

*How to Get it Wrong in Rural Uzbekistan:*  
**An Ethnographic Critique of Household  
Survey Categories**

By

Deniz Kandiyoti  
1999



**Centre for Development Policy & Research (CDPR)**

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London  
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7898 4496,

Fax: + 44 (0)20 7898 4519,

E-mail: [CDPR@soas.ac.uk](mailto:CDPR@soas.ac.uk)

URL: <http://www.soas.ac.uk/centres/cdpr>



## Introduction

Transition to the market in the former Soviet Union has occasioned an extensive overhaul of the statistical and planning apparatuses inherited from the Soviet period in all the newly independent states, including the republics of Central Asia. The creation of a new informational infrastructure, prompted by the demands of major international donor and lending agencies, appears to be an intrinsic, if little noticed, adjunct of market reforms. Part of the rationale behind these changes is to bring certain indices and measurements (such as definitions of employment, the measurement of prices, living standards and poverty) into line with internationally agreed standards set by bodies such as the ILO, WHO, OECD and the IMF. The shift from universal welfare provision under the Soviet system to ‘targeted’ assistance and poverty monitoring also requires the development of new policy tools. Finally, the design and implementation of development projects funded by various donor agencies has created additional demand for social and economic data. As a consequence of these changing priorities, a significant amount of technical assistance is being directed to upgrading information-gathering techniques and creating the domestic capacity to sustain these efforts. The data collection tools inherited from the era of central planning (such as the Soviet Union Family Budget Survey) are being revised and modified while, simultaneously, a range of externally funded sample surveys are being carried out (see Falkingham and Micklewright, 1997, for details). The volume of social research conducted in the private and NGO sectors has also increased substantially. This has resulted in a proliferation of sample surveys, mainly based on closed-ended questionnaires and relying on quantitative techniques of data analysis. In particular, household surveys have emerged as a prime tool for generating policy relevant information.

The main contention of this paper is that transition economies may present us with special methodological challenges that need to be adequately reflected in research design. In the absence of an in-depth understanding of the local meanings attached to the categories that are most routinely employed in questionnaires and interview schedules, survey findings can be of limited utility, and may even be quite misleading. More specifically, I will attempt to show how the combination of Soviet categories of ‘official’ registration, local cultural understandings and recent changes introduced by agrarian reforms may act to foil the best intentioned attempts at receiving meaningful answers to seemingly straightforward questions. My illustrations will be drawn from a household survey I conducted in four villages from two regions of Uzbekistan, Andijan and Kashkadarya, between October 1997 and August 1998.<sup>1</sup> The survey was preceded by in-depth household case studies and detailed observations in order to avoid errors and biases stemming from the lack of adequate qualitative information.<sup>2</sup> It, nevertheless, highlighted the intrinsic ambiguities of some of the categories employed and the limitations of the survey as a tool in a context where the meanings attached to many concepts are in a state of flux.<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I shall describe these difficulties in relation to five central concepts, namely, those of *household*, *employment*, *access to land*, *income and expenditure*. I shall attempt to illustrate how the contents of these categories are not only context-specific but are also shifting in response to changes in the rural environment of Uzbekistan.

## Households: elusive boundaries

The household (or domestic unit) generally refers to a group of co-resident persons who share most aspects of consumption and draw upon a common pool of resources for their livelihood. However, the sheer diversity of patterns of rural householding documented in ethnographic accounts makes this definition too simplistic and renders the concept itself rather elusive. On the other hand, 'official' definitions of what constitutes a household, deployed for the purposes of enumeration and the delivery of social benefits and entitlements, have an undeniable concreteness. The effects of these definitions may not be overlooked, although they may take different forms in different contexts.

There are a significant differences between studies of households carried out in the industrialised West and those based in the less industrialised economies of the South. In the case of the former, the state and the welfare system are acknowledged as important agents informing both livelihood strategies and decisions about employment and the allocation of household tasks and budgetary resources (see for instance, Morris, 1984,1987; Pahl,1984,1988). In the latter, there is generally little reference to the role of supra-household or non-kin based agencies, reflecting the weakness or absence of social safety nets, especially in rural areas. Societies that have experienced collectivisation occupy a rather distinctive place in this respect since their rural populations have access to a range of benefits and entitlements through membership in collective enterprises and state welfare legislation. However, here as elsewhere, the question of the degree of "fit" between the actual practices of entities registered as households and the official assumptions made about them constitutes a vexed and complicated issue.<sup>4</sup> Rural households in Uzbekistan present specific problems for researchers using standard sampling techniques based on *selsovet* (village administration) records, the most commonly used sampling frame for surveys. This is due to the fact that the relationship between official registration as separate units of co-residence and actual separateness as budgeting and production units can be quite tenuous and variable.

Physically, rural domestic units cluster around a courtyard (*auli*) where the garden plot, poultry and animals may be kept and where separate living quarters may be built for married sons. A distinction is made in the Uzbek language between household (*hodjalik*) and family (*oila*), and multiple family households are quite commonplace. Post-marital residence is virilocal and although it is typically the youngest son who inherits the parental home and cohabits with elderly or widowed parents, other married sons are, if possible, accommodated around the same *auli*. Some sons may leave the courtyard altogether and set up residentially and financially separate households. This becomes inevitable when there is no spare plot to house them or when circumstances take them elsewhere. Parental expectations of co-habitation with at least one married son are high although, in practice, many households diverge from this pattern. Married couples working for collective enterprises that provide them with purpose built apartment accommodation (*zhil dom*) tend to live in smaller household units. Elderly couples who have no sons or co-resident unmarried children may be found living either on their own or with grandchildren.

Within this framework, village records provide an imperfect guide to the actual number of households since there is a tendency for families, whether they are co-resident in the same *auli* or not, to register as separate units. This entitles them to separate private plots and to child benefit and income support when their income falls below a certain level.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, families sharing the same courtyard may have different budgeting arrangements. In local parlance, they may either 'share the same cooking pot' (*kazan bir*) or keep separate pots (*kazan alahada*) and constitute separate budgeting units. The decision to share daily consumption or otherwise involves a wide range of considerations, both monetary and relational, and may undergo modifications depending on changing circumstances.

Mindful of these distinctions, the interview schedule used in the household survey referred to above did not simply take the households registered in the *selsovet* records at face value, but also ascertained whether they had separate cooking pots or not. Such was the case of Omina and Abdulkarim, a newly married couple, who had set up a residentially separate household and reported keeping a separate budget and "their own" cooking pot. However, they had not been allocated a private plot, apart from the land on which their house was built, and appeared to have no visible means of support since the one was unemployed and the other a *kolkhoz* worker who had not received wages for months. It is only later, in connection to questions on crops harvested and sold, that it became apparent that this couple was still working on the plots of Abdulkarim's paternal household and receiving a portion of their harvest and income. This was a clear-cut case where the separation of residence and daily consumption gave few clues on the actual allocation of agricultural and other tasks among married sons. Corrective action by the researcher was clearly needed here to reconstitute the full domestic unit that made this young family viable. Indeed, families that do not cook and live together may nonetheless continue to cultivate common plots, share the produce and remain enmeshed in daily ties of sharing and exchange of products, labour and services structured along gender and seniority lines. This type of corrective action may be particularly difficult to accommodate in large scale surveys based on fixed sampling fractions and using teams of interviewers, assuming that local variations in budget control had been identified in the first place.

Conversely, common residence and a shared cooking pot may act to conceal the tacit separation of incomes and expenditures of co-resident families. Zuhra and Sodik are elderly pensioners cohabiting with a married son, his bride (*kelin*) and their unmarried children. They report cooking together. However, when asked about who keeps the household money and who asks for money from whom when necessary, Zuhra says; 'We keep and spend our own pension. They keep their own money'. Although they may share the produce of their land plots, they go their separate ways when it comes to cash expenditure. This tendency may have been exacerbated by the fact that pensions have become the sole source of cash income in many households where *kolkhoz* workers are paid intermittently and only in kind. Clearly, depending on circumstances, such sharing arrangements may be revised and modified. In one case, a widowed pensioner, Omina, decided to separate her cooking pot from her elder son, who already has four children, and to share her pension income only with her youngest married son who has no regular income and a disability. She justifies her initiative as follows: 'Why should I share my pension with all of them? The older children grow, the more they eat. To each his own, it's better that way'.

To complicate matters further, relational considerations may exercise a considerable influence on the reporting of even the most seemingly straightforward items. The household survey in Andijan and Kashkadarya also included interviews with all cohabiting, adult women. This often meant that mother-in-law/daughter-in-law pairs had to answer the same questions (albeit separately). Concerning the ownership of household durables ( such as televisions, sewing machines or furniture ), the answers of co-habiting pairs tended to be identical, which was what one would normally expect. There was, however, a notable exception of a daughter-in-law who reported owning only a cupboard, the one she had brought with her trousseau, omitting to mention other household items that were plainly available. When I queried this apparent anomaly, I was informed that this *kelin* was having a particularly bad relationship with her mother-in-law. This was evidently her way of signalling her disaffection with and alienation from her husband's family. In a rare twist of events, there was also one case of a bride reporting a car among household possessions, an item that was left out of her mother-in-law's account. This was a case where the older woman only had access to her pension money, whereas the bride claimed to be in control of general household finances.

Similar considerations seem to have applied in some responses to a question concerning the number of co-resident families in the household. In some cases, widowed parents, with or without unmarried children, were considered to constitute a separate family, in other cases they were not. Divorced daughters who came back to live with their parents, with or without children, were considered as a separate family, pointing to the anomalous, and hopefully transitory, nature of their current status.<sup>6</sup> Neither the boundaries of constituent families within households, nor those between households are fixed entities. Rather, they may themselves become the object of negotiation and redefinition, depending on a range of material and emotional circumstances.

Domestic units are, therefore, best conceptualised as the site of multiple and interlocking sets of processes. These may activate different sub-sets of individuals who may constitute appropriate units of analysis, depending on the nature of the research question posed. For instance, the analysis of family planning decisions may require a different unit of analysis than, say, the allocation of intra-household resources. Since the exploration of these boundaries is part and parcel of the research process, there is a sense in which units of analysis may sometimes emerge *a posteriori*.

This is precisely what happened in the household survey in Andijan and Kashkadarya where I found the links between co-residence, budget control and household divisions of labour (in both domestic and production tasks) to be varied and complex as well as fluid. Even the use of so-called 'filter questions' (in this particular case, trying to sort out households with a common vs. separate cooking pot at the outset) proved unequal to the task of identifying the boundaries of domestic units for the purposes of my investigation. Yet the general tendency in survey research is to assume that households correspond to officially registered units of residence and that these, in turn, constitute discrete budgeting units. A more flexible and exploratory approach clearly needs to be adopted, one that is more open to trial and error. The qualitative methodologies habitually employed at the pilot stage of

surveys, whether these take the form of focus group discussions, participatory and observational techniques, may not be sufficient in themselves to secure adequate questionnaire design. However, an unexpected bonus of the survey may reside in the heuristic value of the inconsistencies, gaps and apparent inaccuracies of the responses provided- what are normally dismissed as “errors”. This is what the rest of this paper will attempt to demonstrate, starting with the category of “employment”.

### **Employment vs. livelihoods ?**

Although it is a commonplace that the concept of “employment” is itself an artifact of regulation (as most discussions on the informal economy keep reminding us), this is nowhere more apparent than in the republics of the former Soviet Union. In the case of our survey, a strikingly high proportion of respondents declared themselves “unemployed”, even as they gave detailed descriptions of their farming, animal husbandry or trading activities. This was not an attempt at dissimulation; they were, indeed, “officially” unemployed.

In the Soviet Union ( and currently in Uzbekistan) all employees are provided with a workbook (*trudovaya knishka* in Russian, or *mihnat daftarchasi* in Uzbek) which is registered with their employer for the entire duration of their time with that enterprise. If a workbook is “with the person himself/herself” rather than with an employer this constitutes an interruption of service and reflects detrimentally on pension rights (with the exception of one and a half years allowed for maternity leave, or *dekret*). It is therefore important to keep one’s workbook registered with an enterprise whether one is drawing a salary or not.

The restructuring of farm enterprises in Uzbekistan<sup>7</sup> created different categories of employees; those registered, and still receiving a salary (generally in managerial positions), those registered, without receiving a salary ( some skilled workers who now work on their own account), those registered, but receiving irregular payment and only in kind (unskilled agricultural workers), and those who are struck off the books altogether and “keep their own workbook”. These latter identify themselves as unemployed, regardless of what else they do and how much they earn.<sup>8</sup>

Among the “officially” employed, current patterns are also getting increasingly complex, especially in urban areas. There are people who are registered with an enterprise for pension purposes but do not do the job they are registered for, nor do they draw a salary. There are also those who are registered in an enterprise, and do another job entirely. Not surprisingly, with the collapse of public sector employment and precipitous drops in wages what used to be “subsidiary” activities or “unofficial” incomes now often become the mainstay of household budgets. However, for the purposes of surveys (an official activity par excellence) many will still report the place where their workbook is registered, and the “official” salary that goes with it, regardless of what they actually do to make a living and how much they might actually earn.

This was quite apparent among registered *shirkat* workers in the survey (constituting the majority of rural workers) who reported a monthly wage that had by now become quite

fictitious. Within the framework of a household survey, unless special precautions are taken, this makes the calculation of household incomes quite problematic. There is a sense in which this insistence on official wages has to do, at least partly, with a desire by respondents to depict their current situation as somehow “anomalous”, a situation that could not last indefinitely and might, again, be put right. Especially now that no stigma attaches to informal activities, which are no longer considered illegal, this tenacity cannot be attributed to attempts at concealment. This could hardly be the case in the context of a survey where all other sources of income were gone into in considerable detail. I had to acknowledge the extent to which local understandings of what constitutes a “proper” job and the benefits that go with it had been deeply conditioned by Soviet institutions. The sense of grievance experienced by those subjected to late payment of benefits, for instance, also conveyed a sense of outrage about a loss of normalcy. It is, of course, conceivable that a major overhaul of the welfare system and phasing out the workbooks in favour of different arrangements may, in time, change people’s apprehensions and expectations. It is also clear that this is an area where a great deal of resistance is likely to manifest itself.<sup>9</sup>

What is directly pertinent to the argument at hand, is that extreme vigilance is required when formulating questions on current employment status. The issue of whether salaries are actually received or not, at what intervals, the calculations of money equivalents of in kind payments and the extent to which currently non-salaried jobs offer scope for non-official wages to be earned<sup>10</sup> must all be taken into account. This is difficult to achieve in view of an understandable reticence to report unofficial earnings. Informal activities, such as trading in markets, are reported with greater ease. These activities are, in fact, subject to regulation since it is necessary to register and pay the *bazarkom* (the officer in charge of allocating spaces and collecting charges) for one’s stall or spot. On the other hand, it is common knowledge that although a *bazarkom*’s official wages may be quite low this is a sought after and profitable position offering plenty of opportunities for unofficial emoluments which provide a handsome supplement. This is a point I shall return to in greater detail when discussing the question of household incomes.

But first we must consider the crucial question of access to the main source of rural livelihood, namely land.

### **Access to land: moving the goalposts**

Among the republics of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is noted for pursuing a gradual strategy of partial changes in the area of agrarian reform (Spoor, 1995; Ilkhamov, 1998). Unlike neighbouring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, there has not been a disbanding of *kolkhozes* but rather the creation of what Ilkhamov has described as a three-tiered rural economy. This structure consists of collective farms, still occupying the major part of irrigated, arable land, a thin layer of private peasant farms, and a mass of collective farm employees who cultivate household smallholdings. Ilkhamov has cogently argued that the local elite has a stake in the maintenance of this type of agrarian economy since it ensures a minimum subsistence level



for the peasantry whilst preserving the monopoly of the government and administrative elites over land and water resources and over cotton, the leading and most lucrative export commodity

However, despite the absence of *de jure* privatisation land is *de facto* increasingly becoming a commodity through the development of the leasehold market. Local administrations and collective farms face the contradictory pressures of having to simultaneously fulfil state procurement quotas for crops (cotton and wheat), continue to allocate private plots to households for their own use and entering leasehold arrangements with farmers under the new rules of the Land Law. This is creating an unprecedented indeterminacy in the mechanisms of land allocation.

Villagers have access to different types of plots. The first type is the land plot on which their house is built and may accommodate a small kitchen garden. This is held in perpetuity and is inheritable. The second type is the *tamorka* or private subsidiary plot to which all citizens have been entitled since Soviet times. After independence in 1991 the legal size of personal plots was increased substantially, from 0.1 ha. to 0.25 ha. of irrigated land and 0.5 ha. of non-irrigated land. These are usually allocated from the land reserves of collective farms and, in densely populated areas, may be located some distance away from house plots.

On the collective farm itself, two types of land tenure arrangements may coexist; leasehold peasant farms and sharecropping arrangements with farm management on annually negotiated terms. In principle, leasehold peasant farms are free to market their own produce but, in practice, they also opt for a sharecropping arrangement with the collective farm on which they depend for inputs, transport and access to markets. Independent peasant (*dekhan*) farms are those with the status of separate juridical entities and the right to open their own bank accounts. They may hold leases of up to ten years. These are few in number and have been experiencing reverses rather than expanding. A TACIS report (1996) on the Samarkand district noted a decline in the number of independent peasant farms since 1995. The operations of peasant farms are, in fact, quite severely restricted since they have contracts with collective farms to grow particular crops under sharecropping arrangements. These frequently exceed the legal requirement of crops and quantities ( 50% of wheat or cotton) they must deliver but farmers have weak bargaining power in setting the terms of their contracts. Furthermore, the collective farm is often in arrears of payments, leaving independent farmers strapped for cash, unable to pay for essential inputs or acquiring them by selling produce privately and therefore falling short of their contracted production quotas. Some private farms were closed down with reference to Article 13 of the Land Law stating that if land is not used properly it should revert to the collective. There are, therefore, significant structural obstacles to the development of this type of tenure.

The household survey in Andijan and Kashkadarya reflected the land tenure situation described above quite accurately. Out of 100 surveyed households, only one was identified as an independent peasant farm. This conforms to the official data (1.5 peasant farms per 1000 population, approximating 150-170 households) reported by Ilkhamov ( op.cit.). The different categories of land tenure were also correctly identified. However, the precariousness of tenure from year to year was not adequately taken into account, leading to

puzzling inconsistencies in the case of one particular village. Several households had mentioned rice as their most important marketable crop. However, the household plots reported and the crops grown on them did not include rice. Upon closer scrutiny, it became apparent that this rice was grown on subsidiary plots (*tamorka*) allocated during the past season. In the current agricultural season, the *shirkat* decided to take this land back to plant cotton. One can only surmise that there had been a shortfall in cotton production quotas. That meant the allocations of *tamorka* land would only be made on wheat land after the harvest, allowing households to grow vegetables only, which are both perishable and much lower in value than rice. This decision had created consternation since household budgets would be depleted by this serious loss of income.

Another crop which made an unaccountable appearance in one of the households was several tons of onions reported as sold but not as grown on any of the plots to which the household stated having access to. It appeared that the head of the household had entered into a sharecropping arrangement with the brigade chief (the overseer and manager of work brigades) on the collective farm to plant onions after the wheat harvest in return for a proportion of the produce. The degree of formality involved in this and similar arrangements is not always entirely clear. A widow living with her married sons also reported their household had harvested four tons of carrots, one of which was given to the brigade chief “for the village kindergarten”. Whether this transaction took place in the context of a formal sharecropping contract or not was, again, rather vague. What is quite clear, however, is that since land allocation continues to depend on collective farm managers this gives them considerable power. They have discretion over the quantity, quality and distance from the homestead of the plots leased out, over the terms of the lease and on whether a household is allocated land or not. In one particular instance, one household was in serious financial difficulty and had no land plots at all. It transpired that they had not been allocated any after a falling out with the head of the *kolkhoz* two years ago.

Aside from the vagaries of relationships with collective farm managers, a more insidious underlying source of instability in current land tenure arrangements, resides in the inevitable tensions arising from simultaneously attempting to provide villagers with a subsistence base (and even expanding it under the new Land Law) and establishing land as a commodity through the expansion and diversification of leasehold markets. Inevitably, the claims that rural households make to the land they are, in principle, legally entitled to cultivate may be curtailed by the competing claims and priorities of farm managers. Given the fact that *kolkhoz* employees who no longer receive wages have become more dependent than ever on subsistence farming (and the sale of their crops whenever possible) there is a limit beyond which local administrators may not squeeze them without creating serious distress and discontent. However, there are already signs that this delicate balance may be tilting away from the interests of smallholders.

It would appear that even the very partial process of commodification initiated by agrarian reform in Uzbekistan has set in motion changes that are likely to result in new pressures on smallholder households. Better off households are able to enter into private hire arrangements with the tractor and combine drivers of the *kolkhoz* who get paid either in cash or in kind. But the shortage of cash and inability to pay for inputs has already meant

that the level of mechanisation has dropped considerably for the great majority. On the other hand, private ownership of tractors is rising and households that can command both farming implements and some capital may look further afield than their own village for land to lease. The notion that outsiders who are not members of the collective may thus receive access to land is bound to create great ambivalence and there is likely to be conflict between communal norms and expectations and statutory rights under the new legislation.<sup>11</sup>

This shifting landscape of access to land and wages has meant that household incomes are now generated through a wider range of activities and take multiple forms.

### **Household income: official, unofficial and informal**

In his study of the Soviet informal economy, Grossman (1989) made a conceptual distinction between the informal *second economy* which was outside legal regulation and *informal incomes* that derive partly from the second economy and partly from illegal transfers such as bribes, embezzlement and misappropriation of public resources. He suggested that informal incomes constituted a sizeable portion of household budgets and that these tended to increase in both absolute and relative terms as one moved from north to south (particularly into Transcaucasia and Central Asia) and from major urban centres to smaller cities and the countryside. In an earlier ethnography of a Siberian collective farm, Humphrey (1982) showed that some unofficial or illegitimate roles were, in fact, essential to the smooth functioning of enterprises and that they could be deployed to perfectly legitimate ends such as securing inputs or marketing *kolkhoz* produce. Other research evidence (Mars and Altman, 1992) also highlighted that the second economy thrived in a symbiotic, if not parasitic, relationship to the formal sector and was, in some senses, an outgrowth of specific types of malfunction inherent in the command economy itself. The transition to the market and the crisis of the public sector have occasioned significant changes in the context and extent of informal activities and created new patterns of informalisation which complicate the calculation of household incomes considerably.

Rural households in Uzbekistan currently make ends meet through a combination of sources of livelihood. These are salaries and wages which may be paid in cash, in kind or through combinations of both, self-provisioning and sale or barter of produce from personal plots or animals, income from other trading or informal service activities and benefits and entitlements (such as pensions, child, maternity and invalidity benefits) which are paid in cash. The financial crisis of collective enterprises and the fact that they are chronically in arrears of wages has resulted in a tacit “informalisation” of registered, official activities. Let us consider the case of a woman worker at the local poultry factory in a village of Andijan province. Her salary currently consists of eggs which she must take to market or sell to intermediaries who collect produce from households. This is received in payment for a registered, official job which to take a monetary form has to go through the medium of petty trading, an activity normally associated with the informal economy. Similar conditions apply to workers at the local towel factory, with a resulting periodic glut of towels on local markets whenever they receive their “pay”.

The case of *kolhoz* workers is equally complicated. Workers organised in brigades normally have responsibility for a specific acreage of land planted with cotton (commonly 1 hectare, hence the term *hektardji*) year round for which they receive *only* in kind payment, except for the wages received for picking cotton.<sup>12</sup> However, membership of the collective farm also gives them access to necessities which they would otherwise have to pay for such as the cotton stalks they use as fuel and animal fodder and the ability to graze animals on *kolkhoz* land. As a result, the calculation of money equivalents for in kind payments becomes a less than precise exercise.

When payments in kind are not automatically translated into immediate contributions to the family budget, estimations of income become even more complicated. This point was graphically illustrated by the case of a villager who had grown melons and water melons on a plot of leased land and bartered them at the local commercial shop against one hundred cups and plates. These were meant not only for his own family but also for the trousseau of his daughter who was coming up to marriageable age. Acquiring crockery made the returns from his melons more inflation-proof than if he had received cash for them and will doubtless save him money in the longer run. This sequence of events also implies that his immediate need for cash was not so pressing and that he was sufficiently comfortable to cover himself against some future expenditure.

Finally, the calculation of unofficial wages presents even more intractable problems. By unofficial wage, I mean emoluments received privately by officially registered employees in the performance of their normal duties. Tractor and combine drivers on the *kolkhoz* do private work on the personal plots of villagers in exchange for a fixed cash payment per hectare, or a portion of the produce harvested in the case of combines. Although they pay for their own petrol, they use the machinery of the collective farm and do this work in lieu of wages. Workers in construction brigades may also work privately and offer their services for cash or wages in kind.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, a hospital nurse may give injections privately when called upon by villagers in need of treatment. There is nothing novel in these types of activities which would normally go under the label of “moonlighting” or having a job on the side. The novelty resides in the fact that these incomes have superseded official incomes which nonetheless may continue to be reported in household surveys. Moreover, researchers may find that there is little consistency in reporting practices. One tractor driver in an Andijan village declared his private earnings, while another stuck to his fictitious monthly wage. Others were genuinely unable to put a figure on their earnings due to the fluctuating nature of the demand for their services.

There are other unofficial incomes of a far less innocent nature than the private sale of one’s customary services. These are the bribes and extortions which those in commanding positions of administrative authority are able to exact from villagers. The example of *bazarkoms*, officials who allocate spaces in bazaars, was already cited as a position offering substantial scope for unofficial earnings. Ikhamov

( op.cit.) also remarks that the scale of exactions by officials (such as traffic police) on roads between village and town is of such magnitude that it has become one of the major obstacles to the development of private farming. These types of incomes are, needless to say, not susceptible to detection except through the obvious discrepancies one sometimes encounters

between declared incomes and ownership of consumer durables such as cars, videos and expensive furniture.

In addition to these complications, I was able to identify what we might call phenomenological discrepancies in what respondents themselves consider as “income”. In one household, pensioners’ benefits and proceeds from the household plot were the only sources of livelihood. When asked what the major source of income of their household was, they insisted they had no source of income whatsoever. This occurred on several subsequent occasions. Since these families were plainly living off something, their insistence that they had no income at all needed interpretation. It became apparent that benefits were not perceived as income since this was something they were entitled to. As for the produce from their own plot, it all went towards self-subsistence. They earned no wage and therefore had no income. It was not simply a matter of whether they received cash or not, since pensions are paid in cash. It was more a question of defining what types of returns qualified as income so far as the respondents were concerned. I entertained the possibility that this might be a problem of translation since the Uzbek term *daromad* equally translates as profit. However, I was surprised to come across another household reporting pensions as the major source of income. Commenting on this discrepancy, I was informed that they were sufficiently poor to report their pensions.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, a sizeable proportion of registered workers receiving actual or theoretical wages did not report their wages as the major source of income of their households but mentioned their farming or animal husbandry activities instead.

There are thus numerous sources of inaccuracy and possible bias in the reporting of household incomes. Some of these difficulties have to do with the nature of the incomes in question, others with a reluctance to reveal certain types of earnings and yet others relate to ways in which the meaning of “income” itself is interpreted by respondents. The issue of interpretation became even more crucial in relation to questions concerning household expenditure.

### **Household expenditure: here you see it, there you don’t**

Descriptions of the most important expenses incurred by households during the past twelve months took a variety of forms. In some cases, straightforward reporting of items, such as the repair or construction costs for a house, was followed by a specific sum of money spent. The purchase of consumer goods, such as a new battery for a car or a carpet, was likewise reported in monetary values. In other cases, outgoings were described as an outlay of animals, produce, cash or various combinations of these. The most common incidence of such combinations could be found in enumerations of the costs of a wedding feast, circumcision or funeral ceremony. In many households, these life cycle events were the most frequently cited source of major expenditure. A typical inventory of expenses might look as follows: two rams, one sack (50 kgs.) of rice, one sack of flour, twenty litres of oil and ten kilograms of carrots. Deriving the money equivalents of these outlays was a relatively simple matter, frequently assisted by respondents’ own mental calculations. Whether these constituted net expenses was another matter, given that the value of gifts received on such

occasions may act to defray some of the costs. Nonetheless, these were cases where all outgoings, whether they took the form of cash, livestock or produce were acknowledged as expenses.

I was alerted to the possibility that the concept of expenditure may itself be subject to differing interpretations by some findings from a village in the province of Kashkadarya. Here, one household identified the largest item of expenditure as the payment of 6,000 sums for medical expenses for the treatment of the respondent's sick wife. In answer to a previous question, the same respondent had reported slaughtering two rams and one bull for various religious holidays and ceremonies (for *iftorlik*, the break of fast at Ramadan, for *kurbanlik*, the feast of sacrifice, and for a *sunnat toy*, the circumcision feast). Even the most superficial calculation suggested that the value of these animals far exceeded the sum reported as maximum expenditure, since a single ram would have fetched 6,000 sums. Yet these animals were not mentioned as expenditure. When I probed into this discrepancy, I was informed that these animals didn't count as expenditure *'because they were ours'*. Whereas they had to spend cash for medical costs, and therefore reported it as a major expenditure, they were able to meet their ceremonial needs from their own flock. Clearly, this household was not thinking about the worth of its animals in terms of their market value or in money equivalents but as free goods, highlighting the extent to which the concept of expenditure itself is relative to the degree of monetisation of the economy as a whole.

Indeed, one of the characteristics of this particular village was the fact that few reported selling any of their produce on the market. This was a dry farming area with few marketable crops. Villagers grew wheat on their personal plots for their own consumption and some vegetables, if they could find water, but the principal form of wealth consisted in having animals, mainly sheep. Many necessities were obtained through barter and exchange. Only the poorest households reported that their women wove rugs (*kelims*) for sale on the market and when animals were sold as a means of raising cash for essentials this was a tell-tale sign of resource depletion. In addition, the actual cost of keeping animals was relatively minimal. The whole family, including children, participated in their care. Shepherding and taking animals to summer pastures could be achieved through informal arrangements with *kolkhoz* shepherds who added private flocks to those of the collective farm in exchange for an animal or two depending on the size of the flock. Similar arrangements could be transacted with kin and neighbours.

This situation contrasts sharply with that of villages in Andijan province where the degree of monetisation is much higher. In this area of irrigated farming many household smallholdings were producing crops for sale, particularly rice. The level of mechanisation of production on even relatively small plots was considerable and the cost of production much higher.<sup>15</sup> Transactions to obtain inputs (such access to fertilisers and machinery) were monetised, whether payments were made in cash or in kind, since the money equivalents of in kind payments were carefully calculated. One of the most striking findings here was that even what used to be a communal reciprocal helping arrangements, *hashar*, (such as neighbours coming together to help build a house) now carries a hidden payment in the form of gifts considered to approximate the value of the services rendered. The reporting of household

expenditures in this region was more strictly monetised regardless of the type of outgoings (whether they consisted of money, animals or other products).

The contrasts between findings in different regions are hardly surprising if we remember that the calculation of costs may always be a relative matter. Even in the most industrialised countries of the North a householder keen on do-it-yourself who has just built himself a cabinet or a garden shed might report the cost of the materials purchased but treat his own labour as a “free” resource (although it may be argued that the labour of this amateur has a less obvious market value than that of a good cow). The reason why this gains particular relevance in rural Uzbekistan at this point in time is that the ways in which costs and expenditures are reported are both diagnostic of the degree of monetisation in any given locality and constitute an important baseline for monitoring the extent of penetration of a market economy. That is why rather than treating the concept of expenditure (or for that matter, income) as a self-evident, universal category (which implicitly presupposes a market economy) it may be more pertinent at this stage to achieve a better qualitative understanding of how these categories can be mapped out and utilised in different locations.

## **Conclusion**

Post-Soviet transitions have prompted a search for new policy tools and methods of data collection. The measurement of living standards and calculations of poverty lines have promoted the use of quantitative techniques and sample surveys as privileged tools for the collection of policy-relevant information. I have argued throughout this paper that survey data is valuable only to the extent that it builds upon a solid bedrock of in-depth, qualitative information about the processes under investigation. Using illustrations from a household survey carried out in four villages of the provinces of Andijan and Kashkadarya in Uzbekistan, I offered an analysis of the ambiguities surrounding some basic concepts such as *household*, *employment*, *access to land*, *income* and *expenditure*. My findings suggest that not only are the processes and categories identified under these labels context-specific, but they are also likely to undergo further transformations as market reforms deepen.

This raises a host of methodological issues which are not amenable to easy, prescriptive answers within the scope of a brief paper. Nonetheless, some general observations can be made about crucial areas of indeterminacy which should receive particular attention in the design of household surveys. The first concerns the use of official records, such as *selsovet* records, as sampling frames. These may or may not be adequate depending on the problem at hand. The illustrations provided in this paper suggest that households identified on the basis of village records do not necessarily correspond to self-contained budgeting and consumption units. A more exploratory approach should inform the choice of units of analysis.

The second observation concerns the effects of “transition”. These may be crystallising around a growing disjuncture between “official” occupations and wages and what people actually do to make a living. This disjuncture is reflected in the reporting of occupations and incomes in ways that make an accurate evaluation of both employment status and household

finances quite problematic. At this point in time, there is a tendency in rural Uzbekistan to carry on reporting wages that have now become fictitious and “registered” occupations (tied to the workbook system) that may no longer be related to a household’s main source of livelihood. This may not be simply put down to a reluctance to report informal earnings but may also reflect a genuine internalisation of Soviet definitions of what constitutes a “proper” job- one that not only brings wages but a range of entitlements and benefits. As this system gets progressively eroded, the tendency for reported occupations to fall into line with major income-generating activities will undoubtedly increase. The same applies to wages. The particular combinations of cash and in kind payments received at present, the “informalisation” of registered jobs described in this paper all correspond to a particular phase of the transition process. This period of crisis of the public sector is accompanied in Uzbekistan, by an effort to keep as many workers as possible “on th  
government of Uzbekistan has made it an explicit policy goal to avoid the worst excesses of the market observed in other countries of the former Soviet Union (Human Development Report,1998) and to “cushion” the social costs of transition. However, even the piecemeal agrarian reforms adopted are creating contradictions which are becoming apparent in the area of access to land. The simultaneous attempt to provide smallholders with a subsistence base while developing and diversifying leasehold markets in land is creating new tensions.

Finally, the reporting of household incomes and expenditures may reflect different kinds of logic, depending on the degree of monetisation of local economies. Whereas in one region (Andijan) all outgoings, regardless of the form they take (cash, produce or animals) are accounted for as expenses, in another region (Kashkadarya) variations were observed in whether households calculated their animal wealth in terms of market values. It may well be that the expansion of a market economy may bring about a homogenising effect on the deployment of these categories. The use of sensitively designed, longitudinal surveys may not only serve to monitor these changes but may also make a substantial contribution to our currently limited understanding of transition from command to market economies in different regional and cultural contexts.



---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This household survey was part of a broader project supported by a grant of the Department for International Development with participation from UNDP, Tashkent for a project titled 'Rural Domestic Economy and Female Labour Supply in Uzbekistan'. It was carried out in four villages with contrasting livelihood systems (irrigated farming, dry farming and animal husbandry and farming and rural industry) in the provinces of Andijan and Kashkadarya. Two interview schedules were used; a household interview and a women's interview conducted with all co-resident adult women in the household. My thanks are due to Nadira Azimova who acted as national consultant on this project.

<sup>2</sup> This danger was brought home to me by the results of the EUI/Essex Survey carried out in 1995 in three regions of Uzbekistan which attempted to estimate the incidence of private transfers among households, whether these take the form of gifts, exchanges or loans in cash or in kind ( Couduel , McAuley and Micklewright, 1997 ). This information was obtained by asking household heads or other persons answering the questionnaire whether they had received help from relatives or friends in the 30 days prior to the interview. Although the survey established that a substantial number of households had been involved in either making or receiving cash or in kind transfers, it completely missed out on the most pervasive mechanism for private transfers, namely *gaps*. *Gaps* are social get-togethers functioning as rotating savings associations where all the members of a network pay in a fixed sum of money each month which they receive as a lump sum when it is their turn to hold a gathering at their own home. Since these networks are primarily presented- and experienced- as venues for recreation and sociability there is no reason why they should have been reported in answer to the question posed. Yet *gaps* account for the largest volume of cash in circulation based on private transfers and help to alleviate the shortage of ready money to make more important purchases. However, the cultural embeddedness of *gaps* meant that their economic functions could escape detection altogether ( Kandiyoti, 1998 ).

<sup>3</sup>I choose to label these limitations as 'heuristic errors' since an analysis of the reasons behind some apparent inconsistencies and omissions effectively reveals how respondents actually map out their worlds.

<sup>4</sup>The literature on agricultural development projects in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, is rife with examples of how assumptions about households as income-pooling, corporate units come up against the actual realities of different customary practices. In cases where the automatic control of the male household head over the production and labour time of women cannot be taken for granted, and where projects make the assumption that such control exists, intensified intra-household conflict along gender lines is frequently reported.

<sup>5</sup> Despite legal entitlement to private plots, the actual probability of being allocated one depends on the availability of land. In Andijan province, where population pressure on land is extremely high, new allocations fell well below the legally allowed limit and many were actually denied land. In Kashkadarya much larger allocations of unirrigated land were made to households but lack of water limited what they could cultivate and many used the land to grow fodder crops.

<sup>6</sup>Admittedly, this only happened in two cases since divorce is relatively rare in villages. There is, however, a patrilineal bias in setting the boundaries of families. A disabled, single older brother receiving benefit is considered as part of the same family in a way that a divorced daughter can never

---

be. However, in the event of remarriage a divorced daughter's children are frequently taken in by their maternal grandparents since it is considered unseemly for a woman to bring children from a previous marriage into her new husbands' household.

<sup>7</sup> Alisher Ilkhamov ( 1998 ) notes the fact that this restructuring consisted mainly of converting state farms, which were centrally funded, into collective farms which hold their own budgets. As a result, there was a 30% increase in collective farms since 1991 and privatisation took the rather cosmetic form of restructuring them as joint-stock companies now called *shirkat*. Since these enterprises are in permanent deficit, the pressure of having to pay salaries has resulted in either shedding some of their personnel or keeping them on the books without paying them wages.

<sup>8</sup>There are, also, different categories of non-employed. Housewives who are currently out of a job will report themselves as unemployed, whereas those who have never had a workbook will define themselves as housewives. Invalids receiving benefit, students receiving stipends, women on maternity leave, and pensioners constitute recognised categories of non-employed, distinctions that are seldom found in rural societies where such provision is non-existent.

<sup>9</sup>This became quite clear to me in discussions with Uzbek colleagues who expressed utter disbelief at the notion that pension rights could be tampered with or redefined. Verdery (1996) was right in pointing out that the social compact between state and citizen under socialism was based on the paternalistic promise of being provided for at the cost of restrictions of one's personal freedoms in market and political terms. The elimination of the former in the absence of an expansion of the latter, as is currently the case in all Central Asian republics, could be the occasion of serious social disaffection and unrest.

<sup>10</sup> Some categories of skilled workers are better placed in this respect. For instance, a carpenter-builder registered in a construction brigade but receiving no wages can ply his trade privately and work during the construction season. Tractor and combine drivers are likewise able to do jobs on their own account. Unskilled agricultural workers are least able to command unofficial wages and *shirkats* try to make sure they, at least, get paid in kind. Cotton harvesting wages are always paid in cash on a five-daily basis since the supply of an adequate workforce during the peak season continues to be a problem.

<sup>11</sup> In the course of an interview with a farm manager I tried to highlight the problems of leasing village land to outsiders by asking whether I would be permitted to lease and cultivate a plot if I came forward with the requisite capital. I was assured that I would be welcome to do so and that I would even find willing partners to join me in this farming venture. In reality, leaving aside any existing legislation barring foreigners from such enterprise, this would constitute quite a scandal and receive extremely negative evaluation whatever the formal rules might be.

<sup>12</sup>This payment consists of basic necessities such as flour, cooking oil and rice. A calculation I made on the basis of money equivalents of these goods showed that it translates into a monthly income well below the official minimum wage ( Kandiyoti, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Some payments in kind are more appreciated than cash. Bottles of vodka, for instance, are inflation-proof, just like dollars.

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Nodira Azimova for heated and lengthy discussions on the meaning of some of these findings. She found it self-evident that better off families would not consider benefits as income whereas my own strictly monetary understanding dictated that all payments received must constitute income.

<sup>15</sup>I was particularly struck by the fact that the number of women working as casual wage workers (*mardigar*) at the rice harvest was not particularly high. If we compare this to Southeast Asia where harvesting and processing rice constitutes an important source of income for poor rural women we may better appreciate the differences. However, the increase of manual operations in households who can no longer afford to pay for machines combined with rising unemployment on collective farms may well push up the demand and supply of casual workers.