fruitful to analyse the local actor's ways of managing their livelihoods and coping with challenges. Therefore, it has to consider structural embeddedness of local livelihoods and emerging trends of livelihoods as multi-locality and diversification. (III) Household's livelihoods are vulnerable to risks and stress factors, often resulting from the transformative context, to different extents based on their asset equipment. Especially social capital and local, context-specific forms and institutional that account for social security is a key aspect for livelihoods in Khorog. Social exclusion, thus, is a major vulnerability for livelihoods. (See also Figure 21 on page 11 for an illustration of the analytical framework.)

The subordinate questions derived from this include:

- (I) What are the (limiting) structural factors affecting local livelihoods in context of transformation?
- (II) What are the most important livelihood assets of household in Khorog? How are the trends of livelihoods reflected in local livelihood activities?
- (III) What risks and vulnerabilities do different household groups face? Which role does social security take in organising livelihoods in Khorog? How are local actors dealing with stresses and shocks resulting from vulnerabilities (coping mechanisms)?

To discuss these questions, this master thesis will be structured as follows. In the first part, the understanding of transformation is discussed to clarify the theoretical frame for the broader contextual process that affects livelihoods of people living in post-Soviet states. Building upon this, as already implied, the livelihood approach with its advantages, shortcomings and emerging trends is discussed to highlight how this approach is useful to illuminate life realities and conditions of local actors while also reflecting the embeddedness in broader structures as well as new trends of livelihoods in a globalising world (section 2). Following the research methodology (section 3), the contextual factors of today's livelihood situation will be outlined. This includes a historical perspective and gives face to the constraints and developments regarding the physical-geographical, political and socio-economic context factors (section 4). Subsequently, the empirical results of the field research regarding the actual ways of how households in Khorog manage their livelihoods will be presented (section 5.1). Following this, the empirical findings will be set in context to the outlined theoretical approaches and their implications for livelihood activities of households in Khorog in a transformative environment. This includes issues on social security, the importance of diversification and labour migration, main vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms, as well as a discussion on the ability of households to actively and strategically plan their livelihoods (section 5.2). While the field research can only offer a snapshot of livelihood systems in Khorog, in the final part the livelihood trajectories of different households will be contextualised in the larger transformation process, before the research results and their significance for questions of the geographical development research in regard to post-

Soviet transformation processes and high-mountain societies will be discussed in the conclusion (section 6).

2 Theoretical approaches

In the following chapter, relevant theoretical approaches for livelihood research in a post-socialist, transformative society are examined. Besides outlining the understanding of transformation, and its related uncertainties, this includes a discussion of the (traditional) livelihood research, its shortcoming and challenges as well as theoretical trends and fruitful aspects of livelihood research that might help to construct a clearer, more comprehensive picture of the complex and fluid livelihood systems of local actors in a transformative and challenging context as in Khorog.

2.1 What does transformation mean – for livelihood research?

The far-reaching and fundamental changes for the political-institutional, economic and social life that followed the end of the Soviet Union are usually called transformation or transition. These transformation processes on the macro level are decisive for the conditions under which people organize their livelihoods on a micro level (Burawoy & Verdery 1999: 2). The question on this matter is, what does transformation or transition mean: Transformation or transition *to* what? A normative understanding of this question, often related only to the economic dimension of this process, assumes that transformation describes an adaptation process of the post-Soviet world with its planned economy to a democratic, liberal market economy and its institutions. This perspective on transformation implies a teleological view on a predetermined and catch-up development which would be temporarily limited until the goal is reached. This view entails a problematic modernization paradigm as it contains a pre-set, Eurocentric objective for development following a Western role model and it does not take into account the various dimensions of post-socialist transformation and transition¹ which affect all areas of society (Herbers 2006: 13; Maertens 2017: 162). As Maertens describes it, this perspective comes along with one-sided explanatory approaches:

“In a perspective, which takes such an endpoint for granted, transition is perceived as intervention, the outcome of which is both predetermined and unquestionable, while pre-Soviet cultural and/or religious resilience and/or Soviet legacies are held responsible for shortcomings or failures of economies and societies in transition” (2017: 162).

An alternative approach is an open-end understanding of transformation that does not imply an end-goal, but analyses the ongoing fundamental changes in all political, economic and social areas of society that happen simultaneously and can also be contradictory (Herbers 2006: 13). This perspective allows a more differentiated view on transition processes since it is not based on a priori formulated objectives of transformation (Dörre 2014: 137). Processes and changing structures and their implications on a local level are considered as open-ended and multi-directional processes which are structurally characterised by uncertainty and thus create uncertainty for local actors. Following Steimann, this approach “promoted a shift away from the previous macroeconomic focus towards the multi-level analysis, and particularly emphasized actor research at the micro level” (2011: 4).

Transformation, especially for people living in Tajikistan and Gorno-Badakhshan, is accompanied by the collapse of a stable political system, an economy that guaranteed jobs, social infrastructure and the security it warranted. People, generally, experienced it as a negative process that comes with uncertainty (Herbers 2006: 14). Uncertainty in this thesis is, following Steimann, essentially related to

¹ In the following, I will use the term transformation following Burawoy and Verdery who argue they “prefer the term *transformation*, which has fewer teleological resonances than *transition*” (1999: 14f.).

two types of uncertainty: Livelihood uncertainties, that “mainly refer to the generally unstable and unpredictable conditions in the economic sphere”, and social and political uncertainties that “relate to social developments (...) as well as to changes in political regime” (2011: 36). As Maertens argues, post-Soviet economic transformation led to a “privatisation of securing livelihood, which was formerly granted by the Soviet state” (2017: 160). As being said, the transformation processes on macro levels of different dimensions affect the micro level of households and communities in different, context-dependent ways which limit or enable the distribution of resources or positions. The collapse of the state administered economies accounted for a breakdown of macro structures, “thereby creating space for micro worlds to produce autonomous effects that may have unexpected influence over the structures they have been emerging” (Burawoy & Verdery 1999: 2). Burawoy and Verdery describe the consequences of these processes as “the transformation of party states in the context of changes in the global regime of accumulation has radically shifted the rules of the game, the parameters of action within which actors pursue their daily routines and practices” (1999: 2). In an uncertain environment, these routines and practices may appear as recourses on socialist or pre-socialist legacies, but Burawoy and Verdery argue that these adaptations can only be understood in context of the new market economic environments and, thus, are responses to these. This considers the “complex relations of socialist and postsocialist life worlds, emphasizing unintended consequences and the way the past enters the present, not as legacy but as novel adaptation” (1999: 4). Some ‘novel adaptation’ can be found in the ways people organize their everyday livelihoods in Khorog, so for example the practice of *qarz*, meaning debt or loan (Maertens 2017: 160).

To further emphasise the connection between transformation uncertainties and livelihood which is also connecting macro and micro level, Steimann states:

“The livelihood perspective accounts for uncertainty in the sense that it considers people’s conduct as a response to certain externalities which are beyond the actors’ influence. From that perspective, the Soviet collapse can be seen as a shock, and the subsequent neoliberal reform policy as a trend, which both have deeply affected people’s livelihoods” (2011: 35).

2.2 The livelihood approach – chances, trends and shortcomings

2.2.1 Basics and advantages of livelihood approaches

Due to its actor-oriented perspective and its ability to highlight factors and realities that determine the daily lives of (poor) households, the livelihood approach has been a central element or instrument in development research as well as development practice in the past decades since the promotion of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework by the Department for International Development (de Haan 2012: 346): “Any attempt to understand actors and their practices at local level involves adopting a people-centred research perspective. In development research, this perspective has mainly been developed by the livelihoods approach” (Steimann 2011: 33). The livelihood approach offers a holistic and dynamic concept for analysing poverty that goes beyond a money-centred understanding of deprivation (Beall & Schütte 2006: 11). In the following sections, the possibilities of livelihood approaches in giving relevant insights to the life realities of individual people, households and communities as well as the shortcomings of the traditional livelihood perspective will be outlined to finally show recent developments in the livelihood research that are fruitful for this thesis.

The definition most used in the standard approach to livelihoods is the one given by Chambers and Conway:

“A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover

from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (1992: 7).

Livelihood approaches put (poor) people and their resources, opportunities, needs and agencies at the centre of their analysis and focus on the complex ways how local actors organise their lives in challenging circumstances (de Haan 2012: 346). That way, livelihood approaches can contribute to a better, multi-dimensional understanding of how people are managing their daily lives, facing obstacles and using their own capabilities to live or survive.

Traditional livelihood frameworks conceptualise the different sets of assets or capitals a household obtains in form of an idealised pentagon in which the different assets are represented. Following de Haan, these capitals are broken down into:

“human capital, i.e., first and foremost labour but also skills, knowledge and creativity. Then followed: Natural capital, i.e., resources such as land, water, forests and pastures, but also minerals; physical capital, i.e., houses, tools and machinery, food stocks or livestock, jewellery and farm equipment; financial capital, i.e., money in a savings account or in an old sock, a loan or credit; and finally social capital, which pointed at the quality of relations among people, for example, whether one can count on support from one’s family or (mutual) assistance from neighbours” (2012: 346).

2.2.2 Potential shortcomings of livelihood approaches

While the application of this asset portfolio is useful to analyse how a household manages its livelihood, there are also limitations and challenges. Livelihood approaches in developmental politics and practice with a rather pragmatic point of view might tend to simplify complex realities. Schütte warns that “when relational practices are reduced to singular terms like ‘assets’ or ‘capital’ their complex meaning might be lost” (2006: 3). Referring to livelihoods and their use in practice Beall writes about the danger of a “colonization of social sciences by economics that tend to drive out approaches that are ‘inhospitable’ to a functionalist and reducible view of social interactions” (2002: 72). De Haan also notes that the livelihood approach “tended to focus much more on opportunities than on constraints, more on actor’s agency than on structure, more on neutral strategies than on failed access due to conflicts and inequalities in power” (2012: 348). This sets the tone for the critics on the traditional livelihood approaches.

In focusing on people and households and their living situation and assets, there is always a “risk of adopting too narrow a view and of ignoring the context of structural constraints such as power inequalities” (Kaag et al. 2004: 52). Livelihood approaches may lose grip on structural factors by only looking at and making visibly the agency and assets of local actors, but neglecting political power constellations, socio-economic structures and underlying reasons for adverse situations (Dame 2015: 42). This might erroneously give the impression that the poor themselves are to blame for their situation, but, as de Haan and Zoomers put it, “despite the active way of people try to cope with opportunities, the majority of the poor are forced to lead dispersed and placeless lives, due to the lack of local opportunities” (2003: 358). This lack of local opportunities often lies in the overarching structural economic or geographical constraints. Therefore, livelihood research simultaneously needs to deal with the agencies of the actors and the frame-setting structures as well as “the diverse micro- and macro-political processes that define opportunities and constraints” (Scoones 2009: 186). Generally speaking, geographical development research has to consider the flexible, dynamic and interacting relation between structural constraints and individual agency which is based on their individual access to assets and power relations (Dame 2015: 44, 46). De Haan explains the neglect of power relations with the “supposed non-ideological context in which it was first developed” (2012: 354).

Another related point of critique is the bias of livelihood approaches to the local and in turn the neglect of overarching factors or the failure to capture the *embeddedness* of local situations in broader structural economic and political contexts that determine and limit the local opportunities (de Haan 2012: 351). Following de Haan and Zoomers, “development geographers should focus on making a conceptual update on analysing how place and space influence the way people cope with global challenges, and vice versa” (2003: 361). What are the ways global and over-regional processes materialise themselves in the daily lives of households living in local contexts? And how, on the other hand, do livelihoods and localities shape over-regional or global processes (de Haan 2012: 351).

2.2.3 Trends of contemporary livelihood research

Livelihoods are increasingly connected to larger scale influences and the effects of globalisation – they are becoming more and more multi-dimensional, multi-local and diverse: “With globalisation, the multi-locality of a household’s livelihood accelerates and livelihood has become increasingly dependent on social networks, information networks, etc.” (Kaag et al. 2004: 60). Assets and livelihood resources are not bound to one place, but increasingly spread out over different locations. This is also linked to the fact that strategies and modes of livelihoods are increasingly dynamic and have to be rearranged in changing contexts or due to emerging opportunities. This implies that networks and social relations are not only interesting on a local level, as in a neighbourhood context or regarding inner-urban family ties, but also networks operating on a larger scale: “Social relations do not have to remain local and even kinship is becoming increasingly multi-local, with relatives migrating to different urban and rural areas” (Kaag et al. 2004: 61). This way, migration can also be considered as a way to diversify livelihoods on a multi-local level and the usage of assets in different locations “to spread the income risk through diversifying the household’s income sources (de Haan & Zoomers 2003: 358). Livelihood analyses, thus, have to consider “networks, linkages, connections, flows and chains across scales, but [have to] remain firmly rooted in place and context” (Scoones 2009: 188) and examine the social and political processes and consequences of those multi-local networks.

At the same time, livelihoods are characterised by increasing multi-tasking and diversification. Livelihoods are progressively diverse with a range of household members trying to activate different resources and contributing to securing a livelihood. De Haan and Zoomers describe this phenomenon as follows:

“Poverty induces households to intensify strategies for generating income, using available labour and resources fully as possible. The poor tend to be the most engaged in complex, multi-activity income strategies. They adjust, cope, create and recreate their livelihoods under the impact of macro-economic circumstances, climatic variability and institutional change” (2003: 356).

Additionally, Scoones addresses the aspect of dynamics in livelihoods. The notion of sustainability in the Sustainable Livelihood Frameworks “implies that livelihoods are stable, durable, resilient and robust in face of both external shocks and internal stresses” (Scoones 2009: 188). Most livelihood studies are snapshots in the course of long-run, slower or faster changes or transformations:

“Without attention to these long-run, slow variables in dynamic change, a snapshot view describing desperate coping may miss slow transformations for the better (...) in the same way, a rosy picture of local adaptive coping to immediate pressures, based on local capacities and knowledge, may miss out on long-term shifts which will, in time, undermine livelihoods in more fundamental ways” (Scoones 2009: 189).

This already proposes a perspective that overcomes the temporal constraints of livelihood studies and includes a historical perspective which also considers the various contexts of colonialism, nation-building and globalisation processes as frameworks for analyses (Dame 2017: 43). Livelihoods should

be regarded as something that is more processual than static and continuously influenced in dynamic ways by risks, social relations and globalisation effects (Kaag et al. 2004: 53). In combination with the structural issues described above, this notion leads to a more revealing, contextual understanding of livelihoods, or as Kaag et al. describe it:

“The challenge is not to lose sight of the structural environment that may constrain their initiatives. In view of this, a processual perspective that puts people and their actions at the centre of the analysis but that at the same time considers these actions as the result and the constituent of broader and longer-term processes can be valuable. From this perspective, livelihood practices are seen as embedded actions and livelihood is considered more a process than a system. Livelihood research should capture the dynamics at play, and make visible the interaction between people and their environments (...), as well as considering how this changes over time” (2004: 53).

Furthermore, in addition to the multi-locality and diversification of livelihoods it needs to be considered that livelihoods (nowadays) are also dynamic on the short-term. Livelihoods are continuously in change and the ways households secure a living are characterised by a permanent “rearrangement of strategies using various capitals in different locations” (Kaag et al. 2004: 12).

A more conceptual issue on livelihood research, also in the realm of actor-structure-questions, concerns the use of the term livelihood strategies. As not all livelihood activities can be regarded strategic or intentional, they are more likely to be responses to external pressures and not solely based on own choosing or interests (de Haan & Zoomers 2005: 41-43). A discussion of how the term livelihood pathway would be more useful to describe livelihood activities in Khorog will be included in the analysis of livelihoods. In addition to this approach and in accordance with the notion about the dynamical character of livelihoods, the concept of livelihood trajectories that is also emphasising the individual history of households in the long-term and with a view to the future may be revealing in a transformative context, as Steimann notes that “the notion of livelihood trajectories offers a useful link between the study of livelihoods and the analysis of post-socialist transformation at the micro level” (2011: 39).

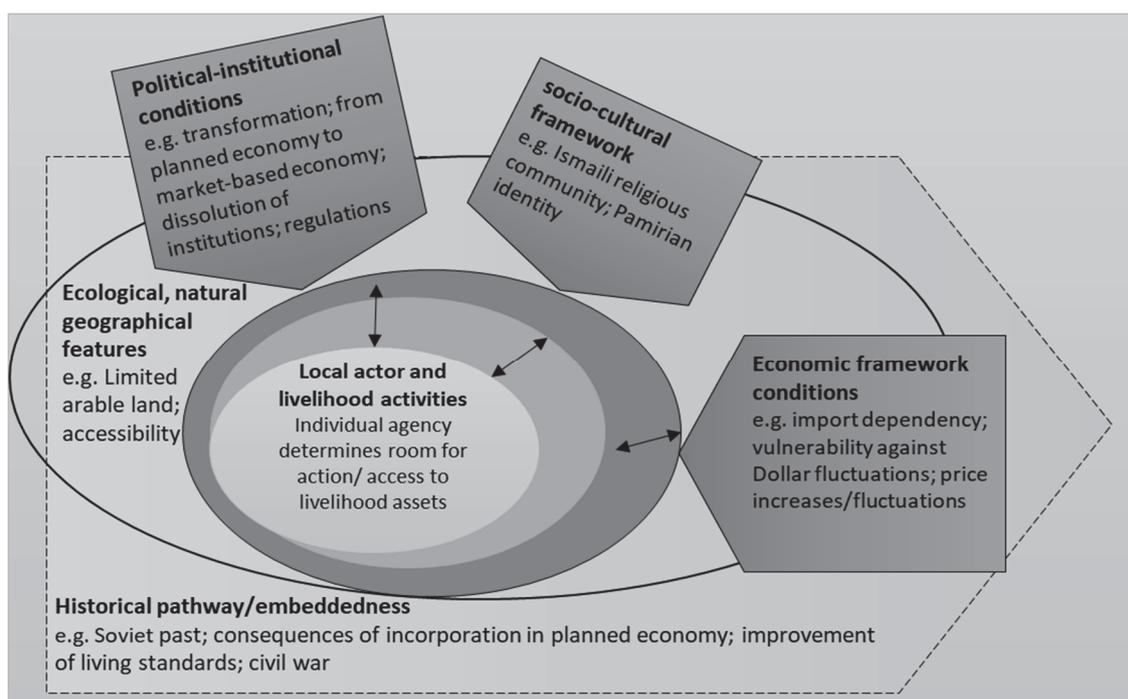


Figure 1: Agency and livelihood activities of local actors embedded in multi-dimensional framework conditions

These notions and trends as well as the discussed shortcomings of livelihood research are meant to be considered in the analysis of livelihoods in Khorog. Figure 1 shows a schematic illustration of how local actors and their agency is embedded in contextual framework structures as political-institutional, socio-cultural and economic framework conditions, which are the results of the particular historical pathway, as well as in the ecological physical environment, which determines the natural constraints.

2.3 Vulnerability, risk and social security

Concerning the temporal dimension and the sustainability or stability of livelihoods, the concept of vulnerability of households becomes an important aspect of the analysis. As Kaag et al. state: “when livelihood is considered as a process, issues as risk, social security and globalisation appear as interesting starting points for analysis” (2004: 53). A processual, more dynamic perspective on livelihoods “puts more emphasis on the versatility of livelihood assets or more specifically on the versatile modes of access to assets. An immediate consequence of defining livelihoods as a process is the incorporation of the variable, stochastic nature of its elements” (Kaag 2004: 54). Livelihoods are, as stated above, not stable, especially not in poor or transformative contexts where households constantly have to find new ways to secure livelihoods or to survive. The focus on the dynamics and stability of livelihoods leads to questions of risk and vulnerability of livelihoods in a dynamic world that is, as the transformation context proves, characterised by uncertainties (Steimann 2011: 37).

Vulnerability concepts in development-oriented research on household levels deal with risks and hazards for the livelihood activities of households. Vulnerability has an external and an internal side. The external side can roughly be translated to the exposure to shocks, stresses and risks, while the internal side describes the capacities of a system. Here the object of the analysis is the household’s ability to cope, adapt or react to those risks, shocks and stresses (Bohle 2005: 72). The asset portfolio a household relies on determines, on the one hand, the level of vulnerability as well as, on the other hand, the resilience of the household and its ability to cope, adapt or react (Dame 2015: 39). For the purpose of this thesis, this raises questions on how crises and shocks are affecting the available assets a household relies on when securing a livelihood, and, the other way around, how do assets (or the access to assets) affect or reduce the vulnerability against shocks or crises.

This includes the risks and/or perceived risks, the “threats and probabilities inherent in a livelihood” (Kaag et al. 2004: 55), the households are facing and the vulnerability referring “to the exposure to, and the impact of specific risks on livelihood conditions” (Kaag et al. 2004: 55). Under consideration of the dynamical nature of livelihoods, the term livelihood security is useful to analyse “the stability and resilience of (...) livelihood[s] in the long term” (Kaag et al. 2004: 55). This can refer to the recovery from sudden shocks and events or to longer-term economic trends and processes that affect the livelihoods and the access to assets of households in the long term (Bohle 2001: 132).

In the context of risk and vulnerability, social security is key for livelihood security. Vulnerability and insecurity are always related, and the aspect of social isolation can be considered the biggest menace to household’s livelihoods: “In other words, a lack of social relations and social networks accounts for the vulnerability of poor people” (Kaag et al. 2004: 56). Bohle highlights the importance of social capital for vulnerable populations as it is in some cases the last or the only available resource for poor people who do not have access to other material resources or assets (2005: 71): Woolcock and Sweetser argue that “being poor means living and dying in an environment that forces a person to rely on neighbours, family, their extended kin, and networks. Social capital is their primary strategy for dealing with life’s challenges and opportunities (2002: 26).

Social security describes the strategies of individuals and households to protect themselves against stresses, shocks and crises which are risking the stability and perpetuity of their livelihoods using social

networks and relations with other actors of society. Research on social security concentrates not so much on governmental regulations and legislations, but more on locally organised, informal forms and institutions of social security which are context-specific and locally organised (Kaag et al. 2004: 56).

Moser argues that a combined livelihood and vulnerability framework “that goes beyond a ‘static’ measuring of the poor, toward classifying the capabilities of poor populations to use their resources to reduce vulnerability” (1998: 14) contributes to a better understanding of the complex living realities of poor or vulnerable people. While also recognising the importance of intangible assets such as social relations that go beyond a mere asset in the pentagon but are dynamic, fluent and the basis for the vulnerability of a household (Moser 1998: 15).

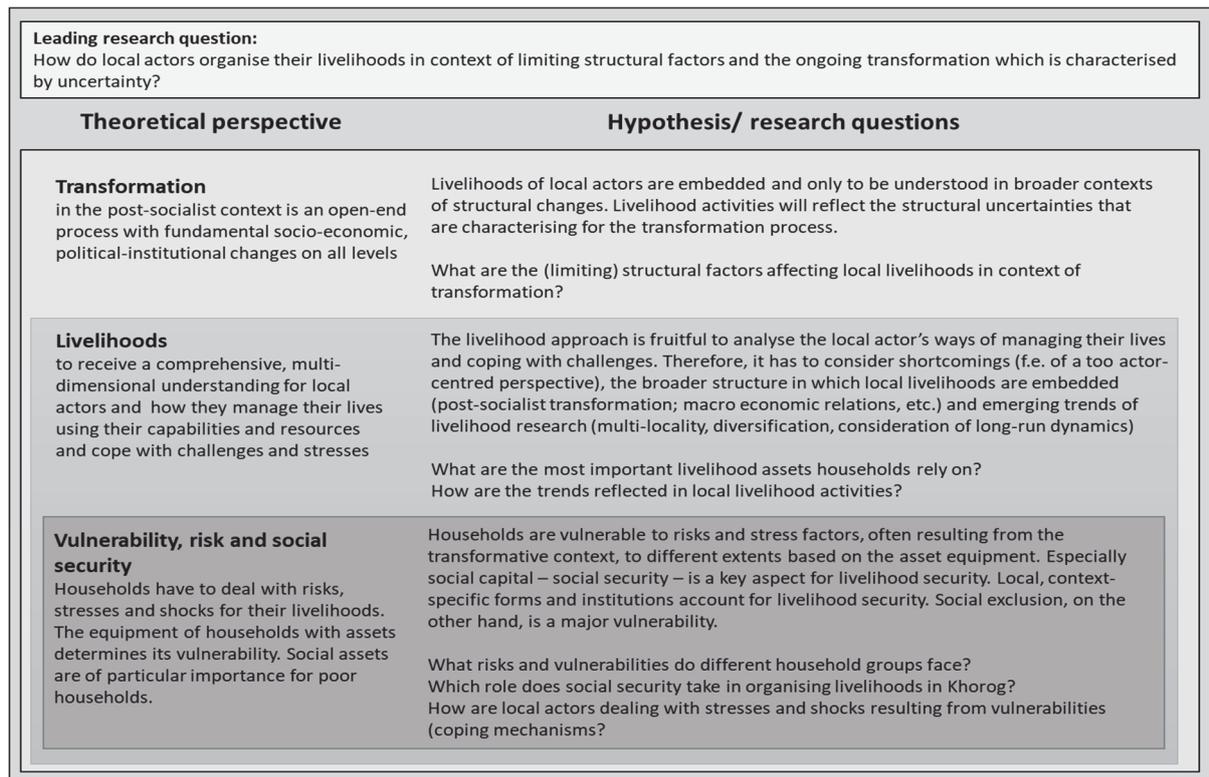


Figure 2: Analytical framework. The theoretical perspectives are hierarchised because of overlying structure. Perspectives of livelihoods are embedded in a transformation context in this research and perspectives of vulnerability, risk and social security are to be understood as subordinate aspects of livelihoods.

As guidelines for this thesis, the theoretical perspectives, its connected hypothesis and research questions (Figure 2) will be used. The transformation context and its impacts on livelihoods, especially regarding associated uncertainties, the macro structures framing the agencies of local actors and the trends and shortcomings of livelihood research as well as the aspects of vulnerability and social security are considered in the subsequent analysis of livelihoods in Khorog. This includes an analysis of the historical, political and socio-economic context factors actors in Khorog are embedded in, the most important assets for the livelihood activities and the broader trends of livelihoods as well as the vulnerabilities and risks people face in a dynamic transformative environment.

3 Methodology

For the operationalisation of the research question and the resulting analytical framework, a methodological approach was used, which will be explained in this section. Therefore, the research area and the data collection methods will be presented as well as the classification methods and possible shortcomings of this research approach.

3.1 Field research and methods



Figure 3: Photograph of the centre of Khorog, study area highlighted in red (photograph by author, 8 October 2018)

A four-week long field research in Khorog was key for gaining an understanding for the livelihood activities and their various aspects and challenges faced on a local level by households in Khorog. During the field research in September and October 2018, 38 household interviews were conducted as well as several expert interviews with representatives of universities, NGOs and from local authorities. The impressions from the interviews were complemented by participatory observations and informal conversations. The basis for the empirical research was a comprehensive review and analysis of literature regarding livelihood research and the political, historical and socio-economic situation in Khorog and GBAO.

The research focus was on Khorog, the major town of GBAO with a population of about 30.000 inhabitants that represents the political, economic and cultural centre of GBAO. Most service providers in GBAO are concentrated in this city. This includes education facilities such as universities, the State University as well as the University of Central Asia, government offices, media stations, a range of NGO offices, health service providers and an airport (Herbers 2001: 370). The research area in Khorog was the urban centre of Khorog. This allowed to collect empirical information on the topic of urban household's livelihood activities in a transformative context. The interviewed households were located in the highlighted area in Figures 3 and 4. The area was identified together with experts and students, who were supporting me, as the area includes different types of houses and in general households with a more diverse socio-economic background and the area represented the most urban area of Khorog which was characterised by a dense housing structure including apartment buildings. Interviewed households were chosen randomly, but it was attempted to get representations from every major street in the research area.

The household interviews were semi-structured and semi-standardised and included qualitative as well as quantitative parts. Each interview was conducted primarily with the head of the household while in most cases other household members were present as well and often presented their perspective. The interviews were conducted with the help of a translator and generally lasted about an hour. No recording devices were used, but during the interviews, transcripts were made with use

of the prepared interview templates. The semi-standardised interviews were based on an interview guideline that included questions arranged in cluster to specific topics in regard to the livelihood activities of the household (see Hopf 1995: 177). This included basic questions to the household composition, size and demographics, income-earning activities, credits, migration and remittances, urban agriculture, social networks, challenges and coping strategies as well as goals and aspirations for the households. Although the interviews included quantitative aspects, with regard to income for example, that can be compared and evaluated, the aim was to conduct the interviews as open conversations to capture important aspects for the interviewees.

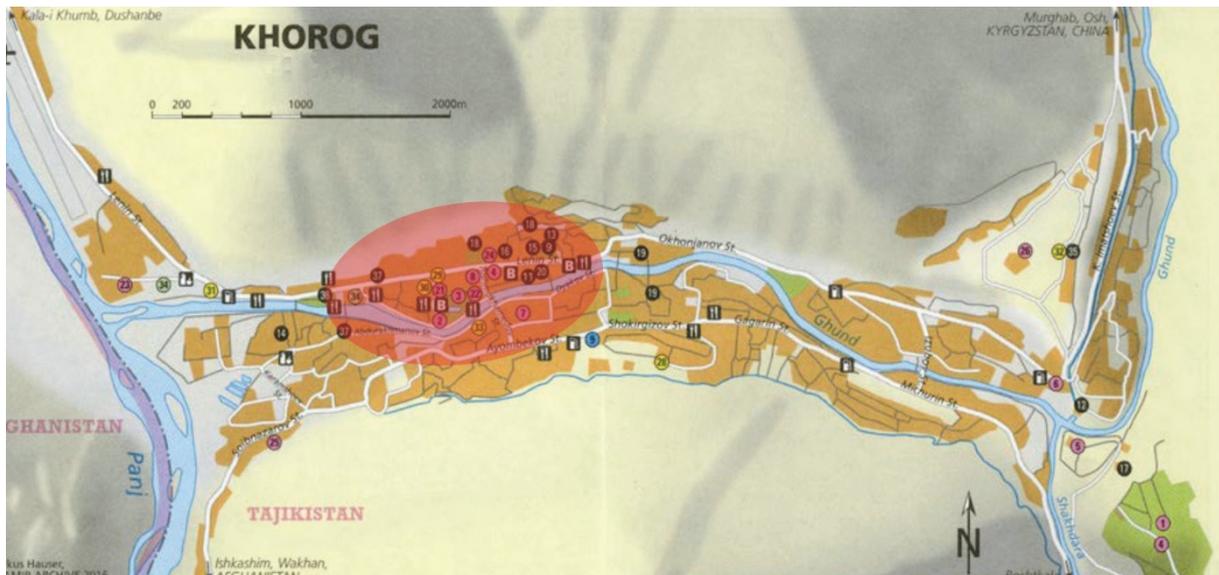


Figure 4: Map of Khorog, study area highlighted in red (Source: Hauser, *The Pamir Archive* 2016)

Expert interviews included similar topics but also focused on the broader development aspects of Khorog and included more specific questions which were directed at the respective field of expertise of the expert. This included, for example, the introduction of community-based credit schemes, food security, challenges of energy supply, the neighbourhood support systems or labour migration. Additionally, bazar sellers were asked about food price and economic developments in recent years.

The interviews were accompanied by an unstructured participatory observation (see Legewie 1995: 192). It was possible to participate to a certain extent in everyday life in Khorog. This was made possible in the first place by the support of the translators who tried to involve me in everyday practices and showed me their daily routines. Participation in everyday life and casual conversations with individuals were key in understanding everyday practices and challenges for people in Khorog. The contacts made in this process facilitated the empirical research and, in some cases, led to further experts. For the participatory research a field research diary was compiled.

3.2 Evaluation and classification of households

The evaluation of the interviews was made following the survey. After conducting the interviews, the information and contents of the interviews were coded and clustered and the qualitative information were gathered thematically and made comparable. Quantitative data as income, for example, was calculated by adding the various incomes of household members, including salaries, pensions and remittances. The quantitative data was fed into databases and evaluated to compare the characteristics of different household groups in regard to income structures, dependency ratio, share of remittances, access to different assets as credits, gardens, food support, etc. (see Annex).

To get a more differentiated picture of the everyday livelihoods of the different households in Khorog, their activities and challenges, the households were classified according to their ability to fulfil their (self-imposed) needs on their own at all times. In the course of the research and with the understanding gained during the research, the dependency of households on owing money to or going in debt with bazar seller or shop owner, *qarz*, meaning debt or credit (Maertens 2017: 160), was taken as indicator for this classification. This indicator is more meaningful than just a categorisation based on income or finance structure. Three categories were derived. The first category (better-off) consists of households that never rely on the practice of *qarz*, going in debt or borrowing. These households turned out to be relatively well-off: they have enough resources and access enough assets to fulfil their desired needs on their own and usually have more income than expenditures. The second category (moderately poor)² includes households who rely on *qarz* or borrowing money for their daily needs from time to time, rarely or unregularly, for example only in winter times when money is scarce. This means they have to resort to this strategy less than six times a year. The resources and assets they access are generally sufficient to meet their urgent needs, but they have a hard time saving assets. The third category (poor) consists of households who regularly rely on *qarz* or borrowing money. Their resources are not sufficient to satisfy their needs on their own most of the time.

A household in this research was defined as a mostly co-residential and related group of people who share their resources (Beall & Kanji 1999: 2f.). This activity-based household unit definition might also involve household members who are currently not-resident, for example on labour migration or studying in another city, but do not have own families to take care of and share their remittances with their Khorog-based household. Family members that are on labour migration and send remittances regularly or irregularly, but otherwise care and share their resources with their own nuclear family are not included (Beall & Kanji 1999: 3). A shortcoming of this research might be the lack of investigation into intra-household dynamics and relations including intra-household power and gender relations, redistribution mechanisms and a stronger consideration of reproductive activities (Beall 2003: 73).³

Table 1 shows the distribution of households into the different household categories explained above. In the sample of households interviewed for this research, 14 households (36.8%) never rely on *qarz* or borrowing money to fulfil their needs (better-off), 12 households (31.6%) use *qarz* or borrow from time to time and unregularly (moderately poor) and also 12 households regularly depend on this strategy (poor).

Table 1: Classification of households based on ability to fulfil needs on their own at all times (based on own survey)

Category	Number of households
Poor	12
Moderately poor	12
Better-off	14
Total	38

² The denomination of those categories is not based solely on quantitative or economic factors, but more on the assessment or self-assessment of experts and students who supported me conducting the research in the field. While the second group, the moderately poor, represents income-wise a sort of middle class, it was agreed to still incorporate the notion 'poor' in order to draw attention to the fact that these households still have to struggle to meet their needs on their own due to missing financial resources. As shown in Figure 9 on page 35, income distribution between 'moderately poor' and 'poor' are often overlapping.

³ For more on intra-household relations, see Beall (2002), and for more information on gender issues of households in GBAO, see Kanji (2001), who in regard to women's livelihoods points out that gender inequalities increased with the transformation processes and highlights the role of women in the care economy which went along with an intensification of workload.

4 Khorog in context – geographical features, historical pathway and socio-economic and political changes

In this chapter, the structuring factors that set the framework conditions for local opportunities and agencies are outlined in their different dimensions to capture the embeddedness of livelihood activities in Khorog in the broader contexts. As discussed above, the limiting (or enabling) factors for local livelihood opportunities often lie in the overarching political and socio-economic structures or the geographical-ecological constraints as well as in the particular histories of places that led to the specific situations we witness today. Therefore, I will describe the natural, ecological landscape conditions and their significance for livelihood opportunities as well as the historical context, which is decisive for an adequate understanding of today's situation. This is followed by a description of the socio-economic changes that came with the transformation processes since the end of the Soviet Union and other important macro-economic processes and factors affecting local livelihoods in Khorog.

4.1 Physical geography and general features

Khorog is situated in the Eastern part of Tajikistan in the Autonomous Province of Gorno-Badakhshan (GBAO) which is completely covered by the Pamir mountains (Figure 5). Gorno-Badakhshan makes up for 47,000 sq. km of the overall surface area of the Pamirs of 62,000 sq. km (Bliss 2006: 18). At the same time, GBAO makes up for 44.5 percent of Tajikistan's territory, however only a population 216,000 of Tajikistan's total population of approximately 9 million lives here, which already indicates the rather inhospitable character of this hard-to-reach high-mountain area (Herbers 2001: 368; Middleton 2016: 246).

The central city of GBAO and the research location for this research is Khorog and it is located in the Western Pamir, a high mountain range with deep valleys running from North-East to South-West that is characterised by limited agricultural opportunities (Herbers 2001: 368). Only 240 sq. km of GBAO are arable for agricultural production which accounts for 0.4 percent of the area of GBAO (Breu & Hurni 2003: 8; Middleton 2016: 246), while only 5.3 percent of the total land area is arable. This means that Tajikistan has "one of the lowest amounts of arable land per person (0.1 ha)" (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 15). This is mainly due to the overall mountainous terrain of Tajikistan (see Figure 5), as mountains cover 93 percent of the country "with a high prevalence of steep lands (54 percent), shallowness (48 percent), and erosion risk (26 percent)" (Akramov & Shreedhar 2015: 15).

Climate conditions in the Western Pamirs are continental but "characterised by moderately warm summers and moderately severe winters, with minimal rainfall in the summer months" (Breu & Hurni 2003: 8) with temperature differences from average -8°C in December to 22.5°C in August and precipitation of 250-300 mm per year. The rainfalls are characterised by great variability. Winters can last from October to April and, thus, affect accessibility in GBAO as well as agricultural cultivation. Despite the arid climate conditions, the physical availability of water usually does not present a problem because of the steady water income through the glaciers – the bigger problem is the distribution of water for the irrigation-based agriculture (Breu & Hurni 2003: 8; Bliss 2006: 27).

Generally, the Pamirs or GBAO are not easy to access. Only a few passages are usable over the whole year and connections to the rest of Tajikistan are unreliable, especially in winter. The most important road connection is the Pamir Highway leading from Western Tajikistan through the Pamirs over Khorog and Murghab in direction of Osh. The state of the roads is in dire need of rehabilitation and improvement and travel from Dushanbe to Khorog can take more than a day (Herbers 2001: 368; Bliss 2006: 22).



Figure 5: Relief map of Tajikistan and neighbouring countries (Source: Kreutzmann 2017: 3)

However, despite its remoteness and relative inaccessibility, it should not be assumed that GBAO is or was isolated from the rest of the world. Networks and exchanges relations have been a key part of the daily lives of people in the Pamirs in the past – from Silk Road times over the Soviet period up until today. Kreutzmann, on this matter, writes: “Mountain regions can be perceived as corridors enabling exchange between communities and partners. At the same time mountain ranges have been interpreted as barriers to the same” (2013: 1). From this perspective the notion of isolation as the primary characterising aspect of living in GBAO can be disregarded: while the geographical location is a challenging and limiting factor, it can also provide opportunities.

Nevertheless, Tajikistan belongs to the countries with the highest logistic costs in the world. In 2012 it was estimated that the logistic costs are around 27 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Tajikistan (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 39). This is due to the poor state of many roads, the mountainous terrain and the poor connectivity of market centres. The accessibility, and thus the transport costs, is strongly connected to the seasonality and its changing weather conditions. Roads may be blocked during the winter months and transport costs increase heavily – up to 300 percent (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 39). These transport and logistic costs contribute significantly to the formation of food and commodity prices. Akramov & Shreedhar show that a more favourable connection to food supply roads leads to lower prices (2012: 39). GBAO might be the province of Tajikistan with the poorest connectivity and consequently the highest transport and commodity costs.

The mountainous topography and the climate conditions are limiting the agricultural possibilities. The main agricultural economic activities consist of combined mountain agriculture, where wheat, barley, potatoes, pulses, fruit trees and vegetables are cultivated in combination with animal husbandry (Giuliani et al. 2011: 18). The limited agricultural production, which is not only based on physical-ecological factors, but also on historical-political (see following section) leads to a situation where not enough food is produced to be self-sufficient (Herbers 2001: 371). In consequence, the import dependency for food commodities as flour, oil and other staple foods, as well as for almost all other commodities is very high which results in an increased vulnerability. In combination with the difficult infrastructural connection and the resulting missing market integration, which leads to relatively high logistical and transport costs, the geographical constellation in the Pamirs of GBAO contributes to high food and commodity prices – especially under challenging weather and thus challenging transport conditions in winter times. Since food and other commodity prices are linked to the transport costs, the prices are very vulnerable to fluctuations of the international oil prices – which are generally rising due to increased demand. Additionally, since most commodities have to be imported, especially staple food commodities, the food price situation in GBAO is dependent on international food price developments that can result in major problems as the food price crisis of 2008 shows (Akramov & Shreedar 2012: 25, 28-30).

4.2 Historical context

Today's societies are always the result of history and specific historical pathways that places experienced. Without a historical contextualisation, the current modes, constraints and opportunities of livelihoods cannot be understood. As stated above, following Dame (2017: 43) a historical perspective which also considers the various contexts of colonialism, nation-building and globalisation processes should be used as a starting point for the analysis. These are aspects that influence the path-dependent development, “the constant, active re-working of inherited and new structures by decisive actors” (Steimann 2011: 22) of GBAO, as Kreutzmann states that “path-dependent development can be interpreted as being rooted in those [colonial and postcolonial] periods when newly demarcated borders significantly affected the future of mountain communities” (2015: 431).

4.2.1 Gorno-Badakhshan in the Soviet system

4.2.1.1 *Integration of Gorno-Badakhshan into the Russian and Soviet state*

In the course of the Great Game, in which the expansionist empires of Russia and Great Britain competed for influence and power in Central Asia, the Pamir region, which represent today's GBAO, was finally incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1895 with the so-called Pamir Agreement after the Russians already had established sovereignty in today's Tajikistan following the conquest of Tashkent in 1865 and the subjugation of Bukhara and Kokand in 1868 and 1876 (Kreutzmann 2002: 33; Kreutzmann 2013: 9; Middleton 2016: 248). An artificial border was drawn by the imperialist European

powers without too much consideration of the interests of local people who subsequently suffered the consequences of the new border regime:

“The agreement thoughtlessly divided up an area inhabited by the same ethnic groups and with a connected cultural history, with the result that right up to the present day communications between the Ishkashims, Shughnanis or Roshanis to the left and right of the Pyandsh is almost impossible. The Chinese Pamiris and Kyrgyz are hermetically sealed off from their present-day Tajik relatives in the same way” (Bliss 2006: 71f.).

The Pamir region in today’s GBAO found itself being part of a new political and economic entity, and at the same time, it was then located in one of the most remote and hard-to-reach periphery regions of this entity, the Russian Empire. The border regime led to an undermining of local livelihoods and ended or affected transregional trading, communication and livelihood networks of pastoralists and other groups (Kreutzmann 2002: 34). Soon, the Russians introduced first ‘development’ initiatives by building infrastructure, introducing health systems as well as public schools (Middleton 2016: 249f.).

The formation of the Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR) of Tajikistan was based on the nationality policy of the Soviet Union with its objective to create titular nations based on nationality and ethnicity of the local populations, forming homogenous republics as far as possible. The ASSR Tajikistan was mostly inhabited by people who were categorised to the Iranian language tree, opposed to the other Central Asian republics Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in which Turkic languages dominated. In the established republics, the titular nationality, in this case the Tajik, has taken a dominant role. This meant that the nation-building efforts in promoting a Tajik nation by the establishment of a common language and a shared national history (Kreutzmann 2002: 34f.). In population censuses in Tajikistan, all Iranian speaking populations were categorised as Tajiks, which also meant that all inhabitants of the Pamirs, except for the Kyrgyz (Kreutzmann 2015: 373), were statistically counted as Tajiks as well:

„In this way, the mountain or Pamir Tajiks were integrated into the community of the eponymous nation or were appropriated by it for the purpose of creating a republican identity. Traditional contrasts in economy (high-mountain agriculture and oasis farming), language (Eastern Iranian Pamirian languages and Western Iranian Tajiki) and religion (Ismaili and Sunni) were ignored and sacrificed in the name of a homogenised Tajik nation, even though few reciprocal exchange relations existed between the regions” (Kreutzmann 2015: 374).

But these differences have become of importance today, as Pamiris in GBAO do not necessarily identify themselves as Tajik and tensions between the central government and regionalist parties are rising from time to time. Simultaneously, following Kanji, “many, including Tajiks, consider Pamiris to be ‘outsiders’, neither real ‘Tajiks’ nor real Muslims” since “the Pamiris are descendants of Eastern Iranian people who converted to the Shi-ite sect of Ismailism in the seventeenth century” (2012: 139) opposing the Sunni majority in Tajikistan. People in Khorog fear the resurgence of conflicts with the central government as in 2012 or 2014, the resulting blockades and consequences for the livelihoods and the fact that the central government can always take advantage of the weak position of import dependency and missing infrastructural connections people in GBAO obtain.

4.2.1.2 *‘Developmental’ efforts in GBAO*

In the course of history, the Pamir range suddenly became strategically important, even though it did not offer any economic benefits or hosted a large population. Gorno-Badakhshan and its people were classified as border-societies. This meant that they would get specific support from the central state in order to stabilize the border region, strengthening the Soviet-state locally and disseminate the advantages of socialism on the borders of the Union as well as over the borders “to show the

neighbouring poor peoples to the south in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan the superiority of the Soviet system in comparison to their own feudal and capitalist societies” (Bliss 2006: 247). Basis for the specific ‘developmental’ promotion was the establishment of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast in 1925 (Kreutzmann 2015: 371) which meant a special status for GBAO due to its perceived ‘backwardness’ and its classification as border-society. The economic support and promotion were also important because the closed border meant that people “were cut off from economic opportunities, and emotional ties with relatives across the border were severed” (Mostowlansky 2017: 41), as, following Kreutzmann, “the economic relations of the Soviet-dominated Central Asian regions were re-directed and amplified towards Russia while at the same time international borders were sealed and became effective barriers” (2013: 13).

The special status and the ‘development’ efforts by the Soviets and the integration into the Soviet economy system were soon followed by far-reaching socio-economic changes “that radically transformed society and set the course for its future path” (Maertens 2017: 165). Extensive investments in the fields of agriculture, infrastructure, social services and education were made subsequently. The infrastructural connection and the construction of the fully asphalted Pamir Highway in 1935, connecting Khorog and Murghab to the rest of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan was only the beginning of introducing the Pamiris to the Soviet-style modernisation, which despite its teleological view of history and its undisputedly violent implications, especially for pastoralist societies in the Eastern Pamirs, led to a significant improvement of living conditions in the Pamirs (Kreutzmann 2002: 37-39; Middleton 2016: 10). Collective farming was introduced about 1933 and agriculture was organised in *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* farming systems which was accompanied by a reorganisation of agricultural production and a conversion of former subsistence farmers into wage labourers (Kreutzmann 2015: 374f.; Maertens 2017: 165). The health system improved and health services could be provided to and accessed by most people in GBAO, the energy supply was provided by the state and affordable for people as coal imports were heavily subsidised, the same applies to accommodations (Bliss 2005: 255-259). Especially the achievements in the education system and the provision of education services had a significant impact on the Pamirian society. The level of education rose above average which is still noticeable today as education plays an important role in everyday life and society, which might also be connected to the influence of the Ismaili lifestyle promoting the value of education. GBAO held an above average share of intellectuals who became part of the Soviet *intelligentsia* as teachers, scientists, doctors or engineers (Herbers 2001: 371; Kreutzmann 2002: 39).

At the same time, the Soviet subsidised economy grew. Employment was created by the state, mostly in *sovkhoses* but also in the industry, commercial, public transport and construction sectors: “In 1987 industrial production in GBAO had increased in value by a factor of 71.8, compared with figures of 1940” (Bliss 2006: 259). The salaries of workers and employees were high enough to offer a relative increase in prosperity, while at the same time, “state social services in the Pamirs provided between 50 and 70 per cent of gross earnings” (Bliss 2006: 261). The infrastructural connection and the incorporation secured the food supply. Even though food supply might have been short in the Soviet period, there was no lack of staple foods which were provided by the state (Bliss 2006: 261).

To understand transformation processes in Tajikistan and GBAO from today and the last decades, it is indispensable to take a look on how the agricultural system was (re)structured in Soviet times. Apart from the above-mentioned natural-physical conditions of GBAO that led to the import dependency, the decisions made on basis of the Soviet idea of agriculture, in which different agricultural tasks were divided among different administration units, also led to a system that contributed to the import dependency of GBAO: “Trade and other infrastructure were designed with a view to meeting the needs of the USSR and not the local economy” (Kanji 2002: 139). The *kolkhoses* and *sovkhoses* in GBAO were mainly commissioned with the tasks of stock rearing and fodder production: “While in 1965 76.3 per

cent of the cultivable area was devoted to the production of foodstuffs and only 23.7 per cent to fodder, by 1987 these figures had been reversed almost completely” (Herbers 2001: 371). Consequently, only 10-20 percent of the region’s food demand was produced locally, most food and other commodities had to be imported, a state that has not changed much since (Herbers 2001: 371).

This reveals a system of external supply that made GBAO completely dependent on imports and destroyed the former economic foundations (Kreutzmann 2002: 38). The Soviet system promoted ‘development’ and supplied services and goods within the planned economy so that, on the one hand, relatively good living conditions could be achieved, but, on the other hand, GBAO became more dependent. As almost 90 percent of consumer goods were imported during Soviet times and the self-sufficiency capacities were reduced due to the Soviet agricultural system so that there were no buffers in case of a supply crisis (Kreutzmann 2002: 40). Before the end of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan was still the poorest Soviet Republic, but it also had high development indicators as life expectancy and literacy were high (Kanji 2002: 138). Maertens summarises the situation as follows:

“On the one hand, the general standard of living in Gorno-Badakhshan was significantly enhanced and resulted, among other things, in a significant increase of people living there. On the other hand, in consequence of comprehensive state-funded provisioning and neglect of both self-sufficiency and non-agricultural production, a persistent dependency of Gorno-Badakhshan on supplies from the outside, in order to allow its inhabitants to exist was sealed – be it state subsidies in Soviet times, humanitarian aid during the civil war in the 1990ies or purchase of essential (and other) consumer goods produced elsewhere in the current time of market economy” (2017: 166)

These historical processes explain the import dependency, which nowadays is a huge contributor to the economic vulnerability, as well as the border-based limitations of regional and local cross-border networks.

4.2.2 The economic collapse and the civil war

The end of the Soviet Union hit Tajikistan, as well as the other Central Asian republics, hard, as the states which suddenly found themselves in a position of national independence were not prepared for the sovereignty to come. The political ties between the Tajik leadership and the central Soviet governance were close, and the economic dependency on Moscow was, as outlined before, strong. Initially, there was no desire for independence in Tajikistan, but the course of history took its way as one by one all republics broke away from the Soviet Union and Tajikistan finally declared its independence on 9 September 1992 (Bliss 2006: 271). Contracts and agreements existing until then were terminated and in short time all running subsidies granted by Moscow vanished and Tajikistan was missing its main source of finance, “which across all sectors had accounted for, on average, between 50 per cent and 80 per cent of its GDP” (Bliss 2006: 278). At the same time, 80-90 percent of the trade took place inside the Soviet Union and with countries of the Soviet Union who were now independent as well (Bliss 2006: 280). In addition to the impending economic crisis, political struggle about the leadership and presidency in Tajikistan emerged which resulted in a disastrous civil war beginning in 1992. While today’s president Emomali Rakhmanov [today Rakhmon] was able to secure power in the capital, open warfare turned into a guerrilla war that lasted for several years, in which GBAO remained de facto independent (Bliss 2006: 273-275).

The consequences of the civil war for the Pamiris were disastrous – even though the war itself barely came to Gorno-Badakhshan. The already mentioned low self-sufficiency and the (missing) infrastructural connection posed severe problems after the supply route was blocked by the central government after a regional party in the Pamirs declared its independence (Bliss 2006: 276). As a result of the blockade, only “30 per cent of normal supplies actually reached the Pamirs” (Bliss 2006: 276) in

1992 and a famine broke out the following winter. Although the declaration of independence was retracted in 1993 and the blockade ended, the ongoing war and chaos kept disrupting the supply lines, leading to a humanitarian disaster in GBAO in the winter of 1992/93 (Bliss 2006: 276; Kanji 2002: 139). Simultaneously, due to internal displacement the population of GBAO increased from about 150,000 to 220,000 which further exacerbated the demand for services and food. Only the commitment and the large-scale humanitarian assistance from organisations as the ICRC, the UNHCR and especially the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and the established Pamir Relief Development Programme (today Mountain Society Development and Support Programme, MSDSP) prevented a further escalation of the humanitarian catastrophe and a large-scale famine as local production decreased immensely and people were not able to pay for food due to the general lack of money and income (Kanji 2002: 139; Bliss 2006: 282f.; Middleton 2016: 156).

While pensions and wages in the first years after the independence were still paid in roubles and at old rates, with the beginning of the civil war these payments stopped almost completely. Only with the currency reform in 1995, payments were recommenced, but with a rate equal to 10 percent of the old value (Bliss 2006: 280). The situation for the population of GBAO, although the region was mostly spared from the destruction of the civil war, became desperate when the supply routes were blocked and governmental services suspended. At the same time, inflation made food commodities, which were already difficult to pay for due to missing wages, more and more expensive and, thus, inaccessible for people in GBAO where food prices are always higher than in other parts of Tajikistan. The lack of money, the inflation and the blockades due to civil war lead to a situation where markets were empty and no goods came to GBAO. With the economy and industry collapsing many people lost their jobs, and where there were no job losses as in the health, welfare and education institutions or in administration, wages simply were not paid (Bliss 2006: 282). Industrial production decreased almost completely in 1992 as there was no energy supply and raw materials could not be delivered (Bliss 2006: 287). Bliss describes the situation in GBAO as following:

“In GBAO after 1993 there was almost no public sector money left to invest in business, let alone in the maintenance of the infrastructure. By 1995 the budget deficit stood at 95 per cent compared to 1991. Unemployment had reached a level of 70-80 per cent. Agriculture, still almost entirely state run, was no longer able to guarantee even the previous level of 20 per cent self-sufficiency without outside help. Supplies of fuel for vehicles and heating from outside sources had reached a figure representing 1-2 per cent of the base value, without taking into account the aid programme run by the Aga Khan Foundation. People were suffering from the cold, and at least throughout the winter of 1992/3 and all of 1993 they did not have enough to eat, there were almost no vehicles on the roads, and schools closed for the whole winter as there was neither means of heating nor shoes for the children” (Bliss 2006: 281).

As a consequence, more than 90 percent of the households in GBAO relied heavily on humanitarian aid once their supplies ran out (Bliss 2006: 281). Despite the efforts of humanitarian programmes, the food situation was more than severe and malnutrition was a severe problem affecting many people and children. Especially people living in Khorog or in larger villages who had no access to land faced serious problems (Bliss 2006: 283). Due to missing preservation techniques, food could hardly be preserved in winter, which lead to extreme food situations in the winter months (Bliss 2006: 284). At the same time, water management declined, state-run water management no longer existed, irrigation channels were no longer maintained and consequently scarce arable land was lost in the 1990s (Bliss 2006: 285).

Another big problem was replacing machinery and equipment. Tractors, spare parts and other agricultural equipment were directed to the *kolkhozes* and *sovkhazes* by the central planning system

or had been subsidized by the Soviet Union. Due to missing funds, replacements were no longer possible and machineries could not be used because there was no fuel. “This meant that an increasing proportion of the work had to be done manually instead of mechanically, outlying fields could no longer be cultivated, transport became increasingly restricted and the harvest could no longer be processed” (Bliss 2006: 285).

As a result of the missing technology and the limited self-sufficiency of the region which was inherent in the Soviet economy, the transformation economy in the 1990s was primarily oriented towards subsistence economy. Many people who had been intellectuals, academics, teachers and doctors in Soviet times suddenly had to become farmers again to cultivate their own small plot of land to generate at least some food. Used to modern techniques, these new farmers had difficulties to deploy traditional subsistence agriculture and harvest by hand instead of using tractors as before as spare parts, fuel, fertilizers, etc. were missing and they had no experience in using traditional agricultural techniques, as for example ox-ploughs (Kreutzmann 2002: 39-43; Bliss 2006: 284-286). Kreutzmann summarises the consequences of the transformation for livelihoods in a historical perspective:

“Die tadschikischen ‚Neubauern‘ – ihres Zeichens Lehrer, Ärzte, Facharbeiter und ausgebildete Techniker – und deren Familien verfügen über einen hohen Bildungsstand und wenig praktische Erfahrungen als Subsistenzlandwirte, während die Expertise ihrer afghanischen Nachbarn genau umgekehrt ausgeprägt ist und deren Stärke in der langjährigen, kontinuierlichen Erfahrung in der Hochgebirgswirtschaft liegt. Bislang gültige Muster über Tradition und Moderne im agrarischen Sektor werden hier prinzipiell in Frage gestellt, der developmentalistische Mythos vom unaufhaltsamen Aufstieg und Wohlstand widerlegt. Der Lauf der Geschichte hat eine Annäherung der Lebensverhältnisse auf niedrigem Niveau bewirkt“ (Kreutzmann 2002: 42).

Subsistence economy and private gardens increasingly gained importance as they were the only more or less reliable sources of food. In larger villages or towns families without land could not even resort to this strategy (Kanji 2002: 141).

Accompanying this, the social infrastructure and services were hit hard as well. The education sector suffered as teachers could not be paid anymore, schools could not be heated or maintained and families could no longer afford school materials. The same goes for the health system and other state services as the provision of housing or energy, which also led to a widespread deforestation as local forest were put under pressure for heating material. Infrastructure was no longer maintained and roads soon deteriorated. The public transport system ceased to exist and law enforcement was no longer executed (Bliss 2006: 288-290).

Despite the tremendous decline of living standards and the general crisis, solidarity amongst Pamiris was maintained or even increased in the post-Soviet time. Neighbourhood support was more important than ever and a reliable way of survival and communal work amongst neighbours gained increased importance. At the same time, thousands of refugees fleeing from civil war were taken in by private households (Bliss 2006: 292). In this time, a broad range of NGOs started to operate in GBAO, including the AKF as well as Médecins Sans Frontiers, the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, GIZ, World Food Programme and many local ones. In general, these NGOs initially worked in the humanitarian sector to advert the consequences of the large-scale crisis during the civil war, especially in the sectors food, nutrition and health. After responding to emergency needs, the NGOs, are by now invested in enhancing longer-term development through education, economic development of economic activities and facilitating agricultural production, but also energy and gender

and social equality⁴ (Middleton 2016: 256-265). The NGO efforts and activities helped to overcome the most serious problems during the crisis and have contributed to an increase of living standards compared to the mid-1990s (see Figure 6). “The success of the programme can be mainly attributed to intelligent public

policy by the local government, resourcefulness and adaptability on part of the population and a wide variety of accompanying measures by a committed international agency (the Aga Khan Foundation)” (Middleton 2016: 266). Still, many interviewed people mentioned that they live in a perpetuated crisis. In 2006, Bliss states that in “ten years of external aid in GBAO it has not proved possible to revive the economy in general” (2006: 329). However, fully reviving the economy to a state it had had in Soviet times seems not to be possible at all due to changed political and economic framework environments.

This is the historical background against which the specific aspects of today’s transformation processes including its path dependency, the decrease of living standards after the end of the Soviet Union – decline in the Human Development Index (HDI)⁵ shown in Figure 6 from 0.623 to 0.55 from 1990 to 1995 (UNDP 2018) – and the modes of livelihood systems nowadays have to be considered.

4.3 Socio-economic trends and constraints in the transformation

Resulting from the history of the Pamirs, today’s livelihood systems and processes are embedded in socio-economic and political contexts which are, inter alia, fuelled by transformation processes and other changes that limit or challenge local livelihoods.

4.3.1 Macro-economic trends and challenges

As outlined in the section before, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought with it far-reaching and comprehensive disruptions regarding all aspects of everyday life and political, economic and social dimensions. This primarily meant the loss of subsidies, job opportunities and state provisioned services, all of which account for uncertainty in the transformation process and led to widespread poverty and a decrease of living standards.

In the economic-institutional dimension, the transition of Tajikistan from a planned to a market economy brought with it a number of features and reforms on a macro-scale that Maertens identified as follows: “comprise of price liberalisation, changes in property rights, the introduction of free trade,

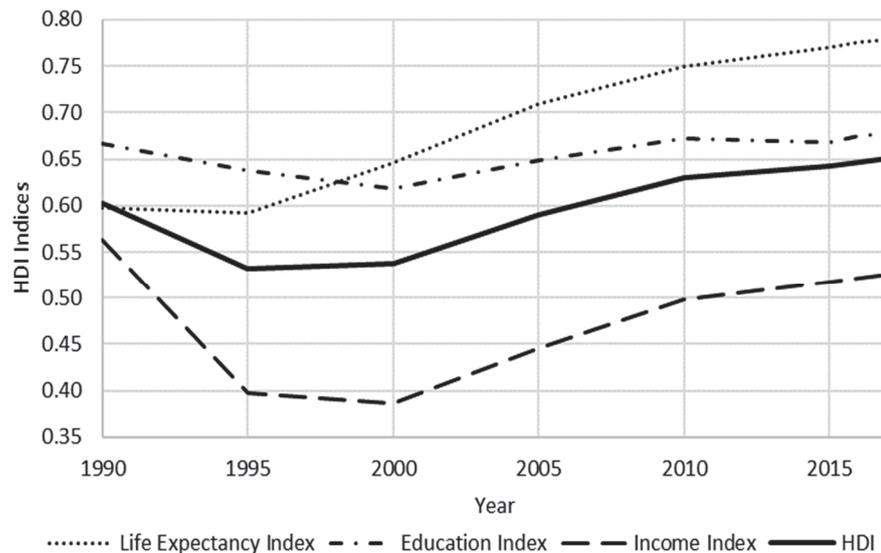


Figure 6: Trends in Tajikistan's HDI component indices 1990-2017 (Source UNDP 2018)

⁴ For a comprehensive overview of the international development aid interventions and their consequences for society in Khorog see Bliss (2006: 297-329) and Middleton (2016).

⁵ For a detailed discussion on the applicability and the limited information value of HDI on mountain areas see Kreutzmann 2006: 55f. The figure was used, nevertheless, to show the broad trend of living quality in Tajikistan during the transformation process.

a radical reduction of state services and subsidies, privatisation and downsizing of state enterprises and institutions and the establishment of capital markets” (2017: 161). These changes of macro scale institutions, consequently, influence the everyday lives and livelihood systems in the micro worlds of local people by, inter alia, introducing what Steimann calls “livelihood uncertainties” (2011: 36) in an insecure economic environment which comes along with the privatisation of securing livelihoods (Burawoy & Verdery 1999: 2; Maertens 2017: 160).

On a macro-level and in context of globalisation, the introduction of market economy and the integration into world markets of food and fuel made Tajikistan vulnerable to international price developments. Due to the situation of import-dependency, which is even more adverse in GBAO, the consequences of the limited national food production capacities due to natural conditions and historical decisions lead to an import-dependency of food and fuel. A situation that is exacerbated due to the deterioration of water and irrigation systems which has led to a decrease of arable land in the decades since the independence where agricultural installations are suffering under degradation and materials have not been modernised (Peyrouse 2013: 3). In Tajikistan more than 50 percent of the cereal consumption of its people has to be imported (Peyrouse 2013: 4), as well as 30 percent of bovine beef, 80 percent of poultry products, three-quarters of vegetable oil and most of its sugar consumption (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 1). This import dependency is already a major challenge for Tajikistan, but it is especially challenging for GBAO due to its even amplified regional import dependency – a problem that was regularly mentioned by household and expert interviewees as a major challenge for the local development of GBAO. The collapse of agricultural production in the 1990s not only intensified the import-dependency, it also had consequences for income and employment as agriculture is the major economic activity: “low productivity and meager earnings from agriculture are major causes of poverty and nutritional problems” (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 1). Simultaneously, the demand for food in the regional markets is growing due to population growth (Asadov 2013: 27).

Increasing international food prices constitute a major problem for households in Khorog where the financial situation is tense, especially when prices are rising due to inflation, but salaries are not. Since Tajikistan is also dependent on energy imports for fuel and natural gas, rising global food and fuel costs exacerbate the inflation in Tajikistan. This happened in 2008/09 as well as in 2011 when “the annualized inflation rate rose from about 5 percent in mid-2010 to nearly 15 percent in mid-2011. Rising food prices have contributed to the overall inflation since 2007, and food prices have increased significantly more than nonfood prices” (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012:1).

As Maertens states, the “dependence on imports alone is nothing remarkable, but things get complicated when dependence conspires with lack of means to obtain what is produced elsewhere” (2017: 165). The vulnerability in context of import dependency has, thus, to be viewed in light of other macro-economic factors as limited export possibilities or the high dependency on remittances of migrated labourers which are vulnerable to global economy trends as well, as the financial crisis of 2008/09 shows where remittances declined by more than 30 percent (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 2).

The ratio of total exported goods and services to food import, which following Akramov and Shreedhar provides a good indicator for macro-level food security, is very low in Tajikistan compared to the world average and the Central Asian neighbours. “The heavy dependence on food imports means that Tajikistan is highly vulnerable to possible periods of food insecurity arising from external shocks such as international price volatility, food availability, and policy directives of its trade partners” (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 25). With regard to exports, Tajikistan is heavily dependent on the main export goods which are aluminium and cotton. The international prices of these two commodities which, in 2008, made up for more than 80 per cent of Tajikistan’s exports, have not changed significantly while the food and energy prices, both commodities which are highly demanded and imported to Tajikistan,

have increased, particularly in the years 2008/09 and 2011 again. This affects the trade balance of Tajikistan and deteriorated its terms of trade (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 25, 27). Even if the remittances the Tajik economy generates through its workforce abroad are added to the exported goods and services the ratio still is low Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 26).

In this context, vulnerabilities arise from restrictions and tariff increases from the main wheat exporters for Tajikistan as seen in 2008, when Kazakhstan put restrictions on its own wheat export, also in face of a bad harvest year in Kazakhstan due to adverse weather conditions which lead to price rises and domestic food price inflation in Tajikistan (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 27f.). In 2011, food inflation in Tajikistan can mainly be accounted to higher export tariffs from Kazakhstan and increased oil prices (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 28f.). Russia, the main exporter of oil for Tajikistan, increased tariffs on petroleum which lead to increased fuel prices in Tajikistan and therefore to increased transport costs which are especially relevant for the GBAO context where, as shown above, almost all goods have to be imported and where logistic costs are especially high. “Domestic wheat and potato price movements in Tajikistan closely echoed the price movements in other Central Asian countries due to the closely interlinked regional market, not only for agricultural products but also for inputs such as fuel oil (...) and even for labor” (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 29). Akramov and Shreedhar summarise the macro economic impacts and vulnerability to international (food) price developments especially in crisis contexts as 2008 or 2011 as follows:

“Firstly, rising food prices, in combination with reduced inflow of remittances, deteriorated macro-level food security in the country. Second, domestic food and consumer price inflation rates in the country were significantly affected by fluctuations of international food prices. The households in Tajikistan had suffered job losses and declines in remittances, and as a result, they had to cut their consumption of staple food, healthcare, and basic utilities” (2012: 36).

In relation to trade, import-dependency and market-oriented economy, Kanji summarises the overarching structural barriers on a regional level in reducing poverty and their consequences for local livelihoods in GBAO as follows:

“One of the greatest problems in creating more secure and sustainable livelihoods in Gorno Badakhshan is the difficulty in finding areas of comparative economic advantage in a region that is isolated because of its geographical position, topography, and climate. It also has a large population in relation to arable land for food crop cultivation. Fundamental questions do arise in relation to the need for redistribution, subsidies, and systems of social protection in parts of the world that cannot compete within a neo-liberal, market-based development paradigm” (2002: 150).

4.3.2 Poverty and employment

In 1997 Tajikistan had a GDP of less than 50 percent compared to 1991. Only then, moderate economic growth could be achieved (Breu & Hurni 2003: 18):

“The post conflict period saw remarkable growth, where the country reported 8.6 percent annual average GDP growth during 2000-2008. Despite these impressive growth rates, Tajikistan’s aggregate and per capita GDP has not reached their pretransition levels. While aggregate GDP in 2010 was only 85 percent of its 1990 level, per capita GDP was even lower at 64 percent” (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 6).

Nevertheless, growth in Tajikistan and especially GBAO is vulnerable to global crises what became obvious during the global crisis in 2008/09. While poverty decreased continuously in the years before, during the crisis moderate and extreme poverty increased significantly in GBAO (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 2, 7). Even though the poverty rate in the whole of Tajikistan declined from 90 percent in the

late 1990s to about 30 percent in 2015 (Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, see Figure 7) it is clear that poverty and its accompanying problems are a major problem for large parts of the population which accounts for vulnerability especially in times of economic crises. The effects of global crisis impacts can be seen in following statistics: “In the precrisis period, the poverty headcount ratio

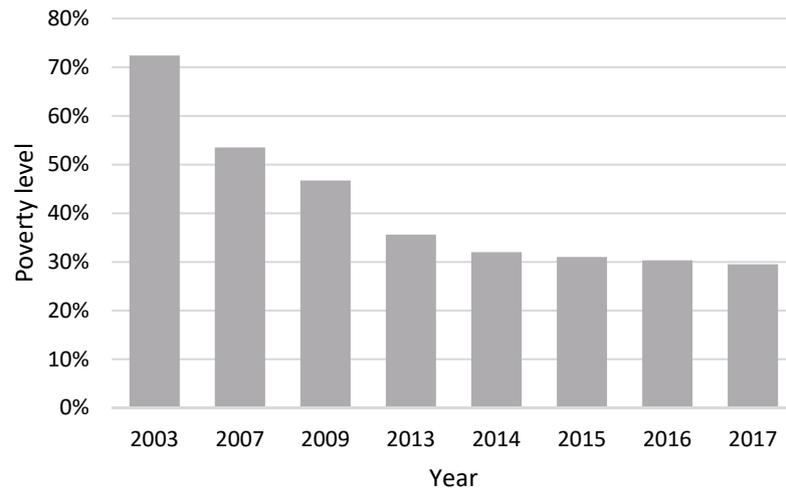


Figure 7: Change in poverty level in the Republic of Tajikistan (Source: Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018: 141)

declined from 72 percent to 53 percent (nearly 20 percent) in four years (2003-2007), but since then it declined less than only 6 percent between 2007 and 2009” (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 8). In GBAO the overall and extreme poverty rates even increased between 2007 and 2009 about 19 and 16 percent, respectively (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 8). For the year 2017, the overall poverty level of GBAO was 39,3 percent while the extreme poverty level was 17,3 (Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018: 142), indicating the special and more vulnerable position of GBAO compared to the rest of Tajikistan.

The employment conditions and (industrial) economy development go hand in hand with the poverty situation. Since most industries only worked thanks to the incorporation in the planned economy during Soviet times, they were not able to function autonomously on a national or regional level after the independence. With the vanishing of influx goods and materials as well of the economic relations to partner Soviet republics industrial production declined sudden and almost completely, leaving many people unemployed (Sieber 2003: 24). The tertiary sector focused almost completely on public services in the health, education or public administration sectors – which was supported only through the efforts of NGOs in the early transformation period. The private sector and markets are developing slowly (Sieber 2003: 24). In the year 2000, 85.6 percent of employed people were employed by the government (Breu & Hurni 2003: 19). However: “Between 1990 and 2000, the total number of persons employed in the oblast of Gorno Badakhshan decreased by 42.7%, leaving 80% of the population either unemployed or underemployed at the peak of the recession” (Breu & Hurni 2003: 19). The objective of the creation of functioning market systems, one of the main goals of a transformation directed towards a capitalist market economy, is only partially reached in Khorog, and further limited due to constraints in demand and purchasing power as well as difficult transport situations (Herbers 2001: 376).

4.3.3 Privatisation and land reform

Restructuring of land ownership and the agricultural system began in Tajikistan already in 1992, but was promulgated with delay due to the civil war in late 1995. The ‘Land Code’ ensures that land is owned solely by the state, but can be inheritably leased and used by private farmers (Herbers 2001: 373). In GBAO, the local government decided to distribute unused or underused arable state land to private farmers in 1993, when regional self-sufficiency dropped to 15 percent (Breu & Hurni 2003: 20). This process proceeded only slowly in GBAO where “the attitude of the population (...) towards privatization was marked by ignorance and scepticism” (Herbers 2001: 373). In 1999, about 80 percent

of the cultivatable land of GBAO had been privatised. However, the created family enterprises often lacked “traditional and comprehensive farming knowledge due to the division of labour in the previous agricultural system” (Breu & Hurni 2003: 21). As stated above, the population that previously formed part of the Soviet *intelligentsia* was partly or completely unexperienced in farm work and furthermore “former Sovkhoz workers [were] complete novices in independent management and decision-making” (Herbers 2001: 375). Herbers condensed the developments: “As a result of the privatization of land and livestock, a form of agriculture is now being practised in the Western Pamirs which corresponds to that followed in neighbouring mountainous regions (e.g. Afghanistan, Northern Pakistan, Ladakh, Nepal) and is known (...) as ‘mixed mountain agriculture’ or ‘combined mountain agriculture’” (2001: 375). The MSDSP is heavily involved in optimising agricultural conditions by giving technical assistance and inputs to farmers and enhancing infrastructure (Breu & Hurni 2003: 21).

Although the restructuration from state and collective farms to private farms as well as the reduction of direct governmental intervention into decision-making processes on farms led to increased production, some challenges remain. The end of state supplied seeds, farm machinery, fertilizers and support services, which enabled modern farming techniques during the Soviet era poses a problem, as, under a capitalist and privatised system, farmers have to buy these inputs on markets which they often cannot afford. Under the planned economy, *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes* were not only provided with inputs but also with expertise in form of trained farm managers, agronomists and technical staff (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 19). In some cases, in GBAO, yields could only be achieved at the expense of land quality and land degradation (Breu & Hurni 2003: 21). Following Akramov and Shreedhar with a view to the situation in the whole of Tajikistan,

“it can be noted that the pace of reform has been slow, land reform and farm restructuring are incomplete, and various characteristics of collective farming still remain. (...) The evidence also suggests that the lack of information on property rights and delays in issuing land certificates, in combination with the absence of land cadasters and poor access to farm inputs and services, is de-incentivizing farmers to take up individual production decisions” (2012: 17)

Although this notion reflects a normative understanding of transformation – from planned economy socialist agriculture to Western-style agriculture – the ambiguous aspect of the land reform effects are still valid. Another constraint in regard to agriculture is that despite Tajikistan’s richness in water, irrigation and water management pose a challenge, as the efficiency of irrigation system is low and boreholes, irrigation systems and pumping stations are deteriorating as the funding for maintenance and operation of water systems are inadequate (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 17).

4.3.4 Infrastructure

Another crucial aspect is the infrastructure in the sectors of transport and accessibility, communication and information as well as energy, which are fundamental for local development and overcoming the relative remoteness (Zibung 2003: 26). The already mentioned infrastructure has not been regularly maintained since the end of the Soviet Union resulting in deteriorating road conditions, unreliable access, as well as time-consuming transport and increased transport costs (Bliss 2006: 290; Maertens 2017: 164). This is a problem that was very present in the minds of people in Khorog who often complained about the current state of infrastructure as a major development constraint. The problem of lacking maintenance and deteriorating technical equipment also applies to communication and information infrastructure (Zibung 2003: 26), although meanwhile Khorog is connected in terms of communication and information systems and internet and phone-based communication plays an important role in everyday life.

The energy supply is provided by Pamir Energy, the regional energy provider which was established with the support of AKF and MSDSP, secured for 97 percent of GBAO according to a Pamir Energy employee. However, the price for energy is not affordable for every household – a problem which was often mentioned in the household interviews. According to an expert on energy supply, this is due to the connection of the local electricity prices to the Dollar exchange rate which leads to a situation where international Dollar fluctuations have a direct impact on local prices.

4.3.5 Socio-economic trends and differentiation

Before the fall of the Soviet Union, the state guaranteed security for the needs and livelihoods of people and ensured a more or less egalitarian society. The ongoing transformation process with the introduction of a market economy and the accompanying privatisation of livelihoods is characterised by a loss of securities people had had before and a general uncertainty. In this course, it also

“led to the *privatisation* of transactions in a market-economic setting, where relatives, neighbours and friends came to encounter each other as clients and shopkeepers. In short, market trade replaced provisioning, and personalised exchange relations replaced rather anonymous state regulations and redistribution” (Maertens 2017: 160).

The transformation context also creates vacuums and leads to a redistribution of resources and social positions. Basis for the ability of individuals or groups to acquire resources and occupy social positions is their power to act, their agency (Herbers 2006: 14). The agency of individuals in the transformation process is mostly based on their previous social or employment position which goes hand in hand with the access to social networks. Herbers shows in her study that actors who were able to benefit from the restructuring of land in post-Soviet Tajikistan have been in positions of power during the Soviet period (Herbers 2006: 15f.). Additionally, households who were successfully entering trade and commerce during the shift to a market-based economy were able to take advantage compared to others (Kanji 2002: 144). Overall however, the move to a market-oriented economy increased income inequalities between households and gender (Kanji 2002: 149). The relative “socioeconomic disparities that exist today suggest that some households were more successful than other to cope with uncertainty in the long term” (Steimann 2014: 224). Breu and Hurni depict the groups who that are negatively affected by transformation processes:

“Young people, retired persons and women have been particularly affected by the changes. Young people who have graduated from university are often forced to seek employment in other parts of Tajikistan or other former Soviet republics. Those who remain have little choice but to work in agriculture or the public service sector. Retired persons with minimal pensions who often depend completely on family ties and are unable to adapt to the new situation, must be regarded as the people most affected by the transformation” (Breu & Hurni 2003: 19).

Women are especially affected by the transformation processes through an intensification of responsibilities and workload (see Kanji 2002). These might be explanatory approaches for the social differentiation that could also be observed in Khorog where some households are doing better than others as shown in the results (see below).

On the other hand, solidarity and social, cooperative networks as social capital are still important factors in GBAO. Trust and reciprocity are pillars of everyday life. Unpaid support with work or sharing of food as well as assistance for those in need is still common (Kanji 2002: 143). Kanji and Maertens suggest that this is connected to the particular identity of the Pamiris as mountain societies who are additionally members of a religious minority (Kanji 2002: 143) and influenced by Muslim values of

mutual support and responsibility which are promulgated by the Aga Khan⁶ (Maertens 2017: 169-174). Simultaneously, mutual assistance and solidarity are also some sort of heritage of the Soviet period that prevailed its demise and found new forms in the processes of transformation (Burawoy & Verdery 1999: 2; Kanji 2002: 143).

4.3.6 Relationship with the central government

A political aspect that is rooted in the history of GBAO and poses a challenge to some extent in post-socialist GBAO is the relationship to the central government that is characterised by varying tensions. Despite the efforts under Soviet rule to integrate Pamiris into a Tajik majority (see above), people in GBAO do not necessarily identify themselves as Tajiks. Instead, the Pamiris have a sense of own cultural identity and mainly speak their regional languages Rushani, Ishkashimi and Shughni (Kreutzmann 2015: 374). During field research, people often refer to their own cultural practices which differ from those of the majority of Tajikistan. An important factor that was mentioned in this context is the affiliation of Pamirian people to Ismailism, a Shiite subgroup of Islam, in contrast to the Sunni Tajik majority in Tajikistan.

During the *perestroika* “accompanied by a desire to reaffirm Pamiri distinctiveness against the revival of the Tajik Sunni identity” (Peyrouse 2012: 3) first separatist tendencies emerged and during the civil war, a regional party, the Lal-I Badakhshan, declared the independence of GBAO. As a result, the government imposed a blockade that further amplified the crisis described above and soon the declaration of independence was withdrawn (Bliss 2006: 276f.). The central government of Tajikistan never gained complete control over GBAO and formally adopted its autonomous status (Middleton 2003: 14). Power was shared with the regional government and informal local leaders who have been warlords during the civil war. “Today, secessionism is no longer on the agenda, but the narrative of defiance against Dushanbe continues to be upheld in the management of local affairs” (Peyrouse 2012: 3). Conflicts between (informal) local leaders and the central government led to violent events in 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2014 with the heaviest conflict escalation in 2012 when the governmental army invaded Khorog which led to the death of 20 to 100 people (Peyrouse 2012: 1). During the field research in autumn 2018, tensions were increasing again due to demands of the central government and the threat of bringing law and order to Khorog. Peyrouse states the reasons for growing tensions, in view of the 2012 escalation, as follows:

“Popular resentment against the central government has grown in magnitude over recent years. Land reforms and the agricultural banking system have weakened rural economies, which constitute the source of livelihood for most of the population. Endemic corruption, which negates the already limited efficiency of public services like health, education, and pensions, has discredited the state legitimacy” (2012: 3).

Fears of people in Khorog relate especially to GBAO’s dependency on the rest of Tajikistan and how easy it would be to increase the economic pressure or to, ultimately, block the roads and cut the supply tracks. Especially in the later weeks during the research, when tensions grew, interviewed people feared the escalation of the tensions and the resulting jeopardy to their livelihoods. Although people have different opinions about the central government and president Rakhmon, and usually they stated to be content with the general stability following the civil war, many people are of the opinion that central government would do too little to promote development in GBAO or that they are actively trying to undermine it in order to increase their control over the region and diminish regional autonomy.

⁶ For a closer analysis of the influence of the Aga Khan and Ismaili values on society and economic relations in GBAO, see Maertens 2017: 169-174.

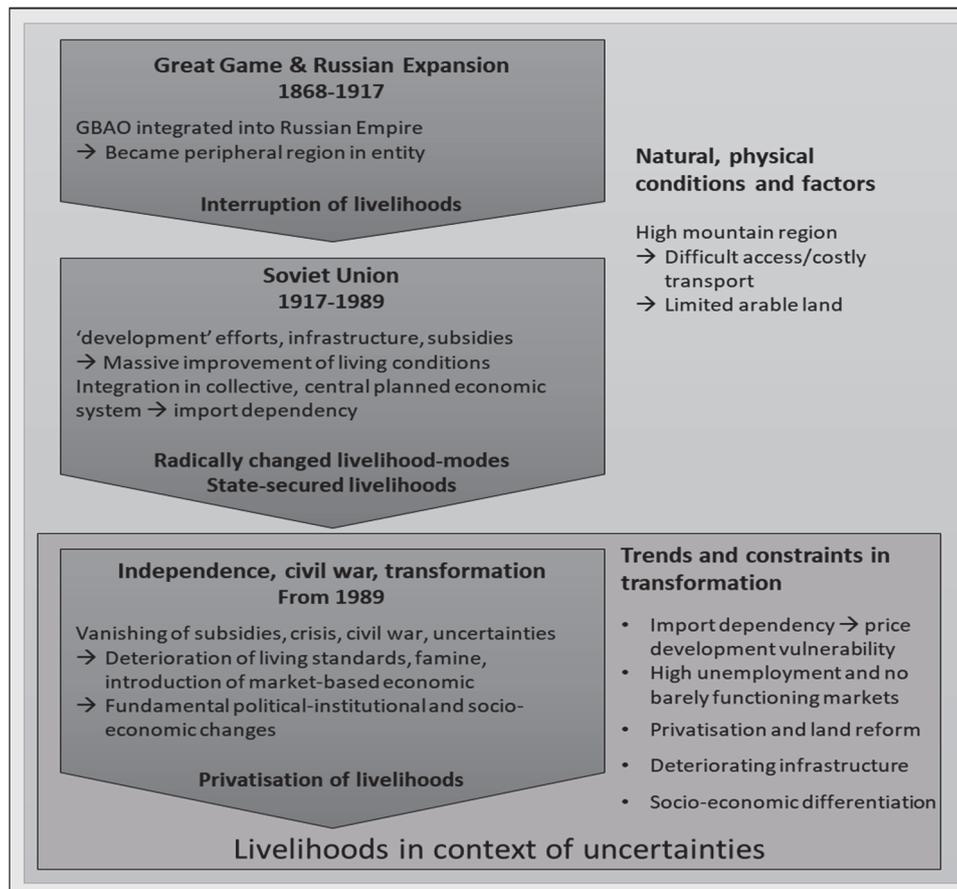


Figure 8: Livelihoods in context of uncertainties. Historical pathway, natural-physical factors and socio-economic trends and constraints of the transformation process

Figure 8 shows the embeddedness of current livelihoods in the structuring framework conditions and contexts outlined in this chapter. This includes the physical environment as a limiting factor for livelihoods (see section 4.1). It also reflects the historical perspective of livelihoods lining out the different aspects of a path-dependent development influencing local livelihoods (section 4.2) as well as resulting socio-economic and political contexts in the transformation process. The transformation process comes along with certain trends and constraints outlined above (section 4.3) ultimately leading to a state of livelihood in uncertainties.

5 Livelihood systems in Khorog in face of transformation

Following the illustration of the physical, historical and socio-economic macro contexts livelihood activities in Khorog are embedded in, in this section the actual empirical findings of the field research regarding agencies and livelihood strategies of households on a micro level will be presented. Following the presentation of the most important assets and strategies used by different sampled households, the household's livelihoods will be analysed in light of the above presented theoretical frameworks. This includes a deeper discussion of the importance of social security in a transformative society that has to cope with the personalisation of livelihoods and the resulting uncertainties, emerging aspects of diversification and multi-locality of livelihoods and the role of remittances as well as an analysis of vulnerabilities faced by households in context of transformation and its risks and constraints. Subsequently, the coping strategies and responses to risks will be discussed, also with regard to overlaps to livelihood activities in Khorog in general. This already directs to a discussion about the ability of local actors to organise their livelihoods in strategic ways or whether the activities followed can be viewed as responses that emerge out of the particular historical pathways and embeddedness of local actors.

5.1 Livelihood characteristics of households in Khorog – empirical findings

5.1.1 Household compositions

In terms of size and composition, the size of households surveyed was between a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 14 households with an average size of 5.5 members per household. Most households had at least one absent household member who either migrated to Russia in search of income opportunities or who studied in another city – in most cases Dushanbe⁷. Typically, households were composed of one family and often close relatives of the male head of the household, for example brothers, the mother or the wife of a son, were also living in the household. In some cases, more families (more than the nuclear family – the greater family) were living in one house or on one plot of land in various structures – for example, an elderly husband and his wife as well as their three sons with their respective families.

As described in the methodology-section, the households were classified according to their ability to fulfil their needs on their own at all times. As indicator for the classification the dependency of households to owe money to or to go in debt with shop owners or bazar sellers – *qarz* – was used. In the sample of households interviewed for this research, 14 households (36.8 percent) never rely on *qarz* or borrowing money to fulfil their needs, 12 households (31.6 percent) use *qarz* or borrow from time to time and unregularly and also 12 households regularly depend on this strategy.

From the surveyed households, 18 live in apartments while the other 20 dwell in houses. Households of the poor category tended to be slightly more represented in apartments (eight of the poor category while moderately poor and better-off households were represented in apartments with four, respectively six households). Correspondingly, only four as poor classified households were living in houses, while the other categories were represented in this category with eight households each.

5.1.2 Labour, income and financial resources

5.1.2.1 *Income structures and sources*

Almost all households had more than one income-earning member or more than one source of income. This finding was consistent with the general trend of income diversification in the last decades: “households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living” (Ellis 2000: 15, in de Haan & Zoomers 2003: 356). The size of the household can usually not be used as an indicator for the well-being or the ability of a household to meet all its needs. In this regard, the dependency ratio⁸ is more significant: How many household members are able to generate an income and how many members depend on them? Larger households with more members in employable age can at least theoretically diversify their income source more easily than smaller households. This could be observed in some larger households: Even when one or more adults were unemployed or only had access to part-time jobs in summer, this could be absorbed by the high number of adults still employed. In the cases of some of the larger households, however, disproportionally many adults were unemployed or relied only on precarious and poorly paid part-time jobs.

⁷ These absent household members were still included into the household because of the close economic relationships between the absent members and the Khorog based household: Students were financially dependent on families; household members working in Russia without own families abroad who mostly sent remittances to one respective household in Khorog.

⁸ Dependency ratio here means the ratio of the number of persons in the household that are not in an employable age *and* persons who are unemployed to the number of persons who *have* work and more or less stable income sources. Persons employed in casual labour or seasonal income sources were counted as 0.5. Pensions were not included into this.

Table 2: Average dependency ratio of 38 surveyed households categorised in household groups (based on own survey)

Category	Average dependency ratio
Poor	3.1
Moderately poor	1.6
Better-off	1.2
Total average	1.9

Households with insufficient income who depend on *qarz* to meet their needs usually have a higher dependency ratio – on average the ratio is 3.1 (Table 2). While households who were better-off and do not rely on *qarz* or borrowing money regularly have lower dependency ratios with average of 1.6 respectively 1.2. These households were on average more successful in diversifying their income sources on the heads of different household members. The loss of an income provider

would hit the already poorer households much harder than the better-off households who usually rely on several income sources.

The number of persons who rely on insecure casual jobs or unskilled labour jobs was non-surprisingly much higher in poorer households than in better-off households (Table 3). These jobs, many of which are in the construction sector, are often seasonal and more vulnerable to economic fluctuations. In some cases, however, households showed a low dependency ratio but were still able to fulfil all their needs on their own due to the high income of one- or two-income earning members. Contrasting this, there also were also households with a high number of income-earning members, but with low income and, thus, a poor ability to meet their needs on their own at all times. Still, a general trend could be observed.

Without going too far into the topic of women’s livelihoods (see Kanji 2012), it can generally be said that women were usually involved in generating income more or less in the same way as men. Less than 10 women in total were described as housewives. Most women were part of the workforce a household could rely on. This might be related to the generally more liberal environment of GBAO with regards to gender relations, which became noticeable during observations and conversations in field research.

In some cases, individual household members diversified their income and pursued more than one job. One man, for example, earns his money as a taxi driver, while simultaneously being engaged as a wrestling trainer and as a part-time construction builder.

The dominant source of income in the sample of households (Table 3) was governmental employment which served as an income source in 19 of 38 households – overall 34 of the 136 persons who indicated to have a job were employed by the government⁹. Thereof, ten persons are teachers, hinting not only at the importance of education in Khorog, but also at the importance of

Table 3: Income sources of individual members of the 38 surveyed households subdivided in different household categories (based on own survey)

Income source	Category			
	poor	moderately poor	better-off	Total
Casual labour	10	5	3	18
Governmental employed	3	7	14	24
Governmental employed (teacher)	5	3	2	10
NGO employed		1	2	3
Pension	6	6	6	18
Remittances	5	7	6	18
Self-employed	1	8	11	20
Wage labour (various)	2	4	5	11
Wage labour (unskilled)	8	5	1	14
Total	40	46	50	136

⁹ This number is likely to be even higher as it was not always clear whether the profession of a person was connected to governmental employment.

educational jobs for households. Although being a teacher does not mean being paid well. Income of governmental employment ranges from the very low salaries of road sweepers, 370 Somoni per month to relatively high salaries of doctors and professors, more than 1,200 Somoni per month. Due to this range, governmental employment can be found in all categories.

18 percent of the workforce were employed in wage labour, which was disaggregated in unskilled and skilled/various wage labour. Unskilled wage labour, together with casual labour which accounts for 13 percent of the workforce, is mostly low-paid and thus predominantly connected with poor households for which they represent the dominant source of income. Various wage labour as income source is more likely to be prevalent in better-off or moderately poor households.

Self-employment (where six out of 20 persons were engaged as taxi drivers) and NGO employment are usually connected with higher incomes and thus indicate for better-off households. Three persons in the sample work for NGOs earning more than 2,000 Somoni. Pensions and remittances were named as regular income sources by 18 households each. While pensions are usually low, 150-300 Somoni, and can be found in all categories, remittances vary widely and were also more or less equally distributed among all households.

Labour accounts for the major part of income generated from local jobs (without remittances) and can thus be regarded as an essential asset for the livelihood activities in Khorog. Nevertheless, income by labour alone, in general, is not sufficient to secure a livelihood for most households in Khorog, as many households also follow additional ways to meet their needs or rely on going in debt regularly or from time to time.

5.1.2.2 *Income distribution*

The sampled households had an average income of 2,619 Somoni per month which corresponds to 520 Somoni per person, with a minimum of 121 Somoni and a maximum of 1,060 Somoni per person. The average income of the better-off group of households is 753 Somoni per person; the income of the moderately poor is 496 Somoni; and the average income of the poor households is 244 Somoni per person.

The average income corresponds to the categorization of households (Figure 9), but it is not the only factor determining the ability of households to cover their needs. This shows that a purely economic perspective would fail as an explanatory approach and that the access to other assets and social relations have to be considered, as the subsequent sections will show. For example, this applies for households that have access to food sources for which they do not have to spend income: Households with bigger or sufficient home gardens (see section 5.1.3), households that receive substantial food support (see section 5.1.4) or households where household members work in food shops or restaurants and therefore are able to access food without spending much money for it. In one sample household (this is one of the outliers of the well-off category in Figure 9), the majority of household members is working in a restaurant owned by a close relative where they are taking almost all their meals and thus do not have to spend their limited income on food which they consequently can use for other needs. Even though the income of this family would suggest they have to rely on *qarz* and borrowing money regularly, this household was able to meet all its needs because of the employment arrangement.

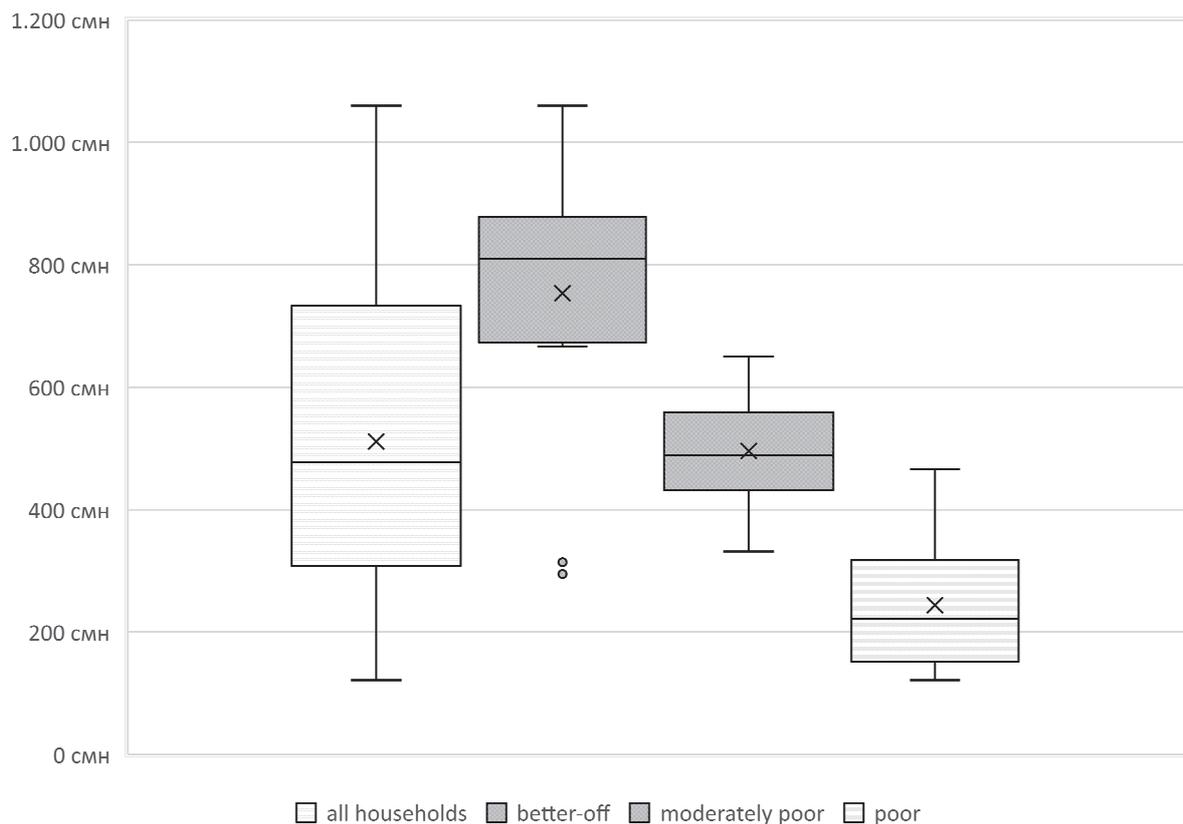


Figure 9: Box plot illustration of income distribution of the 38 surveyed households categorised in household groups in Somoni per person per month (based on own survey)

5.1.2.3 Remittances

Labour migration and remittances play a major role in the economic activities and possibilities of households in Khorog. The money sent from Russia, in almost all cases from Moscow, and in a very limited number of cases from other countries as the United Arab Emirates, has a decisive impact on the ability of households to meet their daily needs as well as for the possibility to acquire money for investments in housing, productive assets or education. This indicates the special role that multi-local organised livelihoods have in the Tajik and Khorog context (see section 5.2.2.3 below for a discussion about the importance of labour migration and remittances).

79 percent of the interviewed households reported to have one or more relatives who migrated to Russia. 53 percent of those households receive more or less regular support from their relatives abroad, while the remaining 26 percent with relatives in Russia only receive support on request in times of need. When this is the case, the relative abroad usually has his or her own family to take care of – those relatives are not counted as household members opposed to those labour migrants who do not have an own family and therefore regularly send money to their respective household and therefore being part of the household in Khorog.

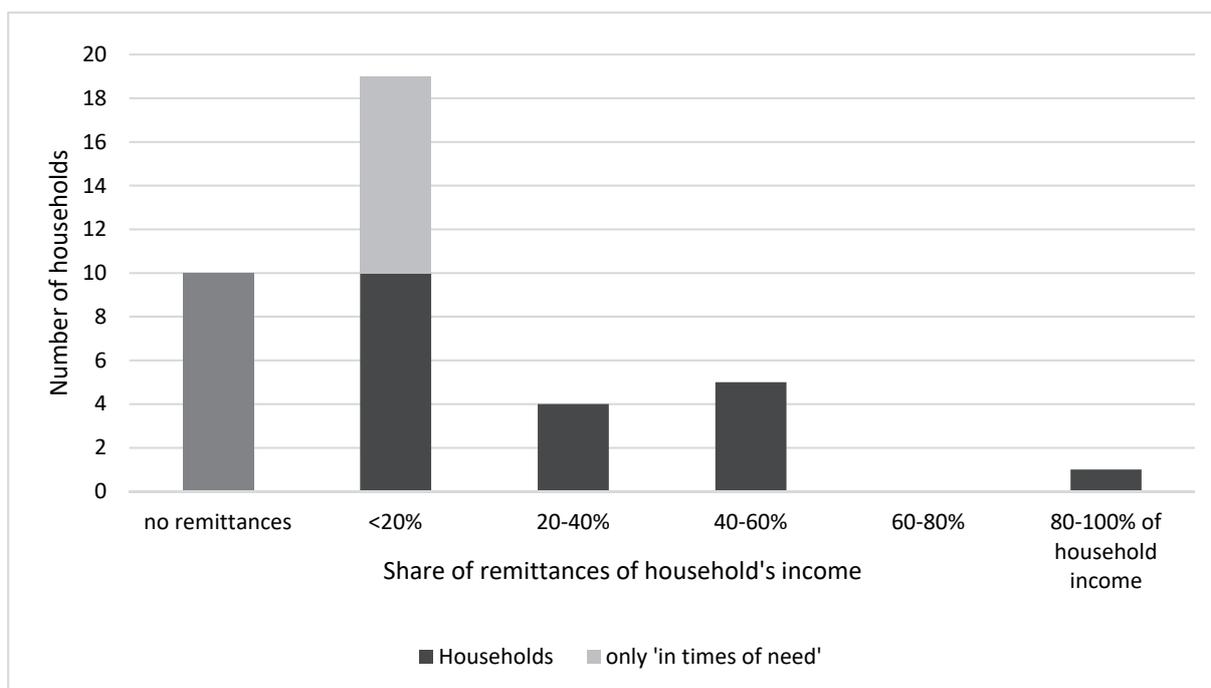


Figure 10: Share of remittances in household's income of the 38 surveyed households. Households that receive remittances on request in 'times of need' were added onto the category "<20%" because the share of those irregular remittances does not exceed 20%

On average, remittances make up for 18 percent of the household income. Figure 10 shows the percentage of remittances in household incomes. In most cases, the percentage of remittances in the monthly income of households is less than 20 percent or the households receive remittances only in times of need, which, then, is also less than 20 percent of the household income. In four households, the share of remittances makes up for more or less a third of the monthly available income, while in five households it is about half of the income and in one household remittances make up for more than 80 per cent of the household income, which underlines the dependency and importance of migration for households in Khorog on different levels – as well as the vulnerability of households if remittances for one reason or another suddenly cease. An employee of the Statistical Bureau of Khorog stated that from the total number of 19,000 people in employable age in Khorog, more than 5,000 are on labour migration. The given number fits to the data the survey indicated.

5.1.2.4 Access to credits

Access to credits can be an important factor for additional financial means for households to meet their needs or to make long-term investments. Borrowing money from relatives and friends or in smaller amounts from neighbours is normally less to be understood as credit, but more as part of mutual social relations or neighbourly assistance – usually without expecting to get the money back, but with the expectation of getting assistance in times of need. The same applies to *qarz* which, although it means debt or credit, is to be understood as a social practice (more on that in sections 5.1.4 and 5.2.1).

About 65 percent of the surveyed households have currently or have had in the last two years taken a credit. The credit sources the Microfinance Bank supported by the Aga Khan Development Network, NGO programmes as of the NGO Madina and very rarely formal governmental bank institutions. The most common credit source was the GAJA credit scheme. More than 70 percent of the interviewed households reported to be part in the GAJA credit schemes (Box 1 on GAJA). Credits are used for

various reasons: to cope with financial challenges in times of need as to pay for electricity fees in winter, to invest in housing, productive assets or the education of children or for labour migration.

Interestingly, six out of twelve households belonging to the poor category are not integrated into GAJA or other credit schemes. Some of these households indicated that it would not make sense for them to be part of it or to take credits since they were not able to make savings at all and also would not be able to pay credits back. In the category of the moderately poor, only one household was not involved in GAJA, while four of the 14 of the better-off households were also not involved. One of the respective households reported that they did not have to rely on credits as being provided in a GAJA scheme, they would however access other, larger credits.

Credits represent an important asset for additional income for most households in Khorog – for coping as well as for investments. However, access to credits is decisive: although GAJA provides access for the majority of households, the poorest households are not able to benefit from credits since they are not able to pay them back.

5.1.2.5 Expenditures

In this section, the most important expenses of households will be briefly outlined. This allows for a better view on challenges and consumption of the different household categories.

Food: The expenditures for food differ between better-off and poorer households and also between households of the same category depending on differing food access opportunities as food assistance from relatives in villages, home gardening or food supply during work which can be accessed, for example, by persons working in restaurants, cafes or shop owners. The average food expenses per

Box 1: GAJA credit scheme groups (based on expert and household interviews)

GAJA is the most important and most used credit scheme in Khorog. GAJA credit schemes are community-based support groups in which credits for small loans up to 5,000 Somoni can be accessed. The community-based groups were established by a MSDSP programme in the years 2013-15. About 100 GAJA groups consisting of 20 to 50 members, mostly women, because the programme initially intended to empower women, were trained by MSDSP employees. A Project Manager of MSDSP reported that about 90 percent of these groups are still active and that to his estimates about 80 percent of all households of Khorog participate in a GAJA group. The GAJA groups organise themselves without supervision of MSDSP. Groups regularly chose their own chairperson who gets supported by a chosen accountant – they are responsible for the functioning of the credit groups. Regular meetings are held to discuss problems and current loans.

Participating persons can pay into the GAJA account whatever they are able to afford and are allowed to take loans with very little interest which they have to pay back in a given time. On the other hand, participants can use the GAJA group to spare money by paying into and receiving the payments back at a given time plus interests.

GAJA credits serve in various ways. Some households used the credits in times of need to cover their daily expenses, especially the rising electricity costs in winter were named as a reason. Some take GAJA credits to pay for other daily needs as food in harsh times or for new school clothing. But GAJA credits are also used to enable investments which were not possible otherwise, for example educational costs, house improvements, festivities as weddings, car reparations or for migration to Russia.

person per month are 132 Somoni, while better-off households spend 165 Somoni on average, moderately poor households spend 124 Somoni and poor households 105 Somoni.

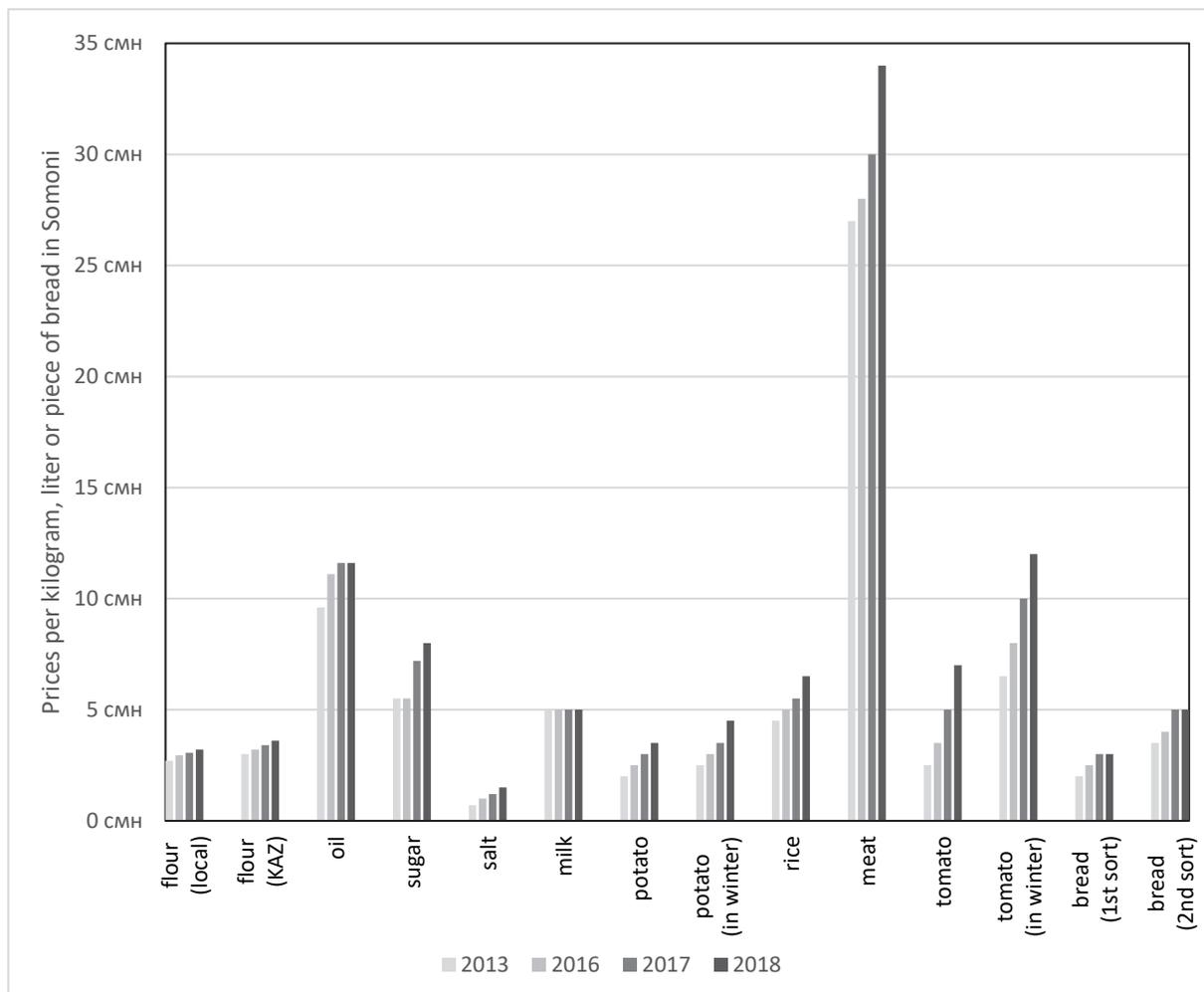


Figure 11: Food price developments on Khorog's main bazar in recent years (based on own survey)

As described above, the food expenditures are increasing due to rising food prices (Figure 11). A majority of households described the rising food prices as a significant challenge and problem. Inflation and the dependency of food prices on the international markets and international oil prices let the food prices increase faster than the average salaries. Also, seasonal fluctuations of food prices present a problem to households in Khorog. In winter, prices for vegetables and fruits are increasing due to ceased local production and logistic costs which are increasing on a high level. Even better-off households are facing problems in acquiring all the needed food commodities during winter. Most households are responding with reduced consumption of fruits and vegetables. A strategy that might lead to poorer nutritional status and a higher vulnerability to health issues.

Electricity: Costs for electricity supply also take a significant part of the monthly household expenditures. Electricity is used for lighting, heating, television, radio and cooking. Especially in winter, when temperatures are dropping to an average of -8°C in December (Bliss 2006: 27), electricity costs are increasing since most households use radiators to heat. On average, expenditures for electricity in winter are more than 190 per cent of the

Table 4: Average electricity expenses in summer and winter of 31 surveyed households (based on own survey)

Average electricity expenditures in summer	Average electricity expenditures in winter	Increase
117.10 Somoni	311.94 Somoni	193%

expenditures in summer (Table 4) and, thus, present a major challenge for households. Some households use alternative heating sources in winter such as wood, which they either buy on the market or cut themselves, coal, which has to be imported from Northern Tajikistan but is still cheaper than electricity but only available for households with ovens (no ovens in apartments) or manure.

Education: While public schools in Khorog do not charge fees, some private schools are relatively expensive. In several cases, the decision maker in households considered private education, for example in the Aga Khan School, as important enough to pay those fees – even though, the household does not have the necessary financial resources. Therefore, credits were taken over GAJA or other schemes. Higher education in universities can also be expensive. Until a couple of years ago, the State University was free, but now the fee is considerable. There are a number of possibilities to study for free. For example, it is possible to get scholarships, especially for high performing students, an opportunity which is utilized by many students. When this is not possible, households try to enable the education of their children by taking credits, lowering other expenses or even go on migration in order to make enough money.

5.1.3 Home gardening

Home gardening can be considered as the most important natural assets in the urban context of Khorog. For those households that obtain the necessary space and who are able to cultivate a plot of land, home gardening or urban agriculture presents a good opportunity to increase their self-sufficiency. From 38 interviewed households, 14 cultivated a garden in some form or another. However, urban gardening is mainly an option for better-off households. Nine of the 14 gardens were in better-off households. On the other hand, only two out of twelve poor households accessed a (small) garden.

Table 5: Urban gardening and effect on food expenses (based on own survey)

Garden (number of households)	Income spend on food (average)
Big garden (6)	20%
Small garden (8)	32%
No garden (24)	37%

In the urban context of Khorog, where most interviewed households rely on buying vegetables or fruits for a nutritional diet on the markets, having a plot for urban gardening can be an important asset or advantage for securing livelihoods. To use a plot for urban gardening access to irrigation as well as the necessary capacities, human assets, as skill, time or physical ability are required. Households that are able to cultivate gardens enjoy two advantages. For one, a home garden contributes to the self-sufficiency of food products. Households with large enough gardens produce enough fruits or certain vegetables themselves that they do not need to go to markets to buy certain food commodities in the summer months. This contributes not only to a more diverse nutrition but also holds the economic advantage that these households have to spend less money for the increasingly costly vegetables and fruits on the markets. Households with large enough gardens were sometimes also able to build up small stocks of food for the winter months.

The smaller home gardens (Figure 13) contribute to the food supply of the households as well, although not to the same extent as the bigger ones. The households with big gardens (Figure 12) spend on average 20 percent of their income on food, while households with small gardens spend 32 percent and households with no gardens spend 37 percent of their income on food (Table 5). Although these figures have to be treated with caution as households with bigger gardens all belonged to the group of households who were better-off and generally had a higher income, they show that the possibility of cultivating a garden poses a livelihood activity that contributes to meet the household needs and save money.



Figure 12: Big home garden of a well-off family in the centre of Khorog (Photograph by author, 9 October 2018)

Most households cultivate small plots of tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers as well as onions and carrots. Additionally, many gardens cultivate fruits and have one or more apple trees, berries, mulberries and in some cases cherries, peaches, apricots or grapes. Six of the cultivated gardens were big or productive enough to have a significant impact on the food situation of those households. The other eight gardens were smaller and only produced additional food for the households.

The relatively low number of households invested in home gardening can be explained because the surveyed households and the study area were mostly located in the centre of Khorog where space is limited and many interviewed households live in apartments (see Figure 3 on page 14). In most non-central areas of Khorog the number of households invested in home gardening as well as keeping livestock would be considerably higher. Of the surveyed households only four keep livestock. These households hold cows as well as chickens, goats or sheep. The milk and meat these animals produced as well as the vegetables and fruits from the gardens were used additionally for own consumption. Only in two cases, households with gardens sell their products. One household sells walnuts and strawberries to get additional income. Another household occasionally sells cherries and apples in times of surpluses.



Figure 13: Small garden for additional food of a poor household on the North side of the centre (Photograph by author, 13 October 2018)

Home or urban gardening serves as an additional asset that can significantly contribute to reducing food expenses. However, it was primarily connected to better-off households. Here, the question is, if those households belong to the better-off category *because* (besides other factors) they access a garden and are thus able to save money and are less dependent on *qarz*, or if they are able to cultivate a garden and to own property which allows it because they are better-off.

5.1.4 Social relations and networks

Arguably, the most important asset and aspect of securing a livelihood in Khorog and to meet the daily needs are the social relations and networks in which the households are organised. Formal and informal structures of mutual networks exist through which poor and vulnerable households are able to access assistance in times of need. During the field research, different aspects of social life were found to be important. This includes formal and informal neighbourhood assistance as the institution of the *rais*, family networks and urban-rural networks, social relations in the form of *qarz*, and other social relations, institutionalized or not, that ensure social security.

Almost all households indicate that they maintain social relations with their neighbours that also contribute in securing their livelihoods or make ends meet. On the informal basis, this includes small mutual support activities such as watching the children of the neighbours, giving food assistance when needed or borrowing small amounts of money. This mutual assistance goes both *ways* for almost all households including the poorer ones who also reported to give their support even though they do not have much to share. Nevertheless, poorer households naturally tended to be more often in a position to receive assistance and better-off households, contrary, to give assistance. Only a small number of households did not mention neighbourhood assistance and, when asked, stated that there was no relation to the neighbours. These households were usually one of the poorest and those who struggled the most to secure their livelihoods. To explain this, one has to look at processes of social exclusion.

Important in this context, are the concepts, practices and institutions of *qarz*, *kiryar* and the *rais*-system. These systems not only help meeting needs but also promote mutual trust and reproduce social relations (for a more detailed discussion, see 5.2.1).

Qarz describes the process of going in debt or taking a credit of a market seller or a shop owner and is an important social concept in Khorog and GBAO and was therefore used as a basis for the categorization of households as described above. As already shown, 24 of the 38 households use *qarz* in their daily lives as a mean to meet their needs. Twelve households rely on *qarz* regularly as a livelihood strategy. Using the *qarz* system, households, especially those who are poor, can acquire goods on credit and pay for them later, when they have the money: “it is considered to be extremely immoral, actually unthinkable, to reject a person who is severely in need, especially concerning food, if one possesses the means to help. (...) In consequence, merchants tend to grant *qarz* to poor persons” (Maertens 2017: 183). Requirement of *qarz* is that both parties know each other, although knowing can be understood in a broader sense here (Maertens 2017: 180). The practice of *qarz* is strongly connected to social and religious values and is thus embedded in particular historical contexts which will be further discussed further below. *Qarz*, thus, is both a way or livelihood strategy for poor people in need to meet their needs and a system of mutual social responsibility and solidarity.

Kiryar, means building together and is, following Ilolov and Khudoiyev, “the traditional Eastern form of mutual aid in which the community comes together to build a house or to sow or harvest crops” (2001: 610). Many households, when improving their housing or building new houses, will activate their social networks consisting of friends and/or relatives to help them in the construction works. In doing so, the social relations are reproduced, and people depend on each other’s help. Also, for festivities such as weddings, funerals or other ceremonies families can usually rely on neighbours, relatives and friends to collect money to pay for the expenses.

These more or less informal bounds of social neighbourhood networks get accompanied by a more institutionalized social network, the *rais*, which represents a form of community self-government or management. The *rais* is the unpaid chairman of a neighbourhood or street community, or – in a rural

setting – of the village. In Khorog, the *rais* is responsible for 30 to 60 households. He gets elected by the households in the area he is responsible for. That way, theoretically, every household and individual get represented by a *rais*. The *rais* knows about the general conditions of the neighbourhood, the families living there and the challenges. Once a month, the community conducts a meeting which is visited by a representative of every household to discuss community issues and problems. Although its functions are not standardized and the tasks of the different *rais* vary, he generally functions as a contact person for the community as well as for the government or NGO programmes and he is responsible to take care of problems for example in regard to local water management issues. His social responsibilities include mediating disputes and organizing funerals or other ceremonies or caring for families who are in need, for example when a member of household has to go to a hospital. Here, the social relations of mutual assistance are formalized and institutionalized, and the *rais* is responsible for delegating particular tasks of mutual assistance. In the example, the *rais* delegates the collection of money to pay for the health costs or in case of a death of caring for the respective family. A majority of households reported to have donated for the hospital visit of a neighbour in the last year.

The institution of the *rais* can be regarded as a social safety net when households are challenged in their livelihood activities by unexpected events as illnesses or deaths that affect the household's livelihood situation. In long-term this system, theoretically, represents an institutionalized social asset that those who are struggling to meet their needs can access in times of need. Simultaneously, the institutions reproduced mutual care and coherence in the community. However, some of the interviewed households that were struggling the most, with low income, high dependency on low-paid jobs and who go in debt regularly, did not mention the *rais* system or neighbourhood assistance. This raises the question about how comprehensive these systems really are and if there are differences about how different households are able to activate this asset or how social exclusion processes work.

The above-mentioned GAJA system can similarly be regarded as a formalized social network. The self-organized loan system, initiated by MSDSP, does not only play a crucial role in accessing financial resources for households, but is also important for the social relations of a community and mutual trust.

A major factor in securing livelihoods for many families were their connections to relatives in rural villages in GBAO who were able to cultivate a larger plot of land and to share their harvests with their urban relatives in Khorog. 20 of the 38 households receive more or less regular food support from their relatives in the villages. In eight cases, this support – in most cases support means a number of sacks of potatoes, onions and carrots, and sometimes fruits or other vegetables – has a significant impact on the ability of the households to meet their food needs. Here, significant means that the support is sufficient enough that the households are less dependent on the markets since their self-sufficiency is enhanced. For example, some of these households do not require to buy fruits in more than six months of the year or they receive enough potatoes, onions or carrots that they do not require to buy them on the markets in the winter months, which consequently reduces their food expenses. In twelve cases, the support is additional to the food needs of a household. This means that the support more or less unregularly enhances the nutritional variability or it is enough for a limited amount of time, but households still have to buy most food commodities on the markets. Nevertheless, this support also has an impact on the food expenditures of respective households. While the households who receive no or additional support spend on

Table 6: Food support from relatives in rural villages and effects on food expenses (based on own survey)

Food support from relatives in villages	Number of households	Income spent on food (average)
no	18	38%
additional	12	31%
significant	8	21%

average 38 or 31 percent of their respective income for food, those households with significant support only spend 21 percent of their available finance resource on food (Table 6).

5.1.5 Governmental and NGO programmes

NGOs and organisations as the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) or the associated Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (MSDSP) play an important role in Khorog, but more so in the surrounding and more remote villages of GBAO where services are harder to reach. While almost no household indicated to benefit directly through the work of NGOs, for example by participating in training programmes or the like, it should be noted that these organisations provide a broad range of interventions and services to increase living conditions or support livelihoods and are contributing by enhancing possibilities for people in Khorog and GBAO. The NGO Madina, for example, provides trainings and support services for labour migrants who have been deported from Russia and enables favourable credits for poor households.

The governmental support, especially compared to the NGO support, only has a limited scope in Khorog. Some households with disabled members reported to get additional governmental assistance and a pension for disabled persons of 100 to 200 Somoni per month from time to time. The additional support seemed to be connected with a decree of the president when he visited the city in the past.

A regular support system exists in the form of a governmental social programme which exists in Khorog since 2015/16. The social programme is aiming to support the urban poor to meet their needs and to access governmental services. Approximately 20 to 50 households apply for the governmental support every month – more households in the winter months – and about 50 per cent of those applications will be accepted. In the applications, households must provide information on their assets and needs. An assessment determines the score of the households, and if the household receives support or not. Households who get into the programme receive 100 Somoni per quarter and reduces or subsidies on governmental services as hospital fees, pharmacies, education and other. Additionally, once a year, the household receives food support in form of 50 kilogram flour, 1 kilogram salt, 2 kilogram butter and 50 kilogram rice. During the research, one household participating in the social programme was interviewed.

However, most poorer households interviewed did not know about this governmental social programme, which raises the question of how information on the programme is disseminated and which social and power processes play a role in getting governmental support. One interviewed household reported that they applied for the programme one year ago, but the respective government authority never responded. Households also did not trust the government to actually pay the support measures as they are suspected to “not care about the people” or it was suspected that only those with relations to the government authority are able to actually get the support as a consequence of nepotism.

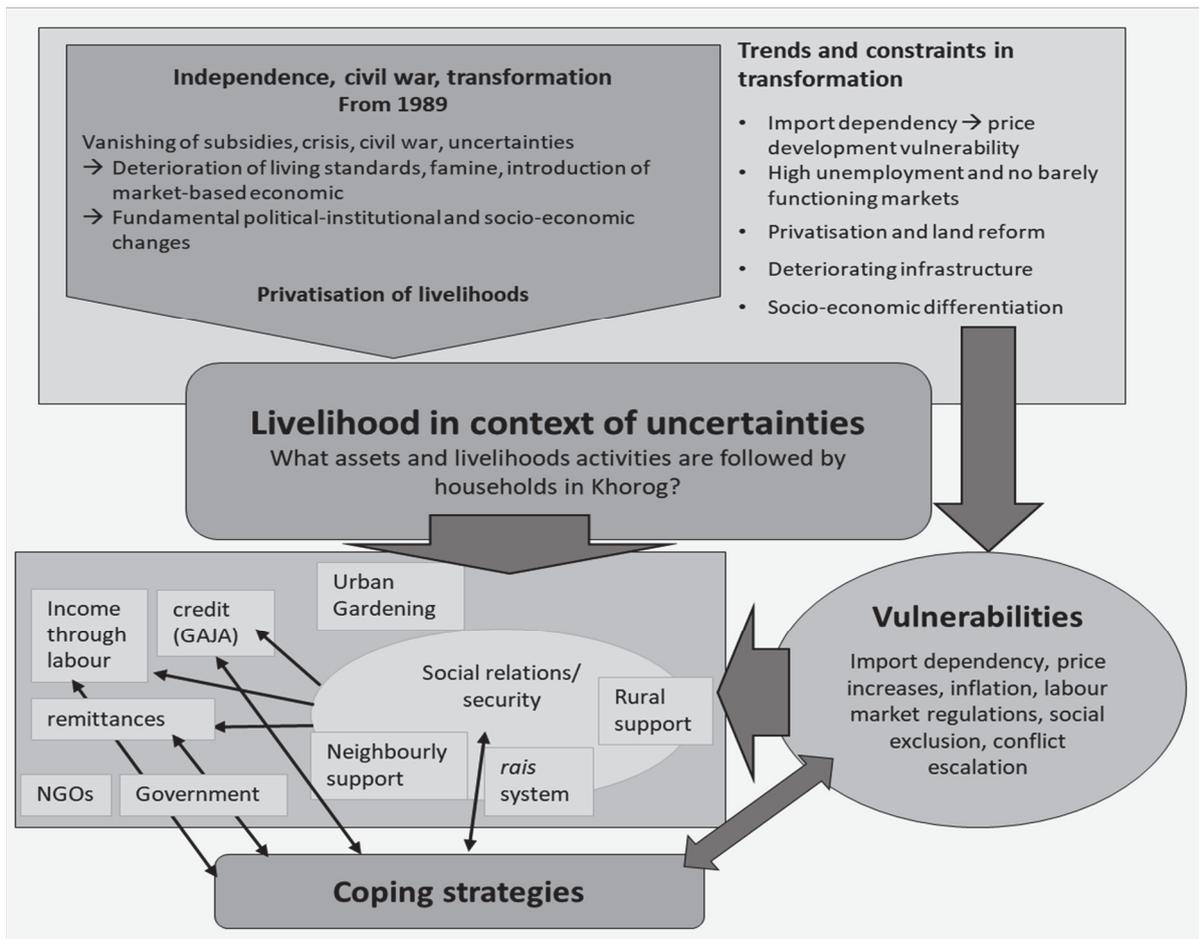


Figure 14: Schematic representation of livelihood activities in transformative context of Khorog

Figure 14 shows a schematic representation of the livelihood activities in context of the transformation which accounts for uncertainty and is the structural framework in which livelihoods of local actors in Khorog are embedded. The most important livelihood activities that the empirical field research revealed are presented with special emphasis on the social relations and social security, a topic that will be addressed in-depth in the following section. Vulnerabilities result from the trends and constraints of the transformation process which might affect livelihoods of local households. Coping strategies against shocks and stresses resulting from vulnerabilities concern different livelihood activities of households. The aspects of vulnerabilities and coping strategies are also to be discussed in the following section.

5.2 Discussion – livelihood systems in Khorog

With regard to the theoretical perspectives on livelihoods in context of transformation (section 2) the empirical results on livelihood activities in Khorog (section 5.1) which are embedded in structural contexts (section 4) will be interpreted. This addresses aspects of the analytical framework on livelihood research that have been identified as important for understanding livelihood activities in Khorog, which exceed rather static perspectives on livelihoods (Figure 15). This includes a discussion about the importance of social security in an uncertain transformative context which goes beyond a mere notion of ‘social assets’, a review on emerging trends in livelihood research that can be found in Khorog as diversification and multi-locality of livelihoods and the role of remittances for local households. Further, aspects and factors that account for risk and vulnerability will be considered, as well as coping strategies and responses of households. As coping already touches the question on the

scope of strategical planning of livelihoods, a discussion on livelihoods as strategies or pathways in the Khorog context will complete this section.

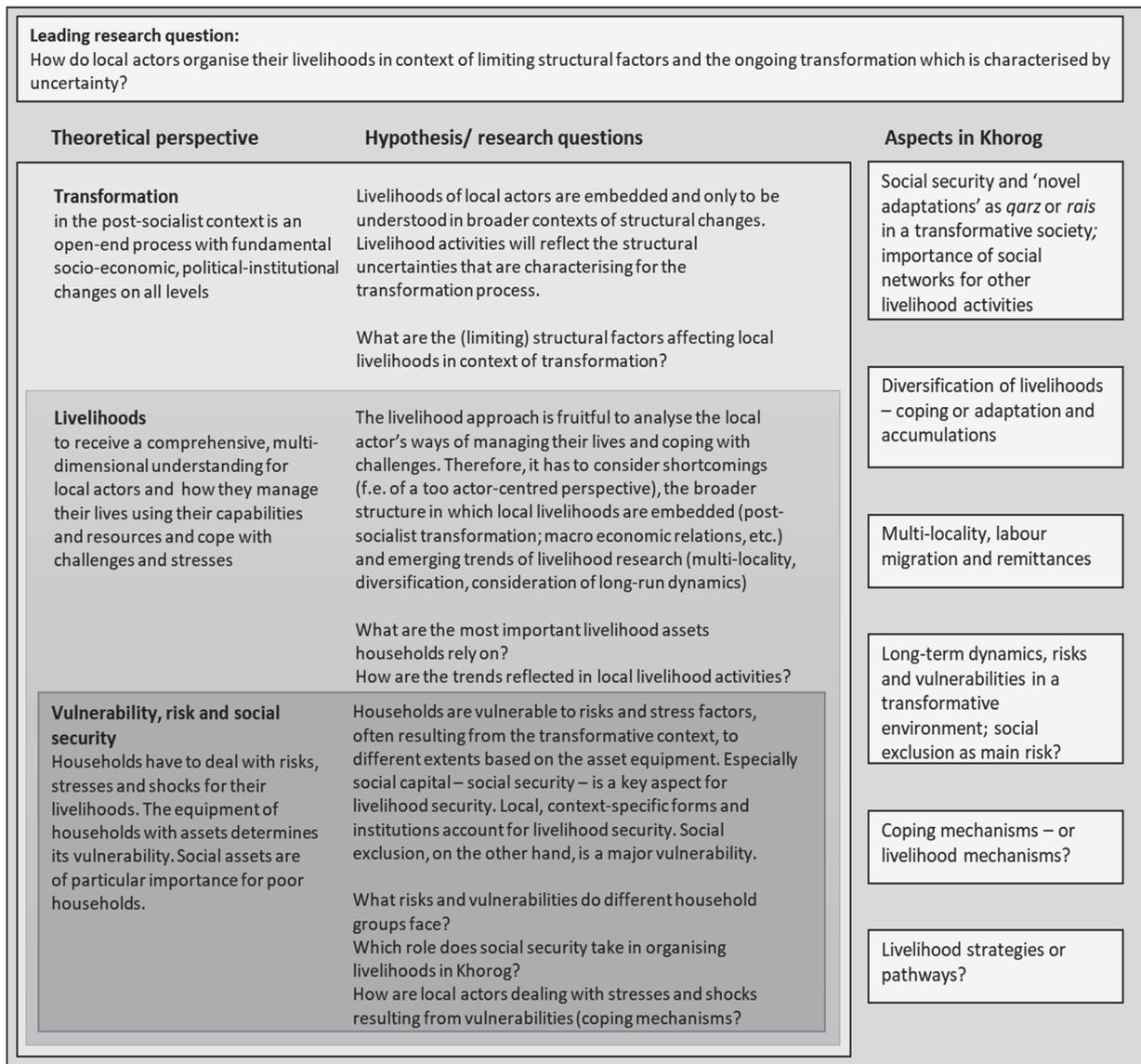


Figure 15: Analytical framework and aspects of livelihood systems in Khorog to be discussed

5.2.1 Social security in a transformative society

As outlined above, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the existing economic and political structures that considerably shaped the life realities of local actors, meant for most people a shock that comes along with a rise of uncertainties that are beyond the influence of the respective local actors (Steimann 2011: 35). The changing macro structures and processes on a broader economic and political sphere affect the everyday lives and practices on a micro or household level and increase the uncertainties faced by local actors by privatising the formerly state secured livelihoods (Maertens 2017: 160).

As indicated above (section 2.3 and section 5.1.4), social relations and networks are key in securing livelihoods. Their role is particularly important when looking at the broader, dynamic picture of livelihoods and not only at the momentary static snapshot of livelihoods. Social relations are more than just another asset in the livelihood pentagon, they are the foundation of the stability and resilience of livelihoods or, on the other hand, when missing, an important factor responsible for vulnerability. Social relations and networks, thus, offer social security. As Kaag et al. explain, the “term ‘social

security' refers to the ways in which people, households, and societies try to protect themselves against shocks and stresses that threaten the continuity and stability of their livelihoods in a social way (i.e. by help, interaction and/or exchange with others)" (2004: 57), this includes "non-state and locally organised forms of social security that are not embedded in state regulations and legislation. Most are not formalised in written rules and regulations, are context-specific, restricted to small areas, and mainly organised by local people" (2004: 57). These characteristics of non-formalisation, context-specificness and local organisation are fitting to the social ways people in Khorog are securing livelihoods. For example, following aspects can be named in this context: *qarz*, the *rais* system and *kirjar*.

These aspects have also to be viewed in the context of transformation and the ways changing macro structures affect the everyday lives on a household level and simultaneously provoking practices on this micro level that can be viewed as continuities or recourses on Soviet or even pre-Soviet times, but are, as Burawoy and Verdery point out, novel adaptations which are direct responses to new changing circumstances (1999: 7). Some of the mentioned practices described above can be interpreted in this way, as social ways that seem to be resurfacing in the form of tradition, but are more likely newly invented, or as Burawoy and Verdery put it: "the past enters the present, not as a legacy but as novel adaptation" (1999: 4).

5.2.1.1 *Social practices and institutions as novel adaptation*

Maertens argues that the practice of *qarz* is such a novel adaptation. *Qarz* for people in GBAO and Khorog is not only a practice used for households to meet their needs, it is also a socio-cultural and religious norm which is embedded in historical context:

"[People in Gorno-Badakhshan] regularly obtain consumer goods on debt basis, which (...) is not only a simple feature of market economic exchange, but rather a complex practice involving moral concerns and forms of social obligation. Moreover, *qarz* points at larger issues concerning the specific course that the transition from Soviet planned economy to a market based economy has taken in Tajikistan's Pamir region" (Maertens 2017: 160).

The practice is, as Maertens shows, interwoven with local cultural practices, embedded in structural economic contexts and a consequence of historical changes, that made the practices vital to secure livelihoods of households and to satisfy their needs. *Qarz*, thus, has several layers of context. For one, the introduction of market economy was accompanied and promoted in Ismaili religious leaders in which course the new economy was embedded "within a normative framework of religious-moral values that are based on a holistic Muslim conception of human existence and experience, in which worldly matters are inseparable from faith, and doing business is not detached from concerns of being a good person" (Maertens 2017: 160). The second layer is the political-historical context of GBAO which experiences the transformation to a market-based economy where the financial situation is poor, inter alia, due to the former integration into the Soviet provision system and the dependencies this has created (see section 4.2.1).

Besides the privatisation of livelihoods, the collapse of the Soviet Union "led to the *personalisation* of transactions in a market setting, where relatives, neighbours and friends came to encounter each other as clients and shopkeepers. In short, market trade replaced provisioning, and personalised exchange relations replaced rather anonymous state regulation and redistribution" (Maertens 2017: 160). Here, *qarz* in the context of personalisation of market exchange presents a novel adaptation, as it is neither a Soviet legacy nor a Pamiri tradition and thus not a restoration of old patterns, but instead a response to new challenging circumstances and the needs of a society in a context where financial means are scarce but traders still need to sell their products to make a living on their own. Maertens argues that

qarz “functions as an intermediary to integrate contradictory demands of the community and the market: of being a good person meeting social obligations and making profit or just ends meet” (2017: 184). The emergence of *qarz* and the personalisation of market exchanges, so Maertens, is both the effect of and the response to

“conditions of pecuniary scarcity, which is a result of both the design of former Soviet provisioning and the introduction of market economic structures in its aftermath. (...) Mediated through personal relationships, scarcity is transformed into debt, which is distributed and forwarded, finally, to a considerable extend, to migrant workers whose destinations indicate the persistence of structures of dependency” (2017: 27).

In a similar way, the *rais* system emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The *rais* system has its roots in pre-Soviet regional Islamic traditions and the *rais* was elected by the community elders as a community chairman to resolve conflicts and consults the elders in making decisions and organizes social community life (Ilolov & Khudoiyev 2003: 610). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, established political structures eroded and the resulting vacuum regarding local power structures was filled by informal political institutions such as the *rais* system, which according to Hill was “tolerated under the Soviet Union and gained a renewed importance in the post-Soviet period” (2013: 296). The *rais* system corresponds to the definition of non-state and locally organised social security given above by Kaag et al. It is based on formal norms and serves as contact mechanisms for governmental agencies or NGO projects which also contributes to maintaining the legitimacy of the institution (Hill 2013: 303).

Drawing on the notes of Burawoy and Verdery, the institution of the *rais* can also be viewed as a novel adaptation, referring back to a Soviet or pre-Soviet institution which is used as a basis for a response to the challenges of a post-Socialist transformational society. In this case, I argue, the *rais* is not only a reaction to the power vacuum and political changes, but also to the subsequent “privatisation of securing livelihood” (Maertens 2017: 160) and the accompanying challenges for households, which can be mitigated by the community organisation and care which is promised by the institution of the *rais*.

5.2.1.2 Importance of social relations and networks for social security

These neighbourhood and family or kin based informal structures of mutual assistance indicate that the solidarity mechanisms are of great importance in securing the everyday needs in the urban area of Khorog. Many interviewed household members emphasized the meaning of these social networks and the mutual support to friends, neighbours and family as an important factor in their everyday lives, which is consistent with the remark of Kaag et al. who write: “Establishing and maintaining good relations with others is of crucial importance for enhancing and maintaining a living” (2004: 9). The practice of *kirjar*, building together, is frequently mentioned in this context. Social relations and trust not only affect the livelihood aspects that are directly linked to the social, as family networks between urban and rural based family members and the food assistance from the village or the described neighbourhood networks as the *rais* system or the GAJA systems or non-institutionalized forms of neighbourhood support, but also mediate other livelihood assets. Social and information networks, as the interviews with people who are planning labour migration or returning from it show, play a huge role in labour migration. This begins with the gathering of financial means for the migration of one family or kin member, includes the information exchange to already migrated social contacts who often are involved in organising jobs abroad or helping with the documents, and involves mutual support structures and the possibility of households to ask family members, who are not part of the household, for financial support.

Housing is also concerned by social relations. Households regularly reported to take relatives into their household in times of need. One household lost their home in the past and was provisioned with some rooms for his family by his employer to whom he maintained a friendly relationship. Households also regularly housed family members from rural areas who go to Khorog to study.

Social networks also concern the access to income and jobs. Some interviewees reported to mobilise their social relations to get access to jobs or information on available jobs, for example in restaurants owned or managed by a family member. Another example is a woman who casually engages in part-time jobs as a cleaner and who activates her social contacts to find temporal employers.

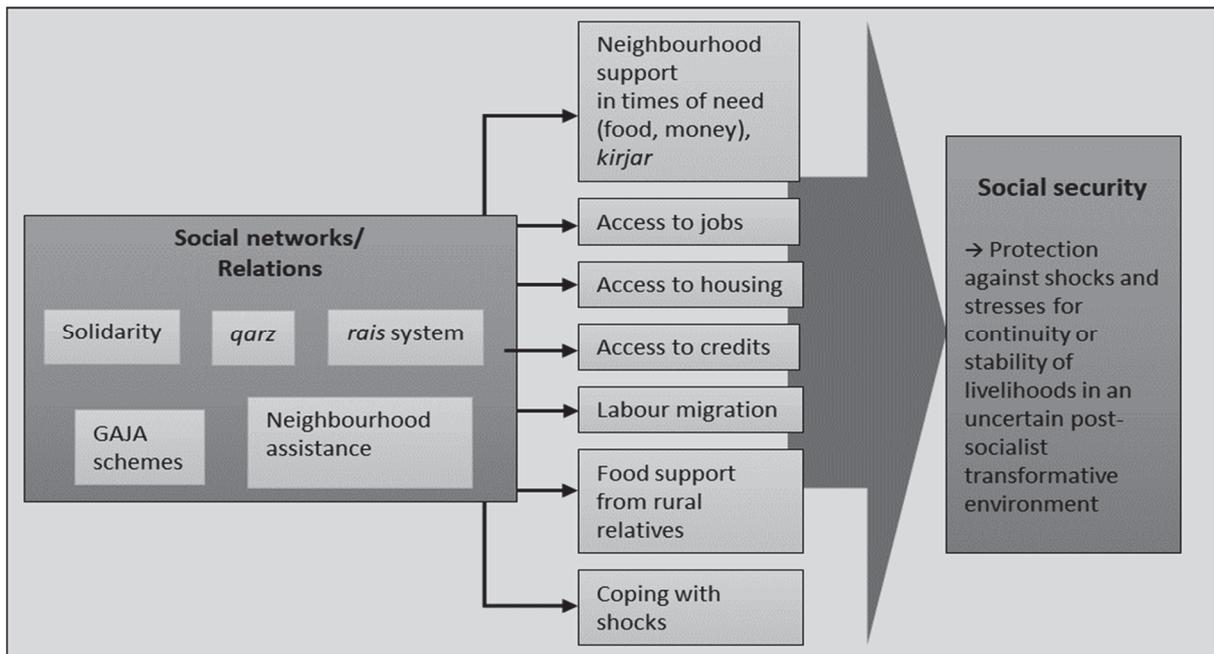


Figure 16: Social networks and relations enabling access to various assets and ensure social security

An expert of a local NGO explained the prevalence of social relations with shared collective experiences of the Pamiris and suggested that the strong relations, even though they existed before, are also a consequence of the experiences of the crisis and famine during the civil war where people had learned that they are only able to survive when they act together in solidarity. Kanji explains this with a particular Pamirian identity:

“Cooperative networks, levels of trust, and reciprocity (...) were very high. People exchanged food and basic goods, and helped each other with labour and specialised skills without ever expecting to be paid. The particular identity of Pamiris, the fact that they constitute a religious minority and that they live in mountain societies, are probably important factors, but it can be argued that basic material well-being allowed generosity and a collective spirit to prevail in this cultural context. In a sense, the system was underwritten by the subsidies provided in the Soviet state” (Kanji 2002: 143).

Although the existence and strength of social relations is considered predominantly positive, one interviewed expert noted that these systems also contribute to nepotism and the problem that work opportunities and jobs are not necessarily based on skills but rather on social relationships. At the same time, the existence of social networks and social inclusion by definition implies the exclusion of others (more on social exclusion in section 5.2.3.5). Social capital and social security are not equally distributed among households, and every household obtains a different ‘stock of social capital’ it can rely on. Further, social relations are not static but dynamic and have to be consolidated through various social processes and actions. This might include reciprocal practices, for example of *kirjar* or the

participation in *rais* meetings, taking care for each other's children or other mutual favours in everyday life.

To sum it up, social security is a very important factor for understanding everyday livelihood practices in post-socialist transformative Khorog. These social aspects, that can be called social capital when thinking in the asset pentagon, "can be considered an asset that reduces vulnerability or increases opportunities" (Moser 1998: 13). Social relations and networks in the form of the *rais* system, *qarz* or GAJA schemes account for social security as they mediate for other livelihood aspects as coping strategies and neighbourhood assistance, food support from rural villages, access to jobs, housing and credits which is displayed in Figure 16.

5.2.2 Diversification, multi-locality and remittances

5.2.2.1 *Diversification of livelihoods*

In accordance with the discussed trends in livelihood research, it became clear during the field research that most households organise their livelihoods in a multi-local way and thereby also diversify their livelihood sources by multi-tasking. The trends of livelihoods in a globalised world, as outlined by de Haan and Zoomers, of diversification and increased spatial dispersion (2003: 355-358) could be observed in Khorog where especially the multi-locality in form of labour migration is essential for securing livelihoods.

As shown above (section 5.1.2.1), almost all households had more than one source of income and were able to activate more than one livelihood asset. In some cases, individual household members diversified their income in pursuing different jobs simultaneously or in different seasons. Many men reported to get engaged in construction works as a part time job in the warmer months. Although increased diversification does not automatically improve the situation of a household (Steimann 2011: 37) a trend could be observed that a more diversified income structure tended to lead to a more stable livelihood. As shown, the dependency rate on individual income earning members is higher the poorer the households are (1.2 in the better-off households to 3.1 in the poorer households). Households that were better-off have more well-paid income sources of their income earning members to rely on. Poorer households also tended to diversify their income sources, but more among low-paid jobs, as for example in unskilled labour or casual labour. In better-off households at least one member obtains a well-paid income source for example as self-employed and other members have different kinds of income sources. Additionally, access to credits diversifies potentially available finance sources for households.

Based on these findings and following Steimann, it can be concluded that diversification means different things for different households: "For relatively rich, diversification is thus often a strategy of accumulation. On the other hand, short-term diversification is often forced and unplanned when households in financial distress are pushed into diversification" (2011: 37). For poorer or more vulnerable households, diversification, generally, can be seen as a response and coping strategy to challenging circumstances as the distribution of income to different sources or sectors reduces the vulnerability if one income source ceases. In the Khorog context these challenging circumstances include the low availability of well-paid jobs, the low salaries in many jobs as well as increasing prices, especially for food. Nevertheless, it could be observed that better-off households are more successful in diversifying their income, or, the other way around, households that were more successful in diversifying their income were usually better-off. However, diversification can be regarded as one factor for successfully securing livelihoods and to overcome the constraints of an uncertain environment. This also touches the discussion on livelihood strategies or pathways, which will be

further outlined below (section 5.2.5). It can be assumed that better-off households are actively diversifying their livelihoods while poorer households are forced to do so.

5.2.2.2 *Combining assets*

Relating to diversification of livelihoods, which is connected to the diversification of income sources, the combination of assets can also be a useful factor in securing livelihoods in Khorog. Not only the income or financial assets determine the ability of households to meet their needs – although these are essential in an urban context, probably more so than in rural contexts where subsistence is likely to play a larger role –, in most cases the specific combination of assets mediated through social relations impact the need fulfilment ability of households.

As shown in chapter 5.1.3, home gardening can be a significant factor for livelihood activities of households if they are able to access and cultivate a plot. It contributes to self-sufficiency, reduced food expenses and reduced vulnerability to food price increases. In this context, the combination of assets shows that a diversified asset structure can have advantages in securing livelihoods in Khorog. Self-sufficiency can be an important factor when connecting urban gardening and the mentioned food support through relatives in rural villages (see section 5.1.4). This lowers the food expenditures of respective households drastically. One surveyed household has access to both, a large garden and significant food support from relatives in villages, and is thus only spending 10 percent of its household income on food. Households who cultivate gardens (of any size) and receive food support (significant or additional) from relatives in villages (four households in the sample, all belonging to the better-off category) spend on average 24 percent of their income on food, while households without both of these assets which are directly impacting food supply (eight households of all categories) spend on average 43 percent of their income on food. This is a considerable difference and makes the latter more vulnerable to food price increases. The majority of households only have access to one of these two assets, a garden or assistance from villages. To access food support from relatives in villages, it is also key to nurture the social relations with families in rural villages and to permanently reproduce those relations. In this context, it should be noted that those rural-urban relationships between relatives were not just one-way but are more complex networks. With regard to education, children of rural relatives often move to the urban relatives, in many cases the same who receive food assistance, and visit one of the universities in Khorog. These aspects confirm the statement of Kaag et al. that “social relations do not have to remain local and even kinship is becoming increasingly multi-local, with relatives migrating to different urban and rural areas” (2004: 61).

5.2.2.3 *Multi-locality and remittances*

The multi-locality of households is, besides the urban-rural-relationships from households in Khorog to households in villages of Gorno-Badakhshan, primarily reflected in the labour migration to Russia, or to be more precise to Moscow. Labour migration and the resulting remittances are one of the most important aspects of livelihoods in Khorog, as well as in the whole of Tajikistan, as they made up for 31.1 percent of the country's GDP in 2017 (World Bank 2019). Migration in this context is “a livelihood strategy that aims to spread income risk through diversifying the household's income sources” and “can, in addition, be seen as a household strategy for overcoming local constraints on investments in the local economy” (de Haan & Zoomers: 2003: 358).

Maertens shows the connection of multi-locality in an increasingly connected and globalised post-Soviet transformation with the particular historical part and today's economic requirements:

“In (...) Gorno-Badakhshan, people do not only seek consumer goods from the outside but also search for income sources somewhere else, mainly in Russia. Ironically, erstwhile ‘Moscow provisioning’ has actually not vanished but, consistent with requirements of the transition towards market economy,

underwent adjustment as well and continues at the present time in its privatised variation of remittances sent home by Tajik migrant labourers” (2017: 165).

As described above (see section 5.1.2.3), 79 percent of interviewed households have relatives migrated to Russia and 53 per cent receive more or less regular support in form of remittances (from 200 up to 2.500 Somoni per month) or in-kind, mostly clothing. Counting all households, remittances make up for 18 per cent of the overall income. Looking at only those households that regularly receive remittances, its share is almost 30 percent of the household’s income. In the better-off category of households, the share was only 15 percent, while in the second category of households it was 26 percent and in the permanently insecure households it was 16 percent. This might be explained by the fact that the better-off households have generally more income so that the same amount of remittances results in a smaller share. It was also notable that the households who were (above-average) well-off did not have the need to send members (or members did not feel the need to go by themselves) to Russia to earn additional income since the resources they have in Khorog are sufficient. The smaller number in the poorer households can be explained that some of the poor households who do not have access to financial resources at all simply could not afford the costs of migration or do not have the social contacts and networks to find jobs in Russia or to deal with the regulations. The low percentage of remittances here can be seen as one reason for being poor. However, the notion of de Haan and Zoomers regarding the meaning of international labour migration for the local situation can be confirmed: “Local development can no longer be explained without taking into account the remittances sent by family members who have decided to migrate, and the flows of information connecting local spaces with the outside” (2003: 359).

The reasons for labour migration to Russia vary. One can differentiate between long-term, permanent migration and temporary migration which can be either goal-oriented or out of need. In some cases, usually in poorer households, long-term migration serves as a mean for additional income. Here, the household member on migration is able to earn more money for his/her own means as well as to support the family household in Khorog in meeting their needs. In other cases, migration is used (or has been used in the past) as a strategy to achieve a certain goal. Here, goal-oriented migration is planned as a temporary solution to earn enough income to be able to afford certain investments. In a number of cases, migration was used to finance the education and University costs of the household’s children who were studying in Khorog or Dushanbe. In other cases, the purpose of migration is (or was) to earn enough money to make larger investments into housing or to build or buy a new house. This was especially the case for recently married couples who were often living under the roof of the husband’s family. Other already returned migrants reported that they were able to invest in productive assets in Khorog with the money they saved during labour migration in Russia. This meant for example that they were able to buy a car to start a taxi business (three times) or to invest into equipment for a bakery business (two times). Another temporary migration strategy was to save enough money in Russia to live from those savings for a certain time with the plan to find an adequate job in Khorog afterwards, or to go back to Russia when the savings are depleted. All in all, the migration processes to Russia were very dynamic. The decision to migrate is often made rather spontaneously. Some people are migrating regularly and only for short durations, others only visit their relatives in Khorog very seldom and unfrequently. In a considerable number of households, one or more members did either come back from Russia in the last two months or are planning to go to Russia in the coming two months, or as soon as they can, even when they currently have a job in Khorog.

The migration to Russia, when a household is able to afford it, is perceived as a secure way to make an income. In seven cases, households took credits, mostly from GAJA, to afford the flight tickets and relevant documents for the migration of one household member. In other cases, relatives collect money for one family member to migrate to Russia. Besides the financial capital, the households also

rely on social capital in form of information networks and already migrated relatives who support new labour migrants with information, accommodation and jobs. A handful of persons reported that they were just waiting for their already migrated relatives or friends to get them a job.

Due to the mutual history, known language and the relatively easy entry into the country, Russia is, almost exclusively, the favoured destination for labour migration (Thorez 2014: 227). Although in interviews and casual conversation it became clear that many people hope for a green card for the United States, some people have been to other European states as the United Kingdom or Germany, and one person migrated to the United Arab Emirates. However, migration to Russia is not as secure as many like to think. While the “entry to Russia for Central Asian nationals is (in theory) relatively easy from a legal perspective” (Thorez 2014: 227) as an agreement officially allows citizens from CIS countries free movement in the post-Soviet space, it is harder to get a work permit. Consequently, a large proportion of Tajik labour migrants work illegally in Russia (Thorez 2014: 227). Some interviewed persons who returned from Russia reported of arbitrariness of authorities and the permanent threat of deportation. Furthermore, many migrants from Tajikistan, as well as the rest of Central Asia, experience xenophobia and racism in Russia which also includes physical harm and in some cases death. Additionally, crises in Russia directly affect the ability of migrants to send remittances to Tajikistan, as the financial crisis of 2008/2009 shows when remittances declined from 2.5 billion in 2008 to 1.7 billion US-Dollar in 2009 (World Bank 2019). In times of crises, the migrant workers are the first ones to lose their jobs many interviewed returned labour migrants reported. This, in turn, affects the situation of the households receiving the remittances in Khorog which are, as shown, to different degrees dependent on remittances. Labour migrants are working under poor conditions and are legally not well protected:

“Central Asian migrants are paid between one-third and one-half of a Russian worker’s salary but try to make up for it by working more. On average, the migrant working week is 20 hours longer than Russian workers and in a third of cases exceeds 70 hours. As such, migrant worker salaries can equal those of the Russians and exceed by far the average salary paid in their country of origin” (Thorez 2014: 227).

Furthermore, it became clear that not everyone who migrates to Russia is willing to come back. Some migrants cut contacts with their families in Khorog, some get attached to the higher standards of living in Russia and, as one interviewed woman put it, are “easily to forget about Khorog and their families here”. Also, some rather younger people reported to plan their future outside of Khorog or see no reason to come back to live in Khorog once they successfully migrated due to missing opportunities. Another problem mentioned was brain drain, as young educated people tend to try to get abroad or to the capital Dushanbe where more and better-paid jobs are available.

Also, the gender relations of migration in Khorog should be mentioned. While usually in Tajikistan, the men are the ones who go on labour migration, in Khorog the share of men and women migrating to Russia was more even. In some cases, recently married couples go to Russia together, sometimes only the husband and sometimes only the wife while the husband stays back in Khorog. Here, the family networks are also of importance: When mothers go on migration, usually the remaining family (aunts, sisters, etc.) takes over the education and parenting of the younger children.

Labour migration and remittances are a good example for the multi-local nature of livelihoods that are the result of specific historical processes, local constraints in Khorog and the resulting need to diversify livelihoods. Thereby people are dynamically using existing information and social networks which reflects on the globalised state of livelihood systems in Khorog. With regard to de Haan’s notion on the reciprocal relation of local livelihoods and over-regional processes (de Haan 2012: 351), it can be stated

that livelihood activities of local households in GBAO are also shaping Russian economy in providing relatively cheap labour.

5.2.3 Livelihood dynamics, vulnerabilities and social exclusion

As outlined in section 2.2.3 and 2.3, a processual, dynamical perspective on livelihoods includes dealing with long-term changes provoked by changing environments and circumstances as well as risks and vulnerabilities. The aspect of change seems particularly interesting in a transformative context where socio-economic and political framework conditions change fundamentally. This section deals with the questions of vulnerability in a transformative society and the related question of long-run slow changes for the better or the worse that considers that livelihoods are snapshots in the course of long-term slow transformation processes (Scoones 2009: 189; Steimann: 2011: 37). As pointed out (see section 2.3), in this context the mechanisms of social security and the other side of its medal, social exclusion, are important in understanding livelihoods and the risks for local actors.

The livelihoods of different household groups in Khorog face a range of risks and have different vulnerabilities that are based on structural context factors, their exposition in regard to the physical environment and the relative isolation and inaccessibility GBAO faces (section 4.1), the consequences of historical processes (section 4.2) as well as the challenges of transformation (section 4.3). On the other hand, not all households are affected the same way, as their individual (or group specific) vulnerabilities also depend on their coping abilities and their asset equipment – the internal side of vulnerability.

In this context, also the perceived risks and problems of the household members, which they were asked for in the interviews, are interesting, as especially the perceived risks determine the actions people pursue. The main risks and problems perceived and mentioned by household members and experts can be structured in structural problems, as the high dependency on imports and the resulting high prices or the high rate of unemployment on the one hand, and in individual problems and consequences for households on the other hand, for example high electricity prices or the inability to find a suitable, well-paid job.

5.2.3.1 *Dependency as source of vulnerability*

Most interviewees stated that the dependency on imports and the consequences of this import dependency is a major problem for the economic situation of households in Khorog. This dependency leads to high prices for almost all materials and everyday consumer goods, from construction materials to clothing as well as food commodities. This is connected not only to the relatively isolated and mountainous location of GBAO and Khorog, but also with the poor infrastructural connection and market integration to the rest of Tajikistan or abroad. The state of the infrastructure has often been mentioned by interviewees in this context, as Tajikistan and especially GBAO have one of the highest logistic costs in the world (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 39) and the streets are in dire need of renovation – a factor that is especially relevant in the winter months when import possibilities are limited. As Maertens writes:

“With dependency comes vulnerability. In the summer of 2015 Gorno-Badakhshan found itself temporarily cut off from outside provision. Heavy rainfalls and unusual high temperatures had caused floods and mudslides that blocked the Pamir Highway (...). Thus, the region’s main artery linking it to commodity supplies from Kyrgyzstan, China and Dushanbe, became impassable at several points” (2017: 164).

Asadov adds explaining the vulnerability as follows:

“The main reason for its food supply vulnerability resulted from a heavy dependence on importing wheat from a single source (Kazakhstan) and the lack of supply diversification. Vulnerabilities regarding transport aggravated the food crisis in Tajikistan because of the blockade by Uzbekistan and the lack of alternative transportation routes” (2013: 25)

In regard to the physical vulnerability due to risks and damages to the supply route and the missing diversification of supplies, Maertens comments that “in today’s increasingly globalised economies, dependence on imports alone is nothing remarkable, but things get complicated when dependence conspires with lack of means to obtain what is produced elsewhere” (2017: 165). The other aspect resulting from the import dependency is the related dependency on developments of the world market prices. Fluctuations in the world market oil prices determine the transport costs and are quickly felt on local markets in GBAO. The same applies for fluctuations on the international wheat markets. As wheat, which represent the most important food commodity in Khorog, is mostly imported, wheat prices in Khorog depend on global wheat price developments or other factors for example when the government of Kazakhstan imposes export tariffs on wheat or suspends exports, as happened in 2008 (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 28), which leads to a high food price vulnerability. This could be observed in 2008 and again in 2011 where external shocks in form of financial or food price crises negatively affected the economy of Tajikistan, while rising food and fuel prices on the global markets facilitated inflation Tajikistan (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 43).

Rapidly increasing prices in times of shock as during the mentioned global crises as well as the long-term increase of food prices affect particularly those households that do not access additional food sources as urban gardening plots or assistance by the rural family. In case of (rapidly) increasing food prices, respective households have to limit other expenses or increasingly rely on borrowing or going in debt. As mentioned above, this would apply for the eight households out of the sample that neither access a garden nor receive food assistance and who are spending 43 percent of their income on food. Price increases are also a problem for self-employed traders who have to pay more for goods which they, for example, acquire in Dushanbe. Simultaneously, those trades are not able to pass the higher prices on to consumers in Khorog due to the limited purchasing power of the consumers.

As stated above, in addition to the food prices, increasing electricity prices were often named as a major problem as many households rely on heating with an electric heater. Especially in the winter month, this is a problem for many households as their expenses for heating increase about 190 percent (see section 5.1.2.5). This is also related to the link of the electricity price to the dollar exchange rate, an expert on energy from the local university supply reported.

An interviewed NGO expert reported on the efforts of NGOs in increasing self-sufficiency through supporting local agriculture. However, one can not anticipate that the import dependency, and thus the dependency on global markets, will decrease any time soon. The vulnerability against those kinds of shocks will remain.

5.2.3.2 *Dependency on remittances*

The risk inherent in livelihood strategies that rely heavily on labour migration and remittances obviously lies in the possible decline of remittances or labour opportunities due to economic regression or stricter labour migration regulations. As being said migrant labourers who in many cases work illegally in Russia are the first one to be affected by economic crises as they usually do not enjoy labour rights. Additionally, migrants are subject to the good will of authorities and constantly threatened with deportation. The vulnerability to international economic crises could be observed in 2008 and 2009: While the overall inflow of remittances was about 2.5 billion US-Dollars in 2008,

making up for 45 percent of the GDP of Tajikistan, in 2009 it declined to 1.7 billion US-Dollars which is only 35 percent of the GDP (Akramov & Shreedhar 2012: 7; World Bank 2019).

The vulnerability at the macro level is reflected at the micro level as remittances make up for 18 percent of the average household income of the households in the sample. Especially those households that strongly depend on remittances where the cash inflows are exceeding 20 percent of the household income (10 households in the study sample) would be affected in their ability to meet their needs. This would particularly affect moderately poor households where the percentage of income through remittances is above average: 28 percent against an overall average of 19 percent. This suggests that many households of this category might descend to the poorer category of those households who regularly rely on *qarz*.

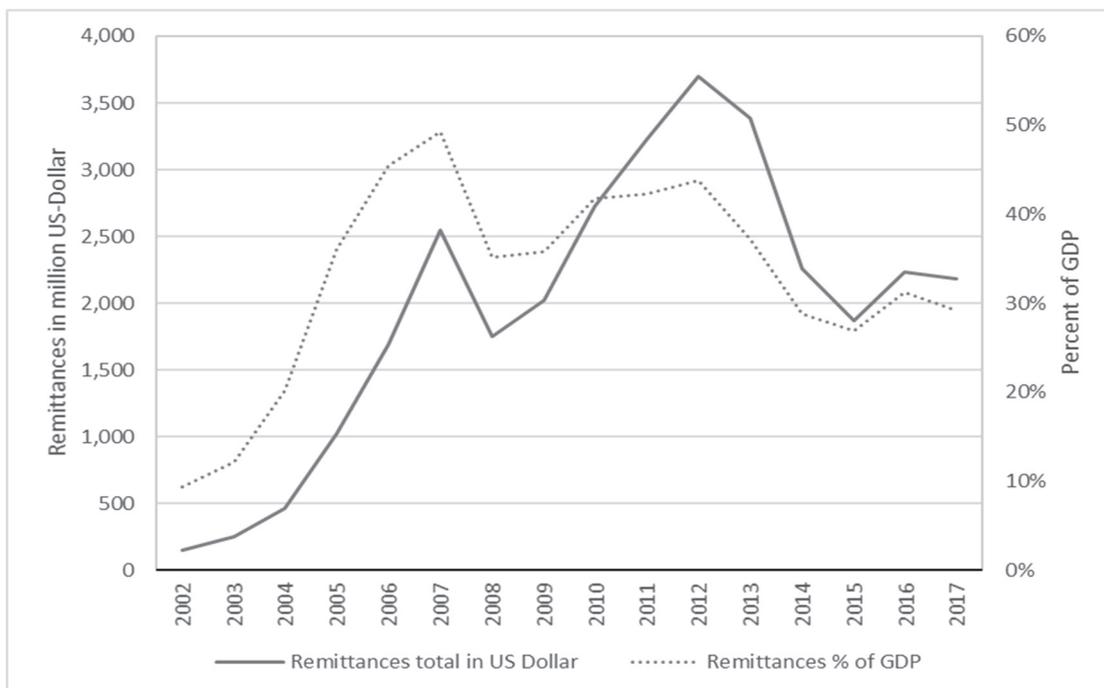


Figure 17: Total (in US-Dollar) and relative (from GDP) received remittances in Tajikistan (Source: World Bank 2019)

The long-term trend of the inflow of remittances is hardly predictable as are economic crises as the financial crisis of 2008 are hardly predictable. The inflow of remittances, in US-Dollars or as share of the GDP is fluctuating due to external factors which is shown in Figure 17 (see Akramov & Shreedhar 2012).

5.2.3.3 Unemployment and insufficient salaries

Additionally, unemployment, the lack of adequate job opportunities and the general situation of low salaries were regularly mentioned as major problems for the households. Even though the salaries in public services do get adjusted every two to three years, an expert explained, this does not apply for the salaries of all sectors and the increase is not enough to compensate for the inflation which gets particularly problematic in face of the increasing food and electricity prices. As Akramov and Shreedhar state: “Ensuring resilience to external shocks and achieving long-term food security are not possible without reducing poverty and expanding employment opportunities” (2012: 43). The overall trends in reducing poverty are positive in Tajikistan. According to the Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (2018: 141), the national poverty rate was reduced from 72 percent in 2003 to 30 percent in 2017 (see Figure 7 on page 28). However, it is a slow process and the job opportunities in Khorog are likely to remain relatively limited. Nevertheless, projects as the construction of the

University of Central Asia or the new *Jama'at Khana* (religious building for worship and gathering) or the efforts of various NGOs create job opportunities. It must also be mentioned that, although many interview partners complained of high unemployment, some way or another every household had found income opportunities and for more than a third of the households, the better-off, the general economic situation was sufficient.

Unemployment is, nevertheless, a major risk in an urban context where labour accounts as the main income source. Missing job opportunities affect especially poor households that are regularly relying on *qarz* and who have their main income sources in fragile sectors in casual, part-time or unskilled wage labour. This accounts for poorer households that were not as successful in diversifying their livelihoods and where the loss of an income provider would affect these households significantly more in their ability to meet their needs. The loss of an income provider would hit the already poorer households much harder than the better-off households who rely on several income sources.

While the households depending on few assets and low-income jobs are *usually* more affected increasing food and electricity costs or the loss of an income provider, they do not *necessarily* have to be more vulnerable than relatively better-off households. For example, when they can rely on capable social networks that support them in stress situations. As Moser states: "Although poor people are usually among the most vulnerable, not all vulnerable people have to be poor" (Moser 1998: 3).

5.2.3.4 Risk of conflict escalation

Another risk lies in the political theatre and concerns the tensions and the latent conflict with the central government (see section 4.3.6) which, as many interviewees states, is trying to undermine the autonomy of Gorno-Badakhshan. As during the research, the tensions were growing due to demands and implied threats of the central government to the regional government of GBAO, interviewed people were increasingly concerned about consequences of an escalating conflict as experienced in 2012 or 2014.

The geographical location and its infrastructural connection in combination with its import dependency brings GBAO in a situation where it is very vulnerable against blockades which can easily be set up in case of a conflict escalation. This would affect almost every household in Khorog as the whole region is dependent on imports, but especially those who do not have access to own food assets and those who earn their money with trade would be hit hard by the consequences of a blockade (Peyrouse 2012: 1). Some interviewees speculated that the central government was actively trying to hold the economy in GBAO on a low level and that the high and increasing prices are intended by the government.

5.2.3.5 Social exclusion as threat for livelihoods

As social security can be regarded as an essential factor with social networks and relations being major assets of the urban poor (Bohle 2005: 71), an exclusion from social networks or diminishing social security due to whatever reasons, would affect livelihoods of many households in Khorog strongly. When the integration into the community and social networks are considered assets, consequently, the vulnerability depends on the stability of the social capital which is not static but also dynamic and its permanence cannot be taken for granted (Moser 1998: 13).

As stated above, a small number of the poorer households that were characterised by high dependency rates, low income and few assets indicated that there were no reliable social networks they can draw on, be it family or neighbourhood relations. This further indicates that social exclusion might be one of the most important factors determining livelihood insecurity and vulnerability. This corresponds with the findings of Kaag et al.: "Being vulnerable and insecure has a 'relational' aspect as social

isolation – not a (temporary) decline in income – is the greatest threat to livelihoods. What makes the difference between being vulnerable or not is whether one is excluded from, or is a member of, systems of redistribution and access” (2004: 57). This might also be supported by the fact that six out of twelve households of the poor category are not part in GAJA credit groups. The emphasis of social exclusion as an explanatory approach is useful to accent the multidimensional character of poverty and vulnerability. Poverty is not only the result of employment and labour-market participation, which would be a reductionist understanding, but a complex combination and interaction of factors, which explain missing access to livelihood opportunities (Kaag et al. 2004: 59), as for example credit groups. Simultaneously, in this matter, we have to deal with a chicken and egg situation when a “person who cannot meet his/her social obligations due to a lack of means or who cannot live up to social expectations of what a good member of a community is or has, runs the risk of being excluded” (Kaag et al. 2004: 58).

I argue that the aspect of social exclusion is key in explaining the seemingly excluded state of some of the poorest households – while most poor households in the research sample use their social networks extensively to cope with uncertainty. However, the exact processes of poverty and social exclusion in those particular households, in contrast to those other households, and how this state came into being is still open for question and could not be answered adequately within the framework of this research. Here, one has to look at the specific individual history and pathways of the respective households and the decisions and actions that were made in the past which determine the access to different sets of livelihood assets. This would also require taking into account more factors influencing the field of structure and agency of a particular household, as the process of social differentiation, relevant power relations and institutional processes (de Haan & Zoomers 2005: 43). This includes an analysis of the social differentiation processes affecting the history of a household. Therefore it would be required to examine its state and social position during Soviet and post-Soviet conflict periods and the respective agencies of individual actors which affect the distribution of power and resources in the transformation process (see Herbers 2006) as well as the personal histories of individual household members, for example in regard to drug or alcohol addiction which could further affect their social status as well as their livelihood capacities. Addiction was regularly named as a factor for poverty or social exclusion in household or expert interviews.

For households that rely on using social networks and relations to their families or neighbourhoods in their daily livelihoods or when they cope with stresses in times of crises (see next section), a decrease of social networks and mutual care would certainly affect their livelihoods – be it the vanishing of relations to kin in rural villages and consequently the loss of food assistance, the loss of reciprocal trust systems such as *qarz* or of social institutions as *rais* or the GAJA credit schemes. However, interviewed experts and household members did not expect the influence of social bonds to decrease any time soon. The loss of social relations can be an individual fate leading to social exclusion, but it is not anticipated to be a broader social trend affecting all households due to above-mentioned reasons for the particular state of social cohesion of the Pamiris (see 5.2.1). On the other hand, the effects of future crises and consequences of social differentiation processes are uncertain, Moser states that

“the urban poor may be particularly vulnerable to *social fragmentation*. Community and interhousehold mechanisms of trust and collaboration can be weakened by greater social and economic heterogeneity, associated with wider distributional ranges of income, opportunities, and access to infrastructure, services, and political influence in urban areas” and that “the extent to which economic crisis increases or erodes social capital may have important long-term consequences for a community’s ability to create and sustain alternative delivery services if publicly provided services deteriorate” (1998: 4).

As shown in section 5.2.1, social relations and networks affect the access to livelihood assets and activities and account for social security. Social exclusion and a diminishing of social relations would therefore negatively affect the capacities and opportunities of a household to access these other livelihood assets or activities. Hence, it can be considered as a major vulnerability – especially for households that have limited financial means.

5.2.4 Coping mechanisms – or essential livelihood mechanisms?

Even though the income of some households is not always enough to buy for food for themselves or to meet other desired needs, almost no people reported to go bed hungry or are not able to meet their most important needs. “Some way or another people find a way to get food in Khorog”, an expert of MSDSP reported. In the following section, the different ways of coping with stresses and lacking financial means of households in Khorog will be outlined.

Households in Khorog deploy different coping mechanisms when their actual available resources are not sufficient to meet all their needs. One can differentiate between income-raising and consumption modifying strategies as well as between short-term and long-term strategies (Moser 1998: 5). An overview of the various short and long term as well as the income-raising and consumption modifying strategies is presented in Table 7. Although long-term strategies may also be regarded as adaptation processes to adverse livelihood conditions in Khorog in general.

Table 7: Coping strategies followed in Khorog; categorised in short and long-term as well as income-raising and consumption modifying. Coping strategies are, thus, overlapping.

Coping strategies		
	Short-term (rather individual)	Long-term (adaptive and rather collective)
	<i>qarz</i> or going in debt; borrowing/ getting support from neighbours, families & friends; temporarily moving to relatives;	maintaining social relations to ensure the persistence of social security mechanisms (<i>qarz</i> , support from relatives in villages, etc);
	asking for additional remittances; generating more income through additional jobs;	labour migration; asset diversification; enabling education
	GAJA credits; selling jewellery or productive assets	securing access to credits (continuance of GAJA); credits for investments
Income-raising	generating more income (available for self-employed, e.g. taxi drivers, bakery owners); renting rooms; asking for additional remittances; GAJA or other credits; selling jewellery or productive assets; searching for additional jobs; diversification	
Consumption modifying	(seasonally) reduced food consumption (especially expensive vegetables, fruit and meat); de-prioritisation of other needs (health, clothing, heating); going in debt for electricity; alternative heating; temporally moving to relatives	

Simultaneously, many of those strategies or actions for coping are also crucial aspects of the livelihood asset portfolio of a household. Diversification, as Marschke and Berkes (2006) argue, can also be seen as coping or potentially adaptive strategies. This shows that it is not always possible to distinguish between livelihood or coping strategy in contexts characterised by poverty where (some) households are more or less permanently under stress – often “livelihood strategies and coping responses overlap” (Steimann 2011: 37).

When coping, as Ellis defines it, “refers to the methods used by households to survive when confronted with unanticipated livelihood failure” (2000: 297), it also becomes clear that in a transformative environment which is primarily characterised by uncertainty livelihood and coping activities may

coincide. One might also view livelihood modes and systems as the result of longer-term coping and adaptation strategies. For example, the practice of *qarz* might be considered as a mechanism for short-term coping for individuals but also as a long-term adaptive and lastly even a livelihood strategy for large parts of the community which are facing uncertainty and ongoing economic pressure. I argue that some strategies that can be categorised as a short-term coping strategy for the individual household can also be viewed as long-term adaptation processes for the collective, which can be defined as processes that increase livelihood security and reduce vulnerability (Ellis 2000: 298).

5.2.4.1 *Short-term and long-term adaptive coping strategies*

As already discussed, households who are struggling to meet their needs due to missing financial means (are forced to) make use of the practice of *qarz*. They owe money to the respective bazar seller or shop owner and pay their expenses later, which can mean a week later or even up to several months later. This not only includes the acquisition of food but also of other needs as clothing as some interviewees reported getting into financial stresses when having to buy new school uniforms or winter clothing. Especially in the winter months, where income through casual jobs is reported to be lower due to limited job opportunities, in particular in the construction business, and where the prices are higher, this strategy is used more frequently. Households with a high percentage of casual workers and members working in the construction sector follow this strategy more frequently. Here, the importance of social networks, trust and reciprocity and the regulation of the privatised responsibility to secure livelihoods in the form of *qarz* as reaction to changing socio-economic and political-institutional environments can be observed and the distinction between short-term coping strategy and long-term collective adaptational processes gets fuzzy. It might also be stated that it seems to be a proper long-term strategy to maintain good and trusting relationships to shop owners and sellers who allow the consumers to go in debt. In general, this seems to be one of the most common and most reliable coping strategies. As mentioned above, 24 of the 38 households in the sample relied on owing to shops and bazars, thereof twelve on a regular basis and twelve only from time to time and mostly in winter times or on other occasions where expenditure exceeds incomes. See Table 8 for an overview of the different coping strategies adopted by the 38 surveyed households in the research sample classified by household categories.

Locally embedded social security networks such as the *rais* system are important as well in coping. In case of deaths or serious health issues, for example, the *rais* organises the collection of money to pay for funeral or health service costs which could represent a major challenge for households. In more than ten households, interviewees reported to have given money for such an occasion during the last year and a couple of households received such kind of assistance. Another social institution helping households to cope are the GAJA credit schemes in which the majority of households were represented and which give poorer households the opportunity to afford smaller credits to cope with urgent financial stresses. These two social security mechanisms can be integral parts for individual households to cope with sudden stresses or shocks, but also represent a long-term adaptive coping process for the collective community.

The winter period is connected with stress in many ways. It affects heating and many households have to go in debt for electricity. As many households rely on heating with electrically powered radiators electricity prices on average increase up to 190 percent for households compared to summer. Many households are unable to pay this and go in debt with the electrical company (eight households in the sample). Concerned households reported that they can usually pay the bills from winter over the following months in spring when electricity, as well as other costs, decrease and income opportunities increase again. While some households borrow money or take GAJA credits for paying electricity bills, some households are able to reduce the consumption or their expenses by using alternative heating

methods as coal, manure or wood (eight households in the sample). These are only available options for households living in houses and not in apartments. The negative coping strategy to this seasonal occurring stress is reduced or no heating which might exacerbate health issues.

In cases of rather short-term deficits and for smaller expenses, a large number of households reported that they were able to borrow small amounts of money from their neighbours, relatives or friends – or, on the other way around households reported to lend money to neighbours, relatives and friends (Table 8). Interviewed persons often do not expect to get the money back but to receive the same support if they are in need themselves. “Today I help my neighbour and tomorrow he will help me the same way”, was a phrase often mentioned in interviews. The same goes for small quantities of certain food commodities: If needed, people can usually go to their neighbours and ask for it. People mentioned in several interviews that they are used to share food and money even if they do not have much themselves. This short-term reciprocal neighbourly support is also built on trust and solidarity as well as Islamic moral values and represents an effective way for most households to meet smaller short-term needs.

In three cases, poor households reported that in times of increased stress within the last year due to the loss of the main income earning activity or the increased financial challenges in winter times, household members split up and moved temporarily to different family members. Here, again, social security mechanisms play a key role in coping with adverse situations in an uncertain environment after other assets are depleted. In one case, the household experienced the loss of the main income earning member while the only adult son in the household was unable to work due to chronic illness and the widowed woman could not participate on the labour market because she could not find a job and occupied with reproductive

Table 8: Coping strategies used by 38 surveyed households in research sample. Most households relied on more than one strategy (based on own survey)

Coping strategies	Category			Total
	poor	mod. poor	better-off	
No coping strategy needed			6	6
Rather short-term				
qarz/ owing to shops & bazars	12	12		24
asking for additional remittances	2	5	2	9
getting support from relatives/neighbours	9	8	4	21
temporary migration to relatives	3			3
going in debt for electricity (winter)	7	1		8
not paying bills	2			2
Income-raising				
(planned) labour migration	1	3	3	7
taking (GAJA) credit	7	7	4	18
generating more income	1	3	1	5
selling jewelry	2			2
Consumption modifying				
reduced consumption	10	4	2	16
reduced food consumption (winter)	12	10	2	24
less/alternative heating in winter	7		1	8

household activities, e.g. educating the son’s children who were also living with them. This household described the social networks within Khorog as insufficient. Once labour was no longer available as a livelihood asset, this household started selling jewellery and subsequently split up for four months in winter and moved temporarily to relatives in Dushanbe and to relatives in villages in GBAO.

Another example which shows the connection between short-term coping and long-term adaptive and diversification processes is the support from relatives in villages who are able to cultivate larger amounts of food and to share the harvests with their relative’s households in Khorog. Households in Khorog reported to get additional food in times of need on request. The ongoing support some 20

households in the sample experience can also be seen as a long-term strategy for diversification of livelihood assets and reducing expenses.

A strategy used for the short-term increase of income is to ask relatives who are currently on labour migration in Russia for additional remittances. In addition to regular remittances, that are mostly received from close relatives or direct household member on migration without own families, additional remittances are sometimes requested to deal with short-term financial needs. From the 28 households that received remittances in the last year, nine households reported that they were able to ask relatives for additional remittances in times of need and did so in the last two or three years (see Table 8). This would be a short-term coping mechanism for households who are in need and who have relatives abroad. In the larger sense, labour migration is the main long-term adaptive strategy for households to deal with adverse local economic conditions and serves the diversification of livelihoods (de Haan & Zoomers 2003: 358) and thus coping with stresses and shocks. As mentioned above, in some cases migration is used in a strategic way to pursue specific objectives and often limited with the achieving of those goals, in other cases migration is the reaction to rather short-term stresses where the household or the individual decides to find an additional source of income.

5.2.4.2 *Income raising*

Income raising activities as increased number of working hours or increased production was only available for self-employed individuals, such as taxi drivers who are able to increase driving hours or bakery owners who are able to produce more bread. To take a credit, mostly a smaller GAJA credit was also mentioned often (18 times) as way of obtaining additional financial means by all household categories (see Table 8). Labour migration on the short- as well as on the long-term can also be regarded as income increasing strategy, see different modes of labour migration (section 5.2.2.3), the same applies for the already mentioned requests for additional remittances. Although it was not mentioned in household interviews, searching for (additional) job opportunities can also be taken as an income increasing activity. It is to be suspected that this was not mentioned in answers on coping strategies because it is perceived as a normal party of the daily struggle. Some households reported that they used to rent rooms to foreigners or businessmen from outside the city to generate additional income. However, since the development of hostels, institutionalised homestays and hotels in recent years in Khorog this possibility is dwindling. This can be considered as an unintended consequence of the promotion of tourism and formalised homestays through NGOs in Khorog.

Negative income raising coping strategies, such as selling of productive assets have not been mentioned in interviews to happen, although some households would regard this option as a last resort. Two households reported that they sold their jewellery in the last year as a more desperate way to generate some income.

5.2.4.3 *Consumption modifying*

Consumption modifying strategies are mainly followed seasonally in the winter months. As stated above, job and income opportunities decrease in winter, while the overall costs, especially for food and electricity increase. The majority of households, including many of those households who are relatively well-off and do not rely on *qarz* to secure their livelihoods, change their consumption in winter (see Table 8). Especially fruits, and also vegetables, are far less consumed because they are too expensive. Other common consumption modifying strategies or consequences – as strategy implies an active decision rather than a mere adaption to missing financial resources – are reducing costs for clothing, the de-prioritization of health expenditures and reduced heating in winter. While some households borrow money or taking GAJA credits for paying electricity bills, some households (eight in the sample) are able to reduce the consumption or their expenses by using alternative heating

methods as coal, manure or wood. These options are only available for households living in houses and not apartments. The negative coping strategy to this seasonal occurring stress is reduced or no heating which might exacerbate health issues.

Money allocated for educational needs of the households, such as paying university fees, are rarely being reduced. Households tend to reduce other expenditures as the just listed expenditures first. Another rather desperate strategy to reduce expenditures that was mentioned once is to simply not pay bills anymore.

These short-term ways of reducing money expenditures can also have negative health consequences in cases when hospital visits or medicaments cannot be paid anymore or when heating in winter is reduced or nutritional food as fruits and vegetables cannot be consumed in winter months. This might affect the long-term ability of households to secure their livelihoods. In some cases, individuals got chronically ill and were unable to generate income anymore.

5.2.5 Livelihood strategies or livelihood pathways

Following the findings of the previous chapter that livelihood and coping activities tend to overlap, the question also arises whether one can really speak of livelihood strategies when describing livelihood activities of local actors in challenging environments, as many conventional livelihood approaches do. As Steimann notes on this matter:

“While the notions of *strategy* and *response* help to distinguish the different ways in which people try to sustain their livelihoods, they are of little use when describing processes of livelihood change over long periods of time. This is so because most actors deploy strategic and non-strategic conduct simultaneously, so that livelihood strategies and coping responses overlap, and intended and unintended outcomes coincide” (2011: 37).

The notion of livelihood strategy implies strategic and intentional practices which are set out to follow a specific pre-set goal. However, this view is likely to be built on a *homo economicus* understanding of human behaviour – an understanding of “people solely as economically rational and strategically acting actors does no justice to other aspects that inform human behaviour” (Kaag et al. 2004: 62). Individual livelihood activities are not always intentional, rational or strategically motivated:

“Although people constantly weigh different objectives, opportunities and limitations in response to external and internal circumstances that change over time, we know that household behaviour is not always deliberate or conscious. In many cases, there is a close link between a household’s strategy and its history (...) human behaviour should not always be seen as conscious or intentional: much of what people do cannot be classified as strategic” (de Haan & Zoomers 2005: 38f.).

Here, a narrowed understanding of livelihood strategies would indeed stress the capabilities of local actors but neglect their structural embedding. In environments characterised by uncertainty and insecurity, local actors are not always in the position to make decisions in advance (Kaag et al. 2004: 63). While actors depending on their power to act do indeed have room for agency to some extent, structural conditions of the multi-dimensional environment will limit these: “Livelihoods emerge out of past actions and decisions are made within specific historical and agro-ecological conditions, and are constantly shaped by institutions and social arrangements” (Scoones & Wolmer 2002: 27). Additionally, the range of livelihood activities followed by an individual household are affected by the individual socialisation of the household and its habitus (de Haan & Zoomers 2005: 41). The uncertain and unstable conditions that influence the individual behaviour are “embedded both in a historical repertoire and in social differentiation, including power relations and institutional processes, both of which pre-structure subsequent decision-making” (de Haan & Zoomer 2005: 43). Therefore, as de Haan

and Zoomers (2005) as well as Kaag et al. (2004) propose it is more precise to emphasise the unintentional and often responsive mode of livelihood activities by calling them livelihood pathways. De Bruijn and van Dijk describe this as follows:

“A pathway is different from a strategy, because a pathway need not to be a device to attain a pre-set goal which is set after a process of conscious and rational weighting of the actor’s preferences. Rather it arises out of an iterative process in which in a step-by-step procedure goals, preferences, resources and means are constantly reassessed in view of new unstable conditions. Individuals decide on basis of a wide range of past experiences, rather than on a vision of the future” (2003: 1f.).

The extent to which households in Khorog can decide on their livelihood activities is largely determined by social differentiation processes and their existing livelihood asset portfolio which determines the vulnerability of a single household. Many of the ways through which people secure their livelihoods in Khorog did not arise from a strategic view into the future but are rather the consequence of the particular history of the household biography and its response to challenging living conditions in the course of the transformation. At this point, the own expectations of the future, about which the interviewed households were asked, also become interesting. While better-off households generally had a more optimistic view on the future and the job situation of their household and Khorog in general, the poorer households often did not “expect that things will get better” and hoped that they were still able to survive in the future years which they were not so sure about.

Certain livelihood activities, most of the low-paid casual and unskilled wage labour, are being used not because they offer certain prospects for the future, but because people try to find ways to get their needs satisfied. This also coincides with the observations of Maertens that “most trader’s biographies and self-evaluations reveal that retail trading is primarily perceived as survival strategy rather than personal choice” (2017: 176) and Kanji who reports that “women view trade as a necessary but difficult and insecure livelihood strategy, given the difficulties of diversification and limited demand in the depressed economic environment in which they operate” (2002: 145). Many people changed their profession in face of the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the subsequent vanishing of subsidies as well as employment opportunities and abrupt salary cuts to survive in an environment where the individual suddenly was responsible for his/her own livelihood security (Maertens 2017: 176f.).

As describe above, the ability of making intentional strategical decisions is connected with the results of the socio-economic differentiation processes in transformative Tajikistan and the individual actors’ agency or his/her power to act. As described in the section on socio-economic differentiation (section 4.3.5), the ability to benefit from post-Soviet uncertainties lies, inter alia, in the social position of actors and their social, institutional, formal and informal networks and their ability to use them for their own benefit. Some households were due to their skills, positions and networks better prepared for the privatisation of livelihoods than others who only had limited agency opportunities to obtain a secure livelihood (Herbers 2006: 18). How this process of social differentiation and usage of social networks and opportunities in the redistribution process of transformative Khorog happened exactly is up to further research. It would surely be useful to analyse the ability of households and actors to pursue strategic livelihoods. On this matter, Kanji stated „that economic differentiation is increasing in GBAO and that, in general, households that are able to take advantage of the shifts towards a market economy by entering trading and commerce are doing much better than others” (2002: 144).

In general, better-off households in Khorog are more likely to actively plan their livelihoods in a way that can be described as strategic. Those households are able to make savings which allow them to invest into the future. In this context, it is also interesting to have a look on diversification which can be either part of a long-term adaptation process and thus being part of intentional planning, but it can

also be a response to decrease vulnerability in a stressful environment without being intentional or increasing living. Steimann argues that:

“long-term diversification is more often than not a strategic choice that allows households to build on complementarities and to spread risk. (...) For the relatively rich, diversification is thus often a strategy of accumulation. On the other hand, short-term diversification is often forced and unplanned when household in financial distress are pushed into diversification” (2011: 37).

In the context of Khorog, this notion seems to be valid. Diversification processes of better-off households can be viewed as strategies of accumulation. They are able to take larger credits from the Microfinance Bank, exceeding those of GAJA, to invest in long-term strategies and physical assets which enable start-up businesses, for example cars for taxi business, oven and mixer for bakery business, or to start a small retail business.

The goal-oriented labour migration can also be classified as strategic, as its main characteristic is to provide the financial means for a certain objective. Labour migration is perceived as the most secure way to find additional income. This means that when households are actively planning their livelihood activities, labour migration comes to mind first. Households who decide for one member to go to Russia are often able to collect money in their family circle or they take one or more smaller credits to pay for the travel expenses which exceed the average monthly income by far. This suggests that there is an expectation of a profitable investment. Labour migration which results from necessity and does not pursue specific objectives also requires planning but cannot be regarded as a strategic livelihood activity the same way goal-oriented migration does. It is rather a forced attempt to diversify livelihood activities in order to get additional money some way or another.

The importance attributed to education (and to care for it) can also be viewed as a long-term strategy to improve the economic status of a household. A good number of interviewees, representing all categories, mentioned that they hope to improve their living situation, or that of their children, with a good level of education which they believe will enable them to find a well-paid job. Education is perceived as integral part to a better future, for the individual as well as collectively for the whole community, as an interviewed person told that “the education will be the basis for a better future for Khorog”. On the other hand, many people complained that they were not able to find a good job even with a good level of education. This might indicate that there are other factors that determine the ability to find a job – such as social networks for example – or that there are simply not enough job opportunities. Nevertheless, education plays an important role in the everyday life in Khorog, which is also the result of the influence of Ismailism and the Aga Khan who promotes education as a way for local development. Correspondingly, many students reported that they want to use education to find good opportunities abroad.

To sum it up, speaking only of livelihood strategies in the context of Khorog would give the wrong idea about household’s realities in securing their livelihoods. Undoubtedly, some livelihood activities, usually those of better-off households, can be classified as strategic as they include long-term planning and intentional investments to attain pre-set goals. This applies for example for education as a long-term strategy, for goal-oriented labour migration and for investing credits into physical assets. However, most livelihood activities being followed from households in Khorog are the results of various multi-level structural and individual historical processes and interactions with other actors in an uncertain environment. Here, the term pathway would be a more fitting description, as the “term ‘pathways’ indicates that they are more a result of these interactions than of anything planned in advance” (Kaag et al. 2004: 62). Moreover, the term pathway gives a better reflection of the dynamic element of livelihood choices and of the influence of structural contexts.

6 Summary and Conclusion

In this final section, a summary of the results regarding the thesis' research question of how local actors in Khorog organise their livelihoods in the context of an ongoing transformation process will be presented. This summary includes the most important livelihood activities for different household groups in Khorog, the results of the discussion in regard to trends, modes and vulnerability of livelihoods in Khorog as well as a brief discussion about livelihood trajectories in Khorog in the long-run. In the conclusion, the research results and their significance for questions of the geographical development research concerning post-Soviet transformation processes and high-mountain societies are discussed alongside the theoretical approach and the operationalisation of the research.

6.1 Livelihood systems in Khorog

6.1.1 Summary of results on livelihood activities

This chapter provides an answer on the initial leading research question of how local actors in Khorog organise their livelihoods in context of limiting structural factors and the ongoing transformation which is characterised by uncertainty. Therefore, the results of the empirical research (section 5.1) and its implications (section 5.2) will be summarised.

The research shows that livelihoods in Khorog are shaped by and embedded in structural factors (section 4) which enable and limit opportunities and the scope of agency of individuals. The distinctive physical and natural landscape conditions complicate local self-sufficiency and accessibility shape living realities in GBAO in their own way. But this should not be confused with geo determinism as today's characteristics and challenges are mainly the results of the special historical pathway that Gorno-Badakhshan followed which led to a post-Soviet transformation process that brings uncertainty and economic challenges with it.

Table 9 shows an overview of the most important research results and household characteristics regarding assets, livelihood activities, vulnerabilities and coping strategies of households in Khorog classified by category. Households in Khorog were categorised based on their ability to fulfil their needs all the time on their own for which the indicator of using the practice of *qarz* was chosen. As described, households were categorised in three groups: 14 households as better-off, 12 households as moderately poor, 12 households as poor. The composition and size of households have no significant influence on the well-being of a household, however, the dependency ratio can be taken as a determinant for the household's ability to meet its needs (see section 5.1.2.1). Labour is generally an important asset in urban contexts (Moser 1998: 4). The dominant income source for households is government employment, represented in 50 percent of households and accounting for 34 of 136 indicated jobs. Self-employment, NGO employment and governmental employment, although only slightly, tend to indicate to better-off households while unskilled wage labour and casual labour is a more prominent source of income in poorer households. This distribution of work opportunities is also reflected in the average income of the different groups (see section 5.1.2.2). Credits serve as an important additional income source (see section 5.1.2.4). Here, especially the GAJA credit schemes are useful for households to generate additional income in times of need or when they plan to invest into productive assets or labour migration. However, six out of twelve poor households reported that they were not part in any GAJA credit schemes indicating that the poorest of the poor cannot access this asset. Labour migration and its remittances play a major role for the financial means of households (see section 5.1.2.3 and 5.2.2.3). While 79 percent of households have one or more relatives in Russia, 53 percent receive more or less regular financial support, which, on average, makes up for 18 percent of the household's income. In the moderately poor households, the average income through remittances is as much as 26 percent.

Table 9: Overview of the most important assets, livelihood activities, vulnerabilities, and coping strategies of households in Khorog classified by household category.

	Category		
	Better-off 14 households	Moderately poor 12 households	Poor 12 households
Income	Average dependency ratio 1.2; Governmental employed, NGO employed, self-employed; Average income (per person/month): 753 Somoni per person	Average dependency ratio 1.6; represented in all sources of income; Average income (per person/month): 496 Somoni per person	Average dependency ratio 3.1; Casual labour, unskilled labour; Average income (per person/month): 244 Somoni per person
Remittances	Average 15% of household income	Average 26% of household income; Important livelihood activity	Average 16% of household income
Credits	Able to access larger credits (for strategic planning)	GAJA credits important to access financial means	Only 6 households in GAJA groups; difficult access to financial means
Urban Gardening	9 of 14; urban gardening as additional source for food	3 of 12; limited role of urban gardening	2 of 12; limited role of urban gardening
Support from rural relatives	7 of 14, mostly additional support	6 of 12, often significant support	7 of 12, mostly additional support
Social security	Able to support others (money, food, job opportunities)	Reciprocal neighbourly/family support (food, money, jobs, labour migration); <i>rais</i> as important factor; use <i>qarz</i> from time to time	Predominantly recipients (but also reciprocal) of neighbourly/family support (food, money, jobs); <i>rais</i> and other networks essential; rely on <i>qarz</i> regularly
Vulnerabilities	Inflation, price increases, particularly for traders/self-employed	Vanishing of remittances; import dependency Possibly: Social exclusion	Social exclusion; extremely poor households indicated that could not rely on social networks; increasing (food) costs
Coping strategies	Income-raising strategies, taking credits	<i>Qarz</i> ; neighbourhood/family support, reduced consumption, income-raising, credits (mostly GAJA)	<i>Qarz</i> , neighbourhood/family support, reduced consumption, less/alternative heating, reduced access to credits
Strategic planning	Able to invest in productive assets, goal-oriented labour migration, education	Goal-oriented labour migration; education	Rather responsive livelihood activities without pre-set goal
Livelihood trajectories	Positive; likely to use opportunities to accumulate resources	Mixed, depending on contextual developments	Might be negative or unchanged but with opportunities

Urban gardening (section 5.1.3) and food supply from relatives (5.1.4) in rural parts of GBAO serve as additional food sources for 14 respectively 20 households in Khorog which decreases their dependency on (rising) food prices in the (international) markets. However, urban gardening is mainly an option for households that were better-off in the first place. While governmental social programmes are more or less negligible, the broad NGO landscape invests in creating livelihood opportunities in Khorog and GBAO in a broad range of activities (section 5.1.5).

Besides income from labour and remittances from labour migration, which provide for financial means, the most important aspect of securing livelihoods – as well as for coping mechanisms – is social security (section 5.1.4 and 5.2.1). Here, local, non-state and context-specific organised forms as the *rais* system, *kirjar* or *qarz* are important as well as non-formalised and non-institutionalised neighbourly support or family networks. Social relations also mediate other forms of livelihood activities as the mentioned labour migration, food support from rural relatives, access to job opportunities and many more. The

solidarity among Pamirian people is connected to the Pamirian identity and the religious Ismaili community and its leader Aga Khan IV. Practices as *qarz* can also be viewed in light of the post-Soviet transformation processes and related responses to emerging challenges and uncertainties, for example the privatisation of livelihoods in a market-based economy.

Simultaneously, when social security is the most important aspect or asset in securing livelihoods social exclusion might be the biggest vulnerability, as the examples of the poorest of the poor show who indicated missing social relations and did not mention the *rais* as an institution to support them nor were part of any GAJA credit scheme. Other important vulnerabilities and risks lie in the import dependency of Khorog, which makes the markets vulnerable to price increases, inflation and shocks such as international finance crises. The dependence on remittances, unemployment and low salaries in combination with increasing prices and inflation and the risk of conflict escalation can also be listed as vulnerabilities and risks (section 5.2.3). The vulnerability of households is determined in their asset equipment and their coping mechanisms – here, better-off households are usually better prepared than the poor. Moderately poor households that have a higher dependency on remittances are particularly vulnerable against labour migration regulations.

A general trend of livelihood systems, also to reduce vulnerabilities and to cope with ongoing uncertainties, is the diversification of livelihood activities (section 5.2.2). Almost all households rely on various income earners, men as well as women. They use different sectors and organise their livelihoods multi-local through labour migration or their relations to relatives in rural GBAO. Diversification can be regarded as a strategy to increase income or to accumulate or as an unintentional response to cope better with the general uncertainty, shocks or stresses in a challenging environment. However, the differentiation between coping strategies and livelihood activities is blurry, as they often overlap – especially for households that are more or less permanently affected by stress situations and economic challenges. For example, accessing credits, labour migration or relying on the practice of *qarz* represent important coping strategies but can also be regarded as essential livelihood strategies. Simultaneously, those practices can be perceived as coping strategies for the individual household while for the collective community they are long-term adaptive processes (section 5.2.4).

This also leads to the question of intentional-strategic or unintentional-responsive behaviour in regard to livelihoods (section 5.2.5). Instead of speaking about strategies, the notion of livelihood pathways is more useful to emphasize that specific livelihood activities, especially of poorer households, are the result of specific individual household histories and decisions as well as processes influenced by the structures they are embedded in. However, there are livelihood activities that are strategic and follow a pre-set goal. Particularly, better-off households have the means to plan their livelihood-related future and are able to make investments or to promote education.

6.1.2 Livelihood trajectories in uncertain transformative process

The notion of livelihood trajectories is similar to those of livelihood dynamics and pathways. Here, the focus is on changing ways and developments of livelihood activities over time and “incorporates the dynamic nature of livelihoods, adopts a long-term perspective and takes livelihoods analysis beyond the level of particular strategies, responses and outcomes” (Steimann 2011: 39). This is also useful to analyse livelihoods in post-socialist transformation context that on the one hand is characterised by uncertainty and on the other hand offers distinct positive or negative pathways for households which are “rooted in the past, but are also shaped by a series of active decisions of various actors at all levels” (Steimann 2011: 39).

The concept of livelihood trajectories will be used to provide a short outlook on the future of livelihood activities in Khorog. Of course, the livelihood trajectories will be different for the different households

or household groups in Khorog and social differentiation is likely to increase, as some households are able to cope more successfully with uncertainties, therefore positive and negative trajectories of households will be analysed briefly. Following Steimann, “positive trajectories result in a gradual improvement of a household’s livelihoods through the accumulation of resources”, while “negative trajectories lead to a worsening of livelihoods through the gradual depletion of resources. As a result, a household may gradually lose its capability to respond to externalities such as shocks or negative trends” (2011: 39). Predicting these trajectories, especially in a transformative context is complicated and affected by various factors. Livelihoods are embedded in uncertain and unstable economic conditions (Steimann 2011: 36) which depend on external factors that might jeopardise livelihoods in the future as international price developments can cause enormous effects on local food prices or when labour migration to Russia gets regulated more strictly. Social and political uncertainties might arise when the conflict between central government and local groups escalates again or in regard to the question if social bounds and networks that guarantee social security will be as stable as they are today in the future – especially when social fragmentation and an increased economic heterogeneity weaken trust and collaboration (Moser 1998: 4).

Following de Haan and Zoomers, “livelihood trajectories should explicitly focus on matters of access to opportunities” (2005: 44). Potentials and access to opportunities for better livelihood conditions, however, are available. Apart from the energy sector, which only offers opportunities for few people, or the niche market of organic and sustainable agriculture, the tourism sector was often mentioned in this context and people adapt to this opportunity as one expert reported: “The people learn English, open hostels or homestays or establishing transport businesses for tourists”. Generally, especially the households of the better-off group have been and will be able to follow positive trajectories, as they are better able to seize opportunities and make strategic, intentional decisions and to invest in making a living for example with tourism. Those households of the poor category who constantly have to respond to everyday challenges will have a harder time taking these opportunities. To quote Steimann who “put it simply, *those who already have* are usually in a better position to cope with uncertainty, while *those who have not* are often trapped in a vicious cycle of short-term response and further impoverishment” (2011: 226). A major risk, which accounts for more or less all households but for poorer ones in particular is, to quote an NGO expert, that “the speed of inflation is too fast that it could be compensated with increased salaries”. Better-off households who are disproportionally governmental or self-employed are more likely to have increased salaries than those who rely on casual or unskilled labour, as it was reported that governmental salaries increase every two to three years about 10 to 15 percent. To cope with high prices, poorer households might follow negative coping strategies and will worsen their position to react to shocks or to take better livelihood opportunities in the future.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities for positive livelihood trajectories for the moderately poor and poor as well. Great-scale infrastructure projects as the construction of the *Jama’at Khana* or the University of Central Asia as well as future roads, housing or other infrastructure construction projects can create employment and income for some of those households who are engaged in casual and unskilled labour on construction sites. For better-off households these infrastructure projects offer business opportunities as well, for example one individual was able to establish a stonemason business in course of the construction of the university which is established as running business after the project’s end. Education as “the facilitator of development”, as one expert put it, might also create opportunities for all groups of households in Khorog. While the poverty level, 39.3 percent, and extreme poverty level, 17.3 percent, in GBAO is still comparatively high, there is a constant but slow development of increasing income and overall decreasing poverty (Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018: 141, 142). Overall, it has to be emphasised that more than

a third of the households in the sample was relatively well-off and is currently in the position to accumulate resources, simultaneously, the overall poverty level in Tajikistan is decreasing (see Figure 7 on page 28). This shows that there are ways for households, especially in urban contexts that offer more labour opportunities, to increase their living quality despite a general uncertain environment. A good share of households classified as moderately poor also indicated to be content with the current living quality – especially in relation to the experiences of the 1990s – and expressed a positive outlook for the future. Compared to the recent past, the moderately poor households already experience a gradual improvement of their livelihoods and living conditions – a statement that also applies to parts of the poor households as many of those are likely to have experienced extreme poverty and deprivation in the last 30 years. Whether all households will be able to regain the living standards and livelihood security they had at the end of the Soviet period is uncertain.

6.2 Conclusion

This master thesis dealt with the question of how local actors in Khorog, Gorno-Badakhshan, organise their livelihoods in the context of limiting structural factors and the ongoing transformation which is characterised by uncertainty and responsible for creating new framework conditions in which the actions and agencies of local actors are embedded in. The entire topic of livelihood activities, related obstacles and conditions in an environment that is characterised by structural changes, globalisation and a dynamic interplay of challenges and opportunities is of importance beyond the specific research location.

Changing structural framework conditions in terms of socio-economic and political-institutional changes and their meanings for actors on the local level are especially relevant for the broader post-socialist transformation societies (hypothesis I) who experience similar processes as independent states in a globalising world since the end of the Soviet Union. In this context, similar aspects of livelihood securing might be important in other post-Soviet societies as well, which are also affected by the privatisation of livelihoods. This includes diversification or the dependence on labour migration, which is particularly relevant for the Tajik context with its high share of remittances in the GDP. These aspects also play a major role in other post-Soviet states where people have to find ways to secure their livelihood with limited financial means. However, local forms and institutions of social security as the *rais* system or *qarz* cannot necessarily be generalised, but novel adaptations to uncertain environments are most certainly to be found elsewhere too.

Additionally, this work dealt with development issues in a high-mountain context. The thesis thus shows how high-mountain regions which are often perceived and characterised as backwards or isolated are indeed closely connected to centres, over-regional social and economic networks as well as historical developments, which, for example, is expressed in the “effects of distant world market forces on local and regional level” (Kreutzmann 2006: 51). This could also be observed in this study in form of the contemporary import dependency and its consequences or in the importance of labour migration. The Pamirs are not excluded from critical historical processes and transformations as the integration of Gorno-Badakhshan into the Russian Empire and the subsequent modernisation under Soviet rule demonstrated (Kreutzmann 2006: 57). As shown (see section 4.2.1), the development efforts under the Soviets were made exactly because of Gorno-Badakhshan’s geographical position on the border to non-Soviet nations and the perceived backwardness of its society. This integration fundamentally changed socio-economic and political dimensions but resulted in overall improved living conditions, which deteriorated equally drastic but much faster after the breakdown of the Soviet Union when the supply dependency suddenly presented a fundamental problem. Today’s livelihood systems can only be understood, and this accounts for high-mountain and transformation contexts in general, when the embeddedness and the consequences of broader multi-level socio-economic

contexts, as the transformation, are considered. This goes beyond a mere Malthusian comparison between population growth and food carrying capacity but considers agencies and strategies of local actors that influenced by external factors, socio-economic processes and exchange relations (Kreutzmann 2006: 51).

As a theoretical perspective the livelihood approach, under consideration of a non-normative transformation concept, has proven to be useful to gain a comprehensive picture of the complex and various ways households manage their lives, meet their needs and cope with challenges (hypothesis II). The approach allowed analysing the household's situations with a holistic view on poverty that is not only based on the financial status. Reflecting on shortcomings of too actor-centred and static views on livelihoods that only reflect the local level without overlaying political and social structures and processes, this research approach considered the structural and historical embeddedness of dynamic, increasingly diversified and multi-local livelihoods. This perspective also included approaches to vulnerability and risk (hypothesis III) which primarily derive from the uncertain transformation context in GBAO. Social security could be identified as an essential aspect of livelihood systems in Khorog. Mutual trust and reciprocal support as well as local forms and institutions of social networks, as the practice of *qarz*, the *rais* system and GAJA, constitute the basis for the social security. Consequently, as the research shows, the major vulnerability on a local level would be social exclusion. Risks on a broader scale lie in the import dependency and the vulnerability to price increases and international market fluctuations as well as inflation. How vulnerable households are against these risks is determined in their asset equipment which accounts for the functioning of their coping systems.

The operationalisation of the theoretical approach in an empirical field research with quantitative and qualitative methods proved itself adequate to gain a deeper understanding of the livelihood activities and aspects, agencies, challenges and vulnerabilities of local actors on a household level. This way, the perspectives and information of household members could be obtained and analysed directly. This could also show that ways the households manage their complex livelihoods go beyond static or economic-centred understandings of livelihoods. Therefore, it allowed for the consideration and analysis of the complex ensemble of livelihood activities of individual households, their obstacles and the risks they face and especially the importance of intangible social security in securing livelihoods.

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Annex

Annex 1 – Overview quantitative household characteristics

ID	HH- members	housing	income (total)	income per person	quote members/ working members	remittances	share of remittances	borrow/owe money to fulfill needs	home garden	size of home garden	GAA involved	food support from villages	food expenses	Electricity summer	Electricity winter	seasonal increase of electricity costs
1	5	Apartment	660 CMH	132 CMH	9.00	0 CMH	0	0% regularly	no	no	no	additional	300 CMH	100 CMH	200 CMH	100%
2	5	Apartment	1,600 CMH	320 CMH	1.50	in times of need	-	regularly	no	no	yes	significant	-	110 CMH	300 CMH	173%
3	4	Big House	3,900 CMH	975 CMH	2.00	0 CMH	0	0% never	yes	big	yes	no	650 CMH	200 CMH	600 CMH	200%
4	4	Small	1,960 CMH	490 CMH	3.00	in times of need	-	seldom	yes	small	yes	no	-	-	-	-
5	5	Big House	4,150 CMH	830 CMH	0.20	0 CMH	0	0% never	yes	big	yes	no	800 CMH	-	-	-
6	5	Apartment	4,100 CMH	820 CMH	0.67	1,800 CMH	-	44% never	no	no	no	additional	-	200 CMH	400 CMH	100%
7	3	apartment	1,350 CMH	450 CMH	1.67	in times of need	-	seldom	no	no	yes	no	-	140 CMH	400 CMH	186%
8	3	House	2,000 CMH	667 CMH	2.00	200 CMH	0	10% never	no	no	no	no	-	120 CMH	300 CMH	150%
9	4	Apartment	2,280 CMH	570 CMH	0.33	800 CMH	0	35% seldom	no	no	yes	additional	600 CMH	-	-	-
10	8	Small	1,350 CMH	169 CMH	2.00	0 CMH	0	0% regularly	no	no	yes	additional	-	100 CMH	150 CMH	50%
11	3	House	2,670 CMH	890 CMH	0.33	450 CMH	17%	never	yes	big	yes	no	500 CMH	-	-	-
12	7	House	2,200 CMH	314 CMH	2.5	200 CMH	9%	never	yes	big	yes	additional	800 CMH	-	-	-
13	14	Big House	9,450 CMH	675 CMH	1	in times of need	-	never	yes	small	yes	no	-	-	-	-
14	6	Apartment	4,550 CMH	758 CMH	2	0 CMH	0	0% never	no	no	no	no	-	-	-	-
15	5	Small	1,200 CMH	240 CMH	4	250 CMH	21%	regularly	no	no	yes	additional	600 CMH	100 CMH	200 CMH	100%
16	4	Small	1,250 CMH	313 CMH	1.5	200 CMH	16%	regularly	no	no	yes	additional	550 CMH	25 CMH	60 CMH	140%
17	2	Small	1,300 CMH	650 CMH	0.5	in times of need	-	seldom	no	no	no	additional	-	35 CMH	250 CMH	614%
18	3	House	1,400 CMH	467 CMH	6	1,200 CMH	86%	seldom	no	no	yes	no	350 CMH	45 CMH	250 CMH	456%
19	9	Big House	4,400 CMH	489 CMH	1.86	600 CMH	14%	seldom	yes	big	yes	no	-	80 CMH	450 CMH	463%
20	4	House	1,700 CMH	425 CMH	0.67	400 CMH	24%	seldom	no	no	yes	significant	600 CMH	100 CMH	220 CMH	120%
21	7	Big House	3,600 CMH	514 CMH	1.00	1,500 CMH	42%	seldom	yes	small	yes	no	700 CMH	110 CMH	500 CMH	355%
22	5	House	5,300 CMH	1,060 CMH	1.50	3,000 CMH	57%	never	yes	big	yes	significant	550 CMH	100 CMH	400 CMH	300%
23	4	House	2,500 CMH	625 CMH	1.00	0 CMH	0	0% seldom	no	no	yes	significant	350 CMH	200 CMH	400 CMH	100%
24	3	apartment	1,400 CMH	467 CMH	0.33	200 CMH	14%	regularly	no	no	yes	additional	475 CMH	100 CMH	400 CMH	300%
25	8	Apartment	2,950 CMH	369 CMH	1.83	in times of need	-	regularly	no	no	yes	no	750 CMH	125 CMH	550 CMH	340%
26	6	apartment	730 CMH	122 CMH	6.00	in times of need	-	regularly	no	no	no	significant	300 CMH	80 CMH	300 CMH	275%
27	7	House	3,700 CMH	529 CMH	1.00	0 CMH	0	0% seldom	no	no	yes	no	1,200 CMH	150 CMH	300 CMH	100%
28	4	apartment	2,900 CMH	725 CMH	1.00	1,400 CMH	48%	never	yes	small	yes	no	800 CMH	150 CMH	350 CMH	133%
29	3	apartment	2,600 CMH	867 CMH	0.50	0 CMH	0	0% never	no	no	yes	additional	700 CMH	100 CMH	250 CMH	150%
30	10	apartment	2,100 CMH	210 CMH	2.33	250 CMH	12%	regularly	no	no	yes	no	1,100 CMH	150 CMH	300 CMH	100%
31	5	Small	1,150 CMH	230 CMH	2.33	0 CMH	0	0% regularly	yes	small	no	no	600 CMH	100 CMH	200 CMH	100%
32	6	apartment	1,990 CMH	332 CMH	1.33	in times of need	-	seldom	no	no	yes	significant	-	100 CMH	200 CMH	100%
33	5	apartment	4,000 CMH	800 CMH	0.67	0 CMH	0	0% never	yes	small	yes	additional	1,100 CMH	115 CMH	350 CMH	204%
34	5	apartment	1,070 CMH	214 CMH	2.33	400 CMH	37%	regularly	yes	small	no	no	450 CMH	120 CMH	280 CMH	133%
35	5	apartment	730 CMH	146 CMH	4.00	300 CMH	41%	regularly	no	no	no	no	600 CMH	190 CMH	250 CMH	32%
36	4	House	3,500 CMH	875 CMH	0.33	150 CMH	4%	never	yes	small	yes	significant	800 CMH	150 CMH	300 CMH	100%
37	10	apartment	2,950 CMH	295 CMH	1.00	0 CMH	0	0% never	no	no	yes	additional	800 CMH	150 CMH	300 CMH	100%
38	7	apartment	2,886 CMH	412 CMH	0.40	300 CMH	10%	seldom	no	no	yes	significant	650 CMH	85 CMH	260 CMH	206%
average	5.4		2,619 CMH	511 CMH	1.88	453 CMH	18%					38	654.63 CMH	117.10 CMH	311.94 CMH	193%