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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women



# Women's representation in local government in Tajikistan

JUNE, 2017

# ANALYTICAL BRIEF



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# Introduction

Women's participation in decision making at all levels of government is essential for addressing various developmental challenges that societies face. Women's leadership and participation are guided by a number of international commitments to women's representation, including the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women\*; the Beijing Platform for Action\*\* and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) until 2030\*\*\*.

Inclusion in decision making is part of the general issue of gender equality that is prominently highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality, encourages states to intensify work on ending all forms of discrimination against women and to seek ways of empowering women and girls in their societies. More specifically, SDG target 5.5 is to: "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life." The "all levels" component of this target means that women's participation and representation in all spheres of government – both national and sub-national – need to be considered.

The issue of women's inclusion in public office is just one aspect of a broader women's empowerment agenda. Yet it is a strategically important entry point – being represented in various decision making fora enables women to shape agendas and priorities across numerous policy areas. This specific issue has been recently highlighted in the Tajik context: the President of the republic raised the issue of establishing a quota for female representation in government in his recent address to female activists\*\*\*\*.

This brief contributes to the discussion of issues of women's representation in government by focusing on one specific level of government – jamoat (municipal) councils. According to Tajik law, jamoat councils play an important role in managing local affairs, supporting socio-economic initiatives, and deciding on local developmental priorities. Given the country's decentralization plans, their role will only increase over time. By mapping the levels of female representation on these councils, the brief attempts to highlight successes and failures in ensuring women's representation and stimulate further analysis of factors that have contributed to those successes and failures. It also attempts to establish one sort of baseline for assessing the effectiveness of any future efforts to encourage women's participation in government.

## Why women's representation in the decision making matters

- Women's leadership is fundamental for gender equality and sustainable development
- It is a human right and a requirement of democracy
- It is critical to realizing all SDGs and SDG 5 in particular
- Women are still under-represented at all levels of decision making worldwide and decision making is not yet sufficiently informed by women's actual needs and priorities

\* Ratified by Tajikistan in 1993.

\*\* Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

\*\*\* Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Accessible at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

\*\*\*\* Asia-Plus, "President offers establishment of quota for female representation in public service", March 7, 2017, at <https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/power/20170307/237378>

# DATA AND METHOD

Tajikistan's legal provisions specify the number of seats that municipal council have – the councils have to have between 15 and 40 seats, depending primarily on the population size and number of settlements in the municipality (each village is entitled to, at least, one deputy seat). Even the smallest size municipal councils thus provide a theoretical possibility for a number of women to be represented on the council. Local deputies are elected in single-member electoral districts whose boundaries are drawn on the basis of the decisions of jamoats (municipalities)\*\*.

The data for the analysis of the actual situation with women's inclusion in local councils that is provided in this brief comes from the last round of local elections that took place on 1st March 2015. The data includes observations on the total number of deputies and the number of female deputies for 427 rural and township municipalities (jamoats) that were in place at the time of elections\*\*\*. These observations are a part of a larger data set of Jamoat Basic Indicators (JAMBI), which includes data on a number of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of municipalities. The source of most of the JAMBI data is administrative statistics collected on the local and district levels\*\*\*\*.

The brief uses a number of simple measures such as the percentage share of female deputies in local councils, and social and economic indicators of jamoat development to identify basic patterns in women's representation and to explore potential factors shaping the levels of this representation. Data for variables and indicators cited in the brief comes the JAMBI data set, unless otherwise specified. Summary statistics on the total number of deputies and number of female deputies elected in the last round of local elections in March 2015 are provided in Table 1 below.

As the table indicates, there were 10,337 local deputies elected in 427 jamoats in the last round of local elections. The largest number of deputies were elected in Khatlon, and the smallest number were elected in the least populous region of the country, Gorno-Badakhshan. A total of 1,572 persons out of all deputies, or about 15.2% of the total deputy corps, were women.

**Table 1. Number of deputies in rural and township jamoats (as of the 1st January, 2016)**

Region	Population*	Number of jamoats	All jamoat deputies	Female deputies	Share of female deputies as proportion of total number of jamoat deputies
Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region	192,136	43	749	159	21,2%
Districts of Republican Jurisdiction (Centre)	1,842,453	115	2,868	380	13,2%
Khatlon	2,723,180	154	3,907	585	15%
Sughd	1,977,271	115	2,813	448	16%
Total	6,735,040	427	10,337	1,572	15,2%

Source: JAMBI dataset, based on records of jamoat council resolutions  
 Note: \*Population of 427 rural and township jamoats, city population is not included

\*\*Law of the Republic of Tajikistan, "About local self-government bodies in townships and villages," adopted 23 June 2009, Akhbori Majilisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2009, N. 7-8, art. 503.

\*\*\*The number of rural and township municipalities subsequently increased and, as of 1st January 2017, includes 429 units.

\*\*\*\*The JAMBI dataset was constructed by UNDP and local think tank Innovation Development Center (IDC), in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT). UN Women provided advice and assistance on the design of gender disaggregated indicators.

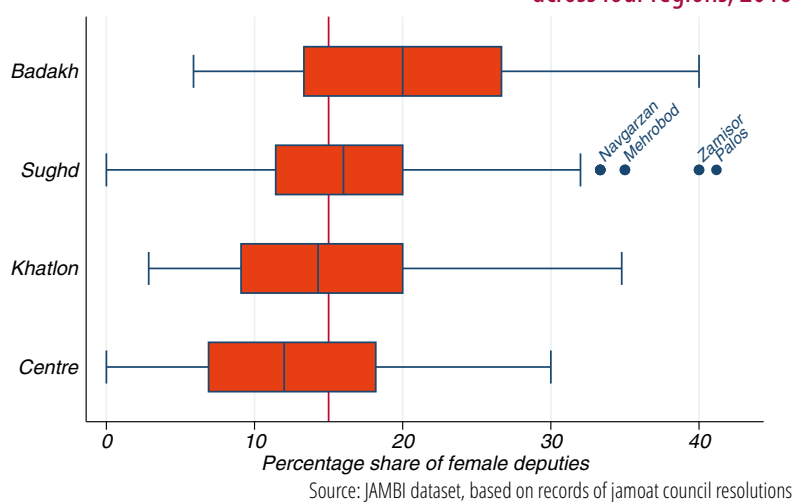
# REGIONAL VARIATION IN FEMALE REPRESENTATION



The 15.2% female share in the local deputy corps points to a generally low level of women's inclusion in governance issues on the local level. It suggests that relatively few women are in a position to directly affect the work of local councils and that these governance institutions, which are among those that are closest to ordinary citizens, are only weakly shaped by the preferences and dispositions of female community members that usually account for more than half of a community's population.

This general number, however, hides considerable differences in the extent of female representation in local councils across different regions of the country. To illustrate the extent of this variation, Graph 1 uses a box plot display to summarize data on municipal shares of females deputies across four regions of the country.

Graph 1. Percentage share of female deputies in municipal (jamoat) councils across four regions, 2016



The red line in the graph indicates the median value of female deputy share for all 427 jamoats – it stands exactly at 15%. The median value of female deputy for jamoats in each region is represented by the line subdividing the box for each region. The length of the box represents the interquartile range (IQR) which covers the female deputy share values for jamoats that fall into two middle quartiles (middle fifty percent of jamoats). Lines, often called whiskers, are drawn to span all data points within 1.5 IQR of the nearer quartile. Any data points beyond the whiskers – high female deputy share values for several jamoat in Sughd region in our case – are shown individually.

Graph 1 indicates that the median values of female deputy shares were higher than the national medium in the case of two regions, Gorno-Badakhshsan and Sughd. In the case of Gorno-Badakhshsan, the difference was especially pronounced. Median female deputy share for this region was 20% and the range of female deputy share values for jamoats in Gorno-Badakhshsan varied from 5% to 40%.

Median values were lower than the national average in both Khatlon and Center. The lowest median value of female deputy shares, 12 %, was registered for Centre region. Female deputy share values in jamoats in Centre region varied from 0 to 30%. Comparing means instead of medians as measures of the centre of the distribution produces the same ordering of regions as depicted in Graph 1.

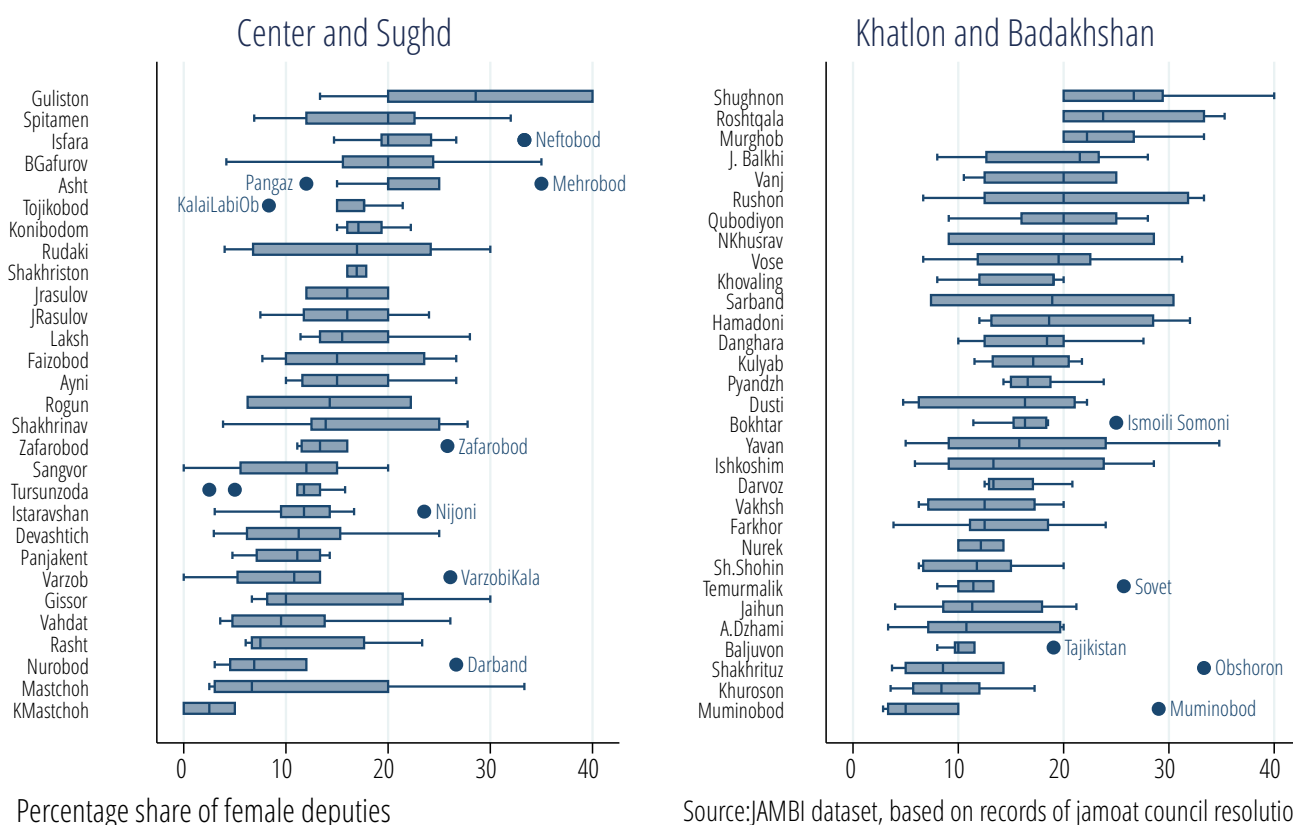
The fact that Center region falls behind in terms of women representation cannot be

entirely attributed to the influence of a more traditional part of the region, Rasht valley. Dividing jamoats from Center into two groups – Rasht (41 jamoats) and the rest (74 jamoats) – reveals that the median value of female deputy share for Rasht jamoats is 12.5% and for the rest is 12%. At the same time, the distribution of values of this indicator for the rest of jamoats in Center is positively skewed, which results in a somewhat higher mean value of female deputy share for these jamoats (13.7%) in comparison to Rasht jamoats (12.9%).

## DETAILED GEOGRAPHY OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION

The summary information provided in Graph 1 above is disaggregated to the district level in Graph 2. The graph shows how the level of female representation varied across districts and across jamoats in individual districts. To present a lot of information in a compact way, the graph combines district data from the four of the country's regions in two sub-graphs. Districts are ordered from the highest to the lowest median value of female deputy share for jamoats situated in the territory of the district.

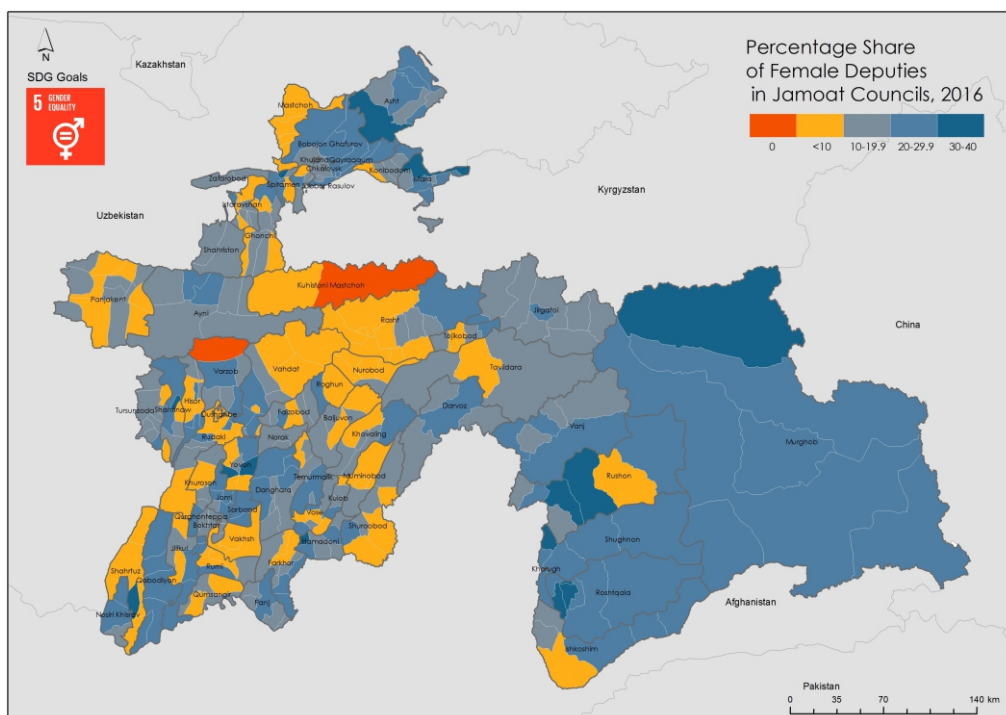
Graph 2. Percentage share of female deputies in jamoats by districts, 2016



As the graph indicates, Guliston district in Sughd region and Shughnon district in Gorno-Badakhshan had the highest median values of female deputy share among the sixty districts listed above. The value of female deputy share for six jamoats that fall under Guliston's jurisdiction varied from 13% to 40%. In the case of seven jamoats in Shughnon district, the value ranged between 20% and 40%.

Districts with the lowest median value included Kuhistoni Mastchoh in Sughd and Muminobod in Khatlon. Muminobod district, for example, includes seven jamoats. While Muminobod jamoat, which serves as the district's center, has almost a third of its municipal council composed of women, the share of women in municipal councils of all other jamoats was below or equal to 10%.

Map 1 provides details on municipal boundaries and the value of female deputy share for individual jamoats. It allows visual examination of differences in women representation across different levels of administrative-territorial division. Some jamoats, due to their small geographic area, do not appear on the map.



Pockets of very high and low values can be identified. Jamoats with the highest level of female representation in local councils include: jamoat Palos in Buston, jamoats Chorukdarron and Zarnisor in Guliston, and jamoat Shirinjonov M. in Shughnon. The female deputy share value for Palos is 41% and for the three other jamoats is 40%. At the opposite end of the distribution are three jamoats with no women in their local councils. They are jamoat Zideh in Varzob, jamoat Vahdat in Sangvor, and jamoat Langar in Kuhistoni Mastchoh.

# DETERMINANTS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION

The comparative literature on women's inclusion in public office points to a number of factors that influence the extent to which women are able to secure representation. These factors include, among other things, cultural norms, education levels, and economic development rankings. A combination of such factors can help to account for some of the macro-regional variation that one observes in Tajikistan.

Urbanization and the related concentration of administrative functions over commercial, social and cultural activities also appear to be important drivers of female inclusion in decision making on a municipal level in the case of Tajikistan. Dividing the country's jamoats into two groups – rural and township jamoats – reveals a large difference in the level of women's representation. The mean value of female deputy share for the 369 rural jamoats is 14.9% (the median value is 13.8%). The mean value for the 58 township jamoats, which predominantly play the role of administrative centers in districts, is 21.6% (the median value is 20%).

The variation in female deputy share across jamoats of the already mentioned Muminobod district provides a good illustration of differences between two types of jamoats. Densely populated Muminobod district, which is located in close proximity to a major regional center, the city of Kulyob, has seven jamoats whose population range from eight to 19 thousand persons. Jamoat Muminobod is neither the largest among these jamoats nor the most centrally located. Yet it has traditionally played the role of the district's administrative center and has the status of a township. As was indicated in the discussion of Graph 2, the value of the female deputy share indicator for this jamoat is well above the values of this indicator for other jamoats in the district.

Analyzing the impact of other structural factors that could be hypothesized to influence women's ability to secure representation does not reveal any systematic patterns. The proxies for jamoat income levels, remoteness from urban centers, and labor migration rates were not strongly correlated with the female deputy share values. An important institutional factor – the single member district (SMD) system which is generally recognized to be disadvantageous for women's representation in comparison to electoral systems based on proportional representation (PR) – was in place for local elections across the country and thus had the same effect on all jamoats.

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\*\*\*\*\* See, for example, R. Inglehart and P. Norris (2003) *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



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While structural and institutional variables need to be considered in efforts to explain in-country variation in levels of female representation and some of them do play an important role in accounting for some of the variation observed at the jamoat level, they are not the only factors at play. The role of agency in explaining successes and failures in ensuring an adequate representation of women in local councils should not be underestimated. We lack field research evidence or other accounts that document the actions of active citizens – male and female – who help to create in certain localities a climate conducive for women's engagement in local affairs, who run themselves or encourage female members of communities to stand for public office.

Without consideration of the role of individuals and specific local contexts it is difficult to explain the large differences in women's representation among neighboring jamoats that share many structural similarities. This point can be illustrated by taking the example of Yavan, another district in the most populous Khatlon region of the country. The district has nine jamoats and is somewhat representative of the national-level picture with respect to women's inclusion in local councils – the median value of female deputy share for jamoats in this district is 15.8% which is quite close to the national median of 15%. There is one township jamoat that serves as the administrative center of the district and eight rural jamoats. Among the latter, there are jamoats where women account for almost a third of all deputies and for a quarter. There are also four jamoats where the share of women in local councils is below 10%. Learning more about the local determinants of these differences is needed if one is to develop a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for enhancing women's presence in local councils.

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## LOOKING BEYOND COUNCIL REPRESENTATION

Women's inclusion in local councils is not the only relevant aspect of women participation in local government. Future research in this area should also focus on collecting and analyzing information on women in leadership positions at the local level: heads and deputy heads of jamoats, secretaries of jamoat councils, members of jamoat consultative councils, township and city mayors. These positions are especially important for empowering women and increasing their profile and influence in communities.

There is also a need to disaggregate available information on women's inclusion in public administration on the local level. According to a recent government report, women hold 21.8% of employee positions in government offices at the sub-national (province and district) level and 22.4% in the self-governing bodies at the jamoat level. The report also provides figures on women's inclusion in public administration at the national level – approximately 17% of all employees are women and women constitute 19% of the members of Tajikistan's House of Representatives (lower house) and 21.9% of the National Assembly (upper house)\*.

Comparing data on women's representation in local government across countries is made difficult by the lack of agreement on what categories of local government positions should be considered and how relevant measures should be precisely defined. But UN Women, as the custodian agency for SDG Indicator 5.5.1b (proportion of seats held by women in local governments), is now developing a data collection methodology to produce the first-ever baseline of the proportion of women in local government.

It should be noted that on other global gender-related indicators that are already available, Tajikistan registers showing very limited achievements. The country is ranked, for example, 93<sup>rd</sup> out of 144 countries in the World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap Index, with a score of 0.679, indicating limited progress from its 2015 score of 0.675 and 95<sup>th</sup> rank among 145 countries. While its scores for educational attainment and for health and survival are relatively high, the score for political empowerment (women in parliament and ministerial positions) is low. Among countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, Tajikistan is among four countries with the lowest Gender Gap index ranking: Tajikistan – 93<sup>rd</sup>, Slovak Republic – 94<sup>th</sup>, Armenia – 102<sup>nd</sup>, Hungary – 101<sup>st</sup>\*\*.

Inclusion in decision making is part of the general issue of gender equality that is prominently highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality, encourages states to intensify work on ending all forms of discrimination against women and to seek ways of empowering women and girls in their societies.

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\* National Report on implementation of Beijing Platform of Actions in Tajikistan, 2015

\*\*The Global Gender Gap Report 2016. Available at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/>

The SDG target 5.5 is to: “Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.” Progress towards achieving this target will be measured through the following indicators:

5.5.1

Indicator

Measures women's proportional representation in two distinct areas of government: (a) national parliaments and (b) **local government**;

5.5.1b

Indicator

Proportion of seats held by women in **local governments**.

SDG target 16.7 is to “Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels.” Progress towards this target will be measured through the following indicators:

16.7.1

Indicator

Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions;

16.7.2

Indicator

Proportion of population who believe decision making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section provides some observations and conclusions both on women's inclusion in local councils and on the broader context in which issues of female representation are situated. Improving levels of women's representation requires understanding and addressing a broader set of challenges.

The finding that the share of female deputies in municipal councils across the country stands at 15.2% means that women are significantly under-represented in public office at the local level in Tajikistan. This number is well below the share of women in society and is also lower than what the available statistics reports as the 20% share of female local councilors globally.\*

Women's participation is a cross-cutting issue and increasing women's engagement

in decision making can greatly contribute to progress in achieving the wide range of goals envisioned by national development strategies and the global Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is difficult to resist highlighting the potential that increasing women's representation in Tajikistan might hold for addressing issues that traditionally receive less attention than, for example, energy generation or connectivity infrastructure in discussions of the national development agenda. It is very likely that an increased presence of women representatives in decision making fora could provide a major impetus for addressing issues of social protection for vulnerable groups, intensifying efforts to combat marginalization and exclusion, and achieving tangible improvements in the delivery of basis social services.

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*Nodira Avezova is member of the municipal council in Jamoat Chorku, Isfara district, Sughd province. In 2013-2014 a process of land reform was initiated in the province to transfer land management from the state and collective farms to individual and family based farms. However, there was a certain level of resistance from the management of the former state farm “Chorku” to pass land management to small farm holdings of individual shareholders from the community. In response to this situation, Nodira Avezova, in her capacity as a local council member, mobilized the representatives of Hojai Alo village to jointly approach the Mayor of Isfara town to ensure that land reforms responded to the actual interest and needs of the local people. As a result, the Mayor of Isfara town issued a decree to restructure and secede 300 hectares of land belonging to the agricultural seed farm “Chorku” and to establish three farm holdings with 400 shareholders.*

**UN Women Tajikistan, 2016**

\* From SDG 5 to Habitat III: UCLG and UN-Women, 2015, *The Role of Local Governments in Promoting Gender Equality for Sustainability*

The high level of women's under-representation calls for and presents multiple opportunities for policy and advocacy work aimed at reducing barriers for women's participation in local decision making, increasing the capacity of civic organizations supporting such participation, and empowering local female leaders to stand for public office. Such work requires that additional efforts are made on parallel tracks to better understand both the exact nature of existing barriers and the types of knowledge and skills needed to improve female candidates' chances for securing elected positions. Serious research efforts should thus complement policy and advocacy work.

The work itself can proceed using different modalities. Much could be done through concerted efforts by a coalition of interested actors (women groups, civil society organizations, and development partners) at the national level. At same time, there is a plenty of room for more limited interventions initiated by individual actors and designed to address specific needs and gaps in those geographic locations that the provided analysis identified as especially lacking in substantial female involvement in local decision making.

Increasing the levels of women's representation in municipal councils in the aftermath of the 2020 local elections or, at least, increasing the number of female candidates standing for office in these elections, could serve as one tangible target for what is likely to be a long-term process of working on strengthening women's engagement in public policy.

Several national policies and programs have tried to increase the presence of women in leadership positions. The latest state programme to promote women's leadership for 2017-2022\*, unfortunately, does not identify a concrete target expected by 2022 in relation to women's improved access to decision making in general and local decision making specifically. The only actions related to the position and participation of women in local decision making, include: 1) conducting special courses

in a "Leadership school" for women leaders at the local level; and 2) establishment and facilitation of debating clubs on the "Role of Women in Governance", with participation of representatives of local executive bodies of government, public associations and political parties. The programme could still be better linked with the state's commitment for the implementation of SDG targets, particularly, SDG target 5.5 described in detail above. To ensure this, efforts should be strengthened to ensure equal access and participation in decision making, based on the SDG principle and approach of No one left behind. Representatives of the most vulnerable, excluded and marginalized groups have to be provided with an opportunity to have a voice and position regarding their development related specific needs and priorities through meaningful participation in decision making at all levels, including locally.

Quotas and reserved seats serve as temporary special measures which provide women with better access to decision making at all levels. There are a large variety of quota/reserved seats mechanisms which have been introduced to increase representation of women across the globe. National decision makers could benefit from studying these practices and identifying the most appropriate for the national context. Quotas that apply for both women and men could be introduced to ensure balanced gender perspectives and limit the dominance of either sex to a maximum of 60% .

Girl's education is a critical issue, especially in the rural and more traditional areas of the country. With 33% of female students in universities (data for the education year 2015/2016) and with a tendency for girls to drop out of secondary school at high rates, it is difficult to achieve considerable progress on women's economic and political empowerment. There is a need for more work targeting parents, and local formal and informal leaders to ensure equal opportunities for girls to study in universities.

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\* State programme on education, selection and appointment of the managerial personnel in the Republic of Tajikistan from among gifted women and girls for 2017 – 2022 (adopted by the Degree N 158 by the Government of Tajikistan on 1 April 2017)

Patriarchal gender norms, roles and stereotypes continue to be a barrier to women's participation and leadership at all levels and should be addressed by constant and targeted actions. Existing socio-cultural practices that affect women's ability to enter public office should be examined in a specific regional context and differentiated. This should result in the development of practical measures to address the existing barriers for women's participation in local decision making and to support an open dialogue within society on equal rights and opportunities for men and women, girls and boys. A collaboration with local media to break barriers to women in public life is important and gender education for media professionals is crucial.

Efforts to build the capacity of women to aspire to, attain and perform in local government offices, and women's groups to engage in local governments, have to be strengthened through elaboration and implementation of development initiatives to support women's needs and concerns by targeting change oriented actions, creating an enabling environment for their participation, advocacy, education and the provision of resources. While quotas and reserved seats result in increases in women's representation in local governance structures, they are not enough to ensure that women sufficiently contribute to local decision making. Women should be supported by comprehensive capacity development, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and practical skills (knowledge on local governance mechanisms, local planning and budgeting, effective communication and negotiation skills, etc.) to perform their roles and functions. Also, to address and overcome barriers caused by a lack of confidence, limited advocacy skills and experience and hesitation to openly raise a voice, women have to be supported by networking opportunities that provide them with strategic

allies and possibilities to work together, learn from each other and have a common vision to present and lobby as a joint position. Such comprehensive support would allow women to become real agents of change for their communities.

Cooperation amongst women activists and members of local governance institutions across districts and regions has to be supported to ensure a mutual exchange of experiences, views and a common contribution to improve the environment for their meaningful participation in decision making. The creation of institutional support mechanisms to promote women's interests and concerns at the district level has to be advocated and further supported.

The abovementioned newly adopted state programme on female leadership has to be reviewed from the perspectives of setting clear targets for women's improved access to decision making and attracting different women's groups in line with the SDG 5 targets and state commitments for full implementation by 2030. The focus on inclusion of women in local decision making institutions has to be complemented by practical actions aimed at overcoming the existing challenges related to weak political incentives, lack of technical knowledge and experience that undermine the incentives, actual interests and ability of women from vulnerable groups to be represented in decision making. The programme indicates the intention to introduce mandatory gender analysis/expertise of all legal and policy documents to ensure their gender sensitivity. This is a good tool and should be applied from the perspectives of ensuring that specific gender related needs and priorities are addressed by new laws and policies, as well as documenting how women and men contribute equally and meaningfully to the decision making influencing their lives.

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\* UNIFEM Progress of the world's women 2008/2009

\*\* The data covers a number of girls studying in universities. An actual number of girls finally completed University education is even less

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