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The local governance of social security in rural Surkhondarya, Uzbekistan: Post-Soviet community, state and social order

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Henrik Poos

The local governance of
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The local governance of social security in rural Surkhondarya, Uzbekistan

Post-Soviet community, state and social order

Wolf Henrik Poos

Abstract

Post-Soviet restructurings in the agricultural and social sectors exerted pressure on the livelihood situation of the Uzbek rural population. The sovkhoz/ kolkhoz had been an overarching organisation which locally organised not only agrarian production. It also served as a local administration, regulated the distribution of centrally provided social goods and services and thus guaranteed basic social security to its members. Its disintegration must have introduced dynamics of community change which go beyond the mere organisational aspects of production and social security. Together with political and economic frameworks the whole ensemble of local communities' imminent social structures is subject to change. But in this regard, village communities in the rural areas of Surkhondarya feature very distinct developments. They strongly differ in present local governance patterns and the role of the state as an actor holding a stake in these:

In the cotton area where the state has strong interest in the maintenance of proven production patterns and thus an adherence to Soviet structural and institutional frameworks, the population in terms of social security still benefits from a collective-like and locally embedded agricultural production system. This bolstered the stability of social order shaped by a worldview based on a 'collective identity'. The mahalla as a newly introduced (self-)administration in the local arena could establish as a mediator between the state, the local farmers and the population and is of strong relevance in the governance of local affairs. Together with the new private agricultural producers it inherited the organisational and social functions of the kolkhoz.

In contrast, the mountainous area - due to the absence of a highly state-regulated production system a politically and economically peripheral region - exhibits the emergence of a relatively liberal economic system under an environment of political self-regulation. A collective kolkhoz-identity has vanished. The mahalla plays only a marginal role in the local setting and did not find its standing in an adapting social order.

Keywords:

Uzbekistan, Social Order, Local Governance, Mechanisms of Social Security, Post-Soviet Developments, Mahalla, State-Local Relationships, Post-Soviet Community

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1 Introduction

In the Soviet past, in the rural areas of Uzbekistan the *sovkhoz* (state farm)/ *kolkhoz* (cooperative) was an overarching, state-managed or state-controlled organisation. It locally organised not only agrarian production and provided its members with basic income and food, but it also regulated the distribution of centrally and collectively provided social goods and services (Spoor 2007:64). The collective guaranteed basic social security to the population. Moreover, with the introduction of the collective enterprise, a comprehensive agricultural, social and political infrastructure was established in the rural areas of Soviet Central Asia. Thus, Soviet institutions and organisations then shaped governance structures for decades and coined the local social order of the rural population.

Since the former Soviet republic gained independence, two decades of economic and political reforms and developments have had deep impacts on the rural society. In two respects, the former entailed incisive changes directly connected to the quality or shape of individual households' livelihoods: First, due to a lack of capacities, the Uzbek government could no longer maintain the social securing functions it used to previously provide to its population due to the omission of subsidies and transfer-payments from Moscow. Uzbek citizens were confronted with cutbacks in social assistance provisions, in the face of rising unemployment, low real wages and land deprivation caused by population-pressure needed more than ever. Secondly, the government undertook land reform measures, amongst others breaking up the landholdings of the former large collective farms (or their post-Soviet follow-ups, the *shirkats*) and transforming these into individually managed private enterprises (*fermer xojaligis*), a process of privatisation which is regarded as marking the end of collective agriculture (Kandiyoti 2007).

Thus, a new social security scheme and the disintegration of the collective farm as an organisational structure caused pressure on the livelihood conditions of rural households and communities and thus required a change in the local organisation of social security. Showing how livelihood strategies in rural Uzbekistan are shaped today and how social security is individually and collectively organised is the main concern of my PhD-thesis.¹ For this purpose, it was analysed which state and communal institutions are of relevance today for the regulation of local social security issues and how existing institutional arrangements changed or were adjusted in order to ensure security and stability on the local level.

But together with new economic and political frameworks also a society is changing. Modes of local governance had been intrinsically tied to the collective modes of production. Thus, it is moreover demonstrated what the changes introduced by privatisation and de-collectivisation are, that go beyond the mere organisational aspects of agricultural production and social security. What are the repercussions regarding the social organisation of the communities in the rural settlements, their imminent social structures and social order formerly shaped by a worldview based on a 'collective' or '*kolkhoz* identity', group solidarity within the kin group or *kolkhoz* and the perception of a socialist state that cared for its citizens? Insights provide observations from the rural areas of the country's most southern province of Surkhondarya:

¹ In this report, the outcomes of a socio-political analysis of rural communities in southern Uzbekistan are presented. It is based on data and findings obtained in the course of extensive qualitative field research. The research was conducted by the author from autumn 2006 until winter 2007. In its course, the methods of participatory observation, semi-structured interviews as well as informal conversations were employed. It is therefore a Surkhondaryan perspective on community change, which though may - as at least studies conducted in other cotton areas of the country (Trevisani, Kandiyoti, etc.) show - lead to similar outcomes in other rural areas of Uzbekistan.

In this article, distinct developments will be exemplified on the basis of research findings obtained in Pakhtaobod, a former cotton *kolkhoz*, and in Darband, a village situated in a mountainous area of the *viloyat*. Contemporary modes of governance on the sub-district level (local governance) are made understand to disclose the societal developments or changes which have been caused by such altering setting. Hereby, the focus is put on the *mahalla*, formally a self-governance organisation set up by the central government which has to regulate local political and social affairs. With the introduction of the *mahalla*, the local administrative system was rearranged considerably. Had state organisations and institutions been directly integrated into the Soviet collectives for regulating local issues, after their disintegration administrative reforms officially set up a separation between the agricultural enterprises, the local administration and the rural population. A new governance actor occurred in the local arena as the space in which the state in form of state actors and organisations and the local communities interact and state and communal institutions interrelate. State-society relations and social order became subject to change.

2 Approaching society, state and social order in rural Uzbekistan

To theoretically approach social order and the nature of state-society relations in Central Asia in general and in rural Uzbekistan specifically, is not a simple game. As acknowledged by Jones Luong, Central Asia already represents a special case in several respects. In this regard. Here, the Soviet state 'not only succeeded in profoundly transforming the social and political organisation [...], but also in blurring the boundaries between state and society in distinctive ways' (Jones Luong 2004a:4). Civil society has remained fragile and marginal (Mandell 2002:292), with state power opposing its deployment.

In Uzbekistan the fracture between 'civil society' and 'political society' is particularly acute (Stevens 2007). State-society relations are characterised by a weak participation of societal organisations and institutions in the public sphere, and by a submissive attitude of the social domain towards the domain of the state (Jones Luong 2004b).

The image of a framework largely occupied by an omnipresent and omnipotent state has pushed culturalist explanations which tend to portray Central Asian societies as 'deep-frozen' and immutable. An evident example is Starr's (1999) erroneous argument which alludes to a perceived (civil) society's weakness to a supposed collectivist tradition, that discourages civic engagement, finally ending up assenting to Wittfogel's (1957) 'oriental despotism' argument.

Trevisani (2008) assesses that the attractiveness of such arguments rests on the lack of empirical knowledge about the actually ongoing processes of social change on the ground. Even if since the beginning of the 1990s much fieldwork-based research has been conducted in the region, there are, however, still many questions regarding its societal and political developments in recent years not answered sufficiently, not to mention the Soviet era. This invites controversies among academics working on Central Asia which though served as a starting point for preparing my research topic:

Concerning the debate on rural community change in Central Asia after 1990, the works of Kandiyoti and Roy express two influential and antagonistic views on currently operating dynamics. As a starting point, both authors depict the Soviet *kolkhoz* as a patronage system in which, behind the façade of formal rules, political loyalty and material benefits and resources were channelled through personal networks. These networks were ingrained locally and (as Roy especially stresses) derived their legitimacy from their amalgamation with local 'traditional' social institutions.

Kandiyoti calls such local institutional arrangements a 'kind of social contract' which, according to her, is now eroding after the breakdown of the Soviet system and an agricultural system under reform. On the local level the broken social contract refers to the loss of formal and informal compensation mechanisms (Kandiyoti 2003:158-9): Though wages of collective workers had always been low, rural households were compensated by various social benefits provided via the state's social security scheme and channelled through membership of an enterprise, including access to a plot for household use. These 'formal' benefits were complemented by more 'informal' mechanisms of paternalistic responsibility of the *kolkhoz*-management towards its workers, such as helping them to defray the costs of life cycle ceremonies or assisting those affected by disease or personal tragedy, providing individual households with factors of production like agricultural equipment, fertilizer and grazing areas for private livestock etc.

According to Kandiyoti, the post-independence agricultural reforms brought about a situation in which the patronal commitment of the rural elites towards their clienteles and a state policy of connivance towards local arrangements of reallocation within the *kolkhozes* ceased to uphold the balance between the needs and demands of the local communities and the policies of the central

state. These changes appeared after independence, when the various effects of the new reform policies eroded local links of reciprocity and solidarity, the 'glue' of rural community life.

The picture Kandiyoti draws is in contrast with Roy's account of traditional solidarity groups recomposed and thus preserved within the *kolkhoz* (Roy 2000). Roy states that - even if Sovietisation brought radical changes to agriculture - it actually preserved the traditional kinship structures and the family as the main unit of agricultural production by co-opting it into its agrarian system. The implementation of collective farms did not break up the existing solidarity groups but built on these. Traditional social structures were this way even strengthened during the Soviet era and even live on until today. While Kandiyoti claims that traditional social ties and cohesion within rural communities have already faded away, Roy argues that the preservation of some form of '*kolkhoz* society' is beneficial to the local communities in that it may alleviate the social burdens of change. For Roy the *kolkhoz* is, although conservative and traditional in both economic and social terms, the local sphere of participation and a form of lived community able to preserve rural society from the trends of decomposition in the face of reforms and privatisation. Roy and Kandiyoti thus take up very different positions related to the question of decollectivisation and communities in change.

In this discourse, Trevisani (2008) - based on his research findings from Khorezm, Uzbekistan - fully assumes neither Roy's nor Kandiyoti's position: even if according to his findings the process of decollectivisation of land really represents the most 'incisive change' in the relationships involved in agricultural production as well as in the relationship between state and society that has occurred since collectivisation, the '*relations observed [...] raise doubts on the assertion that postulates a local solidarity produced by traditional social institutions, which have survived the period of the kolkhoz, as the glue of community. It rather seems that various constraints imposed on local communities mistakenly have led external observers to the conclusion that the kolkhoz has become a place of social intimacy (and solidarity) of the communities.*' (Trevisani 2008:166). Leaning on Roy and Kandiyoti, Trevisani concludes that Kandiyoti is right about the fact that evidence supports the thesis that the *kolkhoz* is neither a recomposed tribe nor a solidarity group.

My work will provide more insights into the decollectivisation process and its repercussions on rural society and social order, also in the light of these different positions. In my case as observed in two former *kolkhozes* in Surkhondarya², the most southern region of Uzbekistan. The reader will see whether my evidence supports the one or the other argument. Thereby, the situation discovered in a locality situated in a cotton area of the province will be contrasted with the developments which occurred in a local community situated in a mountainous area.

² Today, Surkhondarya is one of Uzbekistan's major agricultural areas mainly producing cotton and wheat. The province covers an area of about 20.800 km² which is about 5 percent of the country's territory. The estimated population is about 1.875.000 representing about 8 percent of the country's total population (UNDP 2005), with the majority being of Uzbek ethnicity and Tajiks being the major minority group (Prokhorov 1976). With 80 percent of the population living in the rural areas, the local economy is strongly dependent on irrigated agriculture which is among cotton and wheat production based on sericulture, horticulture, grapes and livestock farming (UNDP 2005). The province is the country's largest supplier of thin-fibrous cotton. Extensively irrigated cotton plantations cover almost 50 percent of its territory. The main part of the rural population lives in settlements among the province's rivers and irrigation facilities. With an estimated 7.4 percent of the labour force unemployed (and a supposable even much higher degree of underemployment), the province had one of the highest unemployment rates in Uzbekistan in the year 2002 (World Bank 2003).

3 A comparative setting – subsistence vs. cotton environment

The comparison between a cotton environment and a mountainous region - where rain-fed grain production and livestock-breeding were the main pillars of collective enterprises' agricultural activities and which is today marked more by individual economic and subsistence strategies - was drawn due to several reasons: On the one hand, due to its geographic setting and the absence of a highly state-regulated cotton-production-system, the mountainous region was regarded as politically and economically peripheral. Hence, distinct shapes of state-societal relationships, distinct modes of livelihood maintenance and governance and thus even distinct local social orders were to be expected. On the other hand, a mountainous region has not yet been in the focus of any socio-political study conducted in Uzbekistan. While reports already exist on studies conducted by scholars in other intensively cultivated agricultural areas of this country, research in a mountainous setting represented 'uncharted scientific territory'.

In rural Surkhondarya, the respective institutions shaping the design of individual and collective strategies for maintaining social security are manifold, and the kind of households' livelihood strategies themselves are generally similar regardless of a mountainous or cotton environment. But there are definitely differences in governance patterns and the local organisation of social security due to distinct geographical and thus socio-economic backgrounds explicable particularly by such determination. The here presented distinct development paths are not explained simply by reason of unequal geographical factors, e.g. distinct livelihood strategies based on natural resources which are available to different amounts or respectively distinct local agricultural systems and according modes of organisation, but rather by reason of differing structural environments and resulting social and political structures educed by these. Foremost, cotton is the backbone of the *viloyat's* agriculture and rural employment and thus the crop that matters most to the district authorities and to the governmental budget, so that state control and interference is stronger here. Given this strong state grip on the cotton areas and a stronger pronunciation of state actors and institutions here, this presence of the state as such must result in different configurations of social order and a respective shape of governance patterns. Thus, geography is expected to matter insofar that distinct geographical and therewith economic settings are as well coherent with distinct institutional and structural environments, even if this does not express itself in a larger extent of direct state investment.

Though, as will be moreover demonstrated in this paper, to a differing degree the state influences local decision-making processes and this particularly in the realm of social security provision. Not least through the *mahalla*-administration, in the cotton area it still reserves itself room for influence on the intra-community allocation of resources and for this purpose harks back to communal mechanisms of welfare provision or resource redistribution.

4 The Uzbek *mahalla* – a new actor in the local governance arena

All districts of the country were administratively divided into *mahallas* with a size of about 150-1500 households, also in the rural areas as a setting where these as an originally urban neighbourhood structure did not previously exist. This measure meant to grant 'traditional' local governance bodies more decision-making power and self dependent action. The network of the *mahallas* is central to the government's vision of decentralisation of power and promoted as a vehicle for community mobilisation. It shall encourage participation by communities in governance processes addressing social issues and development on the local level (Bektemirov/Rahimov 2001). But officially implemented as a 'self-governing organisation', the *mahalla* today combines features of both local self-governance and state administration (Epstein/Winter 2004):

Although officially not considered as being part of the state's administrative apparatus, it is perceived as such by the population. Due to the wide range of administrative functions delegated to it, also Stevens (2005) states that the contemporary *mahalla* de facto translates into local government with very limited state funding: In principle, the employees of the *mahalla* have the duty to support their respective district-*hokimiyat* in the fulfilment of its tasks: besides sharing the *hokimiyat's* responsibility for the fulfilment of centrally stipulated cotton quotas, the *mahalla*-committees have been given the responsibility for administering the new means-tested system of social security. They have been given the responsibility for the channelling state provided social assistance payments and thus dispose of distributional sovereignty over these assets. But the overall means centrally provided for distribution do in no way account for actual local needs and are very restricted. This way, the *mahallas* currently run, at little expense to the government's budget, the major part of its social assistance programmes.

Moreover, the *mahalla* is provided with a budget for financing other social and community support programmes like e.g. measures for the purchase and maintenance of the local (public) infrastructure. These grants again do not take into account the respective actual local situation and demands (Coudouel et al. 2004). As the *mahallas* lack the resources necessary for the implementation of extensive measures in the social and infrastructural sector, budget restrictions demonstrate for many observers the government's attempt to take advantage of the voluntarism within the communities. Not only is the administration of the state's social security system and the realisation of public infrastructural projects delegated to the local communities and their administrations themselves, but also the mobilisation of the therefore necessary resources is in the end abandoned to them which are to be raised according to 'communal' institutions.

5 Mechanisms of social security provision

Forms of intra-communal assistance, mutual exchange relationships and (reciprocal or non-reciprocal) support within the (extended) family, kin-group or neighbourhood are regarded as playing a fundamental role in connection with the maintenance of individual livelihoods in the post-Soviet or post-collective context. Particularly in times of crisis, access to informal mutual support networks based kinship-ties or patronage constitute essential coping strategies. Such may comprise of material as well as financial resources provided to households in emergency situations by other members of the local community. Hereby, a prominent function has a traditional institution of non-reciprocal support or allocation of resources with a religious background: *sadaqa* means the financial or material support of needy families provided by individual private donors, similar to the Islamic *zakat* and in the pre-Soviet past re-distributed through the local mosque. Traditionally, there exist different forms of this institution: an 'open' as well as a 'closed' *sadaqa* respective of the manner of the re-distributional process. 'Openness' or 'closeness' hereby refers to the disclosure of the providing person's identity: In the course of a 'close' *sadaqa*, the recipient is not informed about the origin of the donation. Support is provided via middlemen (e.g. an *aqsakal*, the *rais*, the imam). Thereby, no feeling of shame towards a giver is evoked or any relation of dependency produced.

Similarly it is with the *hashar*, another traditional institution of resource provision. At times it is still individually organised among neighbours or relatives in case a family needs to build or renovate a house, even if already more and more wagedworkers and craftsmen are contracted for such purpose. But this institution is also of relevance in connection with the local provision of infrastructure. In this context, a *hashar* is originally about the non-compensated provision of workforce for the purpose of communal or individual projects like the construction or maintenance of infrastructural devices (e.g. of the irrigation-network, bridges, roads or today the renovation of public buildings such as hospitals and schools etc.).

Stevens (2005) notes, that the *mahalla*-administrations are often merely hardly able to mobilise resources in forms of financial means or labour within their respective community. This he explains by the weakness of their organisational capital. By organisational capital Stevens refers to the set of rules and norms that enable collective action in pursuit of public goods, the 'legal and informal institutional framework' within which the *mahalla*-committees may mobilise the community. But as already Kandiyoti argues, 'neither an understanding of pre-Soviet and Soviet institutions nor an analysis of changing legal frameworks can provide us with an adequate apprehension of the[se] evolving realities' (Kandiyoti 2002:251). As she rightly assesses, such approach would go into the direction of state-biased approaches adopted in many socio-political analyses of (post)socialist Central Asia or the 'dual economy model' (cf. Spoor:2001) which both tend to artificially separate the Soviet (and post-Soviet) political and economic reality into two separate realms of officialdom and of informality (along the dichotomies formal/informal, state/communal or traditional, legal/illegal realms).

The example of the *mahalla* shows that a strict functional differentiation between the state centric categories of state and non-state or formality and informality is often not feasible. And moreover e.g. on the basis of an analysis of *sadaqas* and *hashars* I will demonstrate that informal institutions may be highly formalised in the course of decentralisation or state-building in general. By engaging with the modes in which households relate to these supposedly distinct spheres in Uzbekistan, Rasanayagam (2002:68-69) already showed that such separation in reality is inadequate, as 'at the level of local interactions these distinctions break down' and 'local modes of interaction' prevail. As well Kandiyoti (2002) questions the adequacy of the usually adopted theoretical lenses in reading the social situation. She has argued that a political economy framework with a look at the problems and

survival strategies of the primary producers can provide an adequate approach to state-society dynamics and the relevant processes going on in Central Asia's states, whereby a theory capable of addressing change in a less state-centric perspective is needed.

The Amu Darya project's social order approach (Mielke et al. 2011) takes the necessity for avoiding formal-informal or state-society dichotomies in analysing governance in a context like the Uzbek one into account and is thus employed here. Thereby - apart from serving as an explanatory tool and an alternative lens for looking at political processes, social order itself is a matter of analysis.

6 The local governance of social security and social order

My research was focussed on the local governance of social security. Local governance represents the functional dimension of social order. It is an expression or reflection of social order within a more or less bounded socio-spatial framework or certain action arena. Looking at the processes of decision making and implementation - identifying the actors who are holding a stake in and the institutional settings and motivations shaping these - offers insights in the configuration of social order or adjustments of it driven by external factors like retrenchments in the state's social security scheme or – in the Uzbek context - the recent dismantling of the collective agricultural enterprises. While local governance is concerned with various policy matters, my research was focused on processes which are dealing with the organisation of social security or through which means for the provision of social security are individually or collectively mobilised and distributed.

Hereby I follow a malleable conceptualisation of social security, due to the fact that an analysis of social security in Uzbekistan can not only be oriented towards the former Soviet or western (OECD) schemes. A model of social security to be applied in the context of such country must go beyond such conception and should encompass - beyond state institutions and the market - a consideration of structures like family and social networks, reciprocal exchange relationships or generally the 'variety of social, cultural and economic strategies which secure a living' (Dombois 1998 and Mertens 1998) or an interplay of both. Communal arrangements of social protection based on traditional forms of family and mutual help within communities are characteristic for Central Asian transition economies.

However, it is not only the mechanisms but also the means and resources offering social security to the population which are different from the ones in western countries: land (for subsistence production; pastures and acreage) and water (for irrigation and household consumption) resources may both e.g. provide for a certain degree of food security. So how is the distribution of or the access to these regulated in rural Surkhondarya? How are conflicts over such settled in case these are scarce?

Social security is an important and adequate field to study for the purpose of analysing social order as it takes many fields of action into consideration which are central to the everyday life of individuals, households, local communities or the society in general and which are central for a certain configuration of the latter's social structures:

The 'guarantee of material means' is regarded as one of the fundamental conditions for the ability of any society to reproduce itself and its inherent social order (Elias 1983, Hahn 2006). It refers to the ability to provide for the society's survival - to ensure in general a supply of food and other basic material means for all members of the group. The particular ways in which it is organised lead to different forms of societal structures and thus social order (Jung 2001). Thus in the course of an analysis of social order, the research of the governance of social security may offer insights in its nature and enables an outsider to understand power constellations, perceptions of legitimacy and forms of authority in a society different to his own.

Moreover, social security is a vital precondition for the stability (Köhler/Zürcher 2004) of social order. The existence of mechanisms that guarantee protection for the individual members of the society in case they are in need contributes to its stability. But even if social order - as the interplay of worldview and institutions and thus a kind of 'social contract' - is relatively stable, it may be subject to change. In Uzbekistan, recent years brought up many changes in economic and political frameworks which the rural population has been confronted with. These changes must have had repercussions on the social organisation, the social structures and thus even the social order of rural communities in Surkhondarya.

7 The case of Pakhtaobod: strong state grip on the cotton areas – a community in equilibrium

With its spacious areas under crops, Pakhtaobod is strongly integrated into the state's cotton economy. During Soviet times, three *kolkhozes* producing primarily cotton and grain formed the village.³ In 2004 the *shirkats* (Uzbek term, used to describe former state and collective farms that after independence continued to operate as large-scale state and co-operative agrarian enterprises) were privatized and transferred into individually-managed private farmer enterprises. Still, the *farmers* have to fulfil production quotas for grain and cotton specified by state organs, and they are ordered to deliver their products at state determined prices to the state. In return, however, they are supplied with fertilizers, pesticides and agricultural equipment. The *farmers* are still highly dependent on the state controlled distribution centres for agricultural inputs and on the district's MTP (MotorTraktorPark) on whose tractors and harvesters they still rely in case they have not yet been able to acquire their own machinery. Thus, on the basis of its cotton economy, Pakhtaobod is strongly bound to the Uzbek state.

7.1 The organisation of the agricultural system in Pakhtaobod

The cotton production of the local *farmer* enterprises is today similarly organized as before at the time of the *kolkhoz*: the *farmers* - today's tenants of the acreage (about 40-50 Hectares per *farmer*) - took the responsibility for the fulfilment of production quotas. Most of them are former employees of the collective agricultural enterprise: former members of the *kolkhoz*-management and former heads of the several local working units ('*brigads*') which already, before privatisation, had been in charge of farming the respective *kolkhoz* areas under cultivation. The acreages were in the course of a '*tender*'-procedure (an non-transparent competition at the district's *hokimiyat*) transferred to those claimants who – apart from proving the most experience in agriculture – assured to furthermore employ a large number of former *kolkhoz*-employees. The privatisation process was implemented under strict control on part of the state organisations. According to state regulations and central orders the maintenance of production efficiency was to be ensured by transferring the future responsibility to those actors who had de facto already borne it before. This points out the government's interest in the continuity of the organisational patterns in the agricultural sector:

The *farmers* compile work schedules for the persons employed by them and give instructions regarding the implementation of these plans. Headmen ('*brigadirs*') of the working units represent a form of mediators between the *farmers* and their respective (still called) '*kolkhozniki*' (agricultural workers) subordinated to them. They are responsible for the implementation of the *farmers*' instructions and supervise the work of the '*kolkhozniki*' in their '*brigad*' locally.

The new private farmers in Pakhtaobod usually employ about 15-25 workers. This way, most of the workers who worked in the *kolkhoz* in the past could maintain their employment. The motivation on the side of the *kolkhozniki* for continuing to work on the now private agricultural enterprises does usually not result from the only marginal and moreover irregularly paid compensations the workers

³ Pakhtaobod is today administratively divided into 6 *mahallas*. Most time during the research was spent in the Tshorju *mahalla*. Thus, if in the following paragraphs the term 'Pakhtaobod' is used, it is generally about the Tshorju *mahalla*. In this *mahalla* a total of 633 families are living. The official number of inhabitants is assessed with 2425. But as the number of people temporarily working abroad (in Kazakhstan and Russia) is not registered officially, this number can not be regarded as being precise.

receive for their labour on the *farmers'* fields. These are relatively low and sometimes even only paid in kind.

But, the employees of the *farmers* are allowed to acquire small acreages of 0,1 up to 1 Hectare on the basis of short-termed tenancies (*ijara*-contracts for the purpose of limited production under their own responsibility as peasants (*dehqons*) in the time after the cotton and grain harvests. Products like maize or peanuts are cultivated for selling the crops on regional bazaars and generating a cash income. This leasehold-system is strictly state-controlled. Contracts are to be negotiated between the tenants, the *farmers* and the *hokimiyat* under the mediation of the *mahalla*-administration. Official contracts regarding such arrangements are to be stipulated. In case certain acreages should lie fallow after the harvest, unofficial arrangements (facilitated through negotiations and bribes) with representatives of the *hokimiyat* are to be made for attaining the permit for unscheduled production.

Such *ijara*-arrangements may offer significant revenues. Thus, the agricultural system is in several ways still of high significance for rural families' survival.⁴ Being furthermore employed by one of the local agricultural producer opens additional strategies for earning a livelihood. Moreover, the production processes remain to a high degree embedded in the local village community:

As until today the work in the cotton fields is relatively labour-intensive and this especially during the harvest, a large part of the local population is engaged in the agricultural production processes. While the scope for income activities in the non-agricultural sector is scarce⁵, many people are able to find at least a short-term income here as seasonal workers - mostly women and school children. Their yearly earnings from cotton picking in many cases represent by far the largest cash revenues of rural households.

Parallel to at least temporary occupation in the cotton and grain fields, most families are engaged in subsistence production (*tamorqa*) on some *sotikh* of land (usually about 0.07-0.15 Hectare). This may contribute to a basic level of social security, but - due to scarce land and water resources - production on private *tamorqa*-plots does not suffice for meeting individual households' needs, just as private animal husbandry does. As, due to the intensive cotton and grain cultivation, pastures are sparsely available, only limited animal husbandry is feasible in Pakhtaobod. Families at best own a few sheep or a cow. These are handed over to (private or state) shepherds who operate on state owned lands. Rights of use of pastures are to be acquired from the *hokimiyat* and also strictly controlled.

Apart from offering regular or temporary employment, in terms of social security the local cotton economy is of further relevance: after the harvest the dry cotton plants are used as heating materials for the wintertime. The *farmers* do not only sell these, but they also deliver them free of charge to their '*kolkhozniki*' and to households which during the year provided them with labour force. More than the dependence of the population towards the agricultural producers, this represents a relationship of mutual support.

⁴ Besides the chance of engaging in *ijara* -arrangements, another very important reason for a *kolkhoznik's* labour commitment is the fact that for future entitlements to pension payments records in ones personal employees' record book ('*trudovaya kniga*') are to be proven. Pensions of family members are generally important due to these often represent households' only regular cash income source.

⁵ Only in the time of the cotton harvest, a cotton processing plant in the nearby city of Jarqurgon offers temporary employment especially to young women. Furthermore, the 'medpunkt' (local hospital), the local school, a 'minibank' and the *mahalla*-administration (four employees) offer formal employment and thus a regularly income in the village. Some few people are employed in the transport sector and in petty and retail trade.

Thus, with privatisation no real disjunction between the agricultural and the social sector appeared: The life of the majority of the population in Pakhtaobod is - despite the dissolution of the *kolkhoz* - in various ways linked with the local production of grain and especially cotton. The local agricultural production still offers a high measure of social security to the people in various ways, either as an employee in a '*brigad*', as an independent producer (*fermer, dekhqon*) or as a household benefiting from short-term employment or the supply with heating materials for winter time. A large part of the population still benefits from an agricultural production system and its transfers which still strongly features collective-like characteristics.

The *mahalla*-administration serves the state apparatus thereby as an instrument for exerting control and implementing the state's interests in managing the organisation of agricultural production processes. As we will see in the following, it additionally ensures that the new agricultural producers remain grounded in the population. The cooperation between the *farmers* and the local administration is strongly pronounced, in agricultural as well in social matters:

7.2 Functions of the *mahalla* in the organisation of the agricultural system

The *mahalla*-administration is of high significance in Pakhtaobod since it - together with the agricultural producers - was assigned the responsibility and accountability towards the regional state bodies for the fulfilment of the centrally determined production plans. During the harvest, the *mahalla* is under high pressure on part of the *hokimiyat*. It has to do the utmost to make the *farmers* of the village fulfil their respective harvest quotas:

In the course of *hashars* the population is regularly mobilised for the support of the *farmers* - either for short term harvesting or for the cleaning of irrigation canals. In this regard the local administration looms large since it is the *mahalla's* task to mobilise the therefore needed labour force among the population. The therefore necessary potential is generally provided by the high authority which the local administration in Pakhtaobod enjoys. Together with the *farmers*, the *mahalla* is regarded by the population as the successor of the *kolkhoz*-management which assumed not only the organisation of agricultural production, but also to a certain degree the social responsibilities of the former collective enterprise. In return for an active and reliable performance in the allocation and distribution of not only state, but also communal means for social security provision, the *mahalla* receives legitimacy for its action and support by the population:

The incidence of local conflicts regarding the consent and distribution of social assistance payments is not voiced in Pakhtaobod. The population is highly content with the performance of the *rais* of the *mahalla*, a former *brigadir* who had been recommended for this office to the *hokimiyat* by the *farmers*. Due to his background in the agricultural sector - his brigad had been one of the most successful in the region - and due to the high respect 'as an honest man'⁶ he enjoyed among the population, the district administration agreed and appointed the proposed candidate.

Today, the *rais* is an important actor in the regulation of local affairs and even in the mediation of local conflicts. Enjoying a high status as a bearer of a 'state office' and being backed by the village-elite, he disposes of the authority for enforcing directives for the settlement of various kinds of disputes which are then usually obeyed. Neighbourly quarrels and even conflicts over water quotas

⁶ S.J. (local brigadir), 22.06.2007

for irrigation means are conciliated under his directives.⁷ Moreover, the *rais* is commonly perceived to be capable to mobilise and re-distribute state and other resources within the community in an equitable and effective manner. His predecessor had been blamed for misconduct and the misappropriation of communal means, and was - after complaints by the village inhabitants and several *farmers* who had supported their issues- dismissed by the *hokimiyat*.

7.3 The *oqsokols* and their function as *mahalla*-assistants in the governance of local affairs

The *rais* of the *mahalla* is supported by the unofficial heads of the village's respective neighbourhoods (*kishloq-oqsokols*). These are generally persons who enjoy high respect and have a very high status among the local population. Usually they are *farmers*, teachers, former employees of state organisations or generally people with a background or a leading position in the former *kolkhoz*. They take a high value in supporting the *rais* of the *mahalla* in his performance and thus in enabling a functioning of the local administration itself as they take in a plurality of functions:

The *rais* of the *mahalla* harks back to these influential authorities within the *kishloqs* in case decisions are difficult to implement or conflicts between individual inhabitants of the village are difficult to settle. Thereby, in the case of a serious problem with or between single inhabitants of the *mahalla*, the *rais* of the *mahalla* pays a visit to the respective litigant persons accompanied by one or several *kishloq-oqsokols* to solve the problem, to speak out a directive or at least to appease the people. Generally it shall be averted that letters of complaint are sent to the *hokimiyat* or people call the *militsiya* or the *procuratura* (public prosecution service) or intend to go to court. An internal regulation is generally sought and often even achieved due to the intervention or involvement of the *oqsokols*.

Once a month and thus on a regular basis the employees of the *mahalla*-administration and the *kishloq-oqsokols* (as representatives of their respective neighbourhood communities) meet in the local citizens' council ('*mahalla-kengash*') under the chairmanship of the *mahalla-rais*. Representatives of the district-*hokimiyat* are also attendant on such meetings at times, especially during the time of the cultivating season when the local activities on the fields and later the harvest activities are to be planned. As the *kishloq-oqsokols* are often *farmers* who are allegedly also representing the interests of the other *farmers* of their respective neighbourhood, the issues dealt with in this council are their respective performance and how the *mahalla* may support their activities e.g. in the course of a mobilisation of workforce for harvesting or the maintenance of irrigation infrastructure. But also if issues connected to the local agricultural performance take a relatively high value in such meetings, another subject of discussions and negotiations in this council is the situation within the village in general: upcoming events like local *toys* (private life-cycle and public festivities at which the farmers are supposed to act as financiers) and the scheduling of these, state ordered *hashars* for e.g. the cleaning of neighbourhoods or the renovation of public buildings, the preparation of national elections, etc. The *farmers* are the persons disposing of relatively high prestige and authority due to their economic status, their potential for influence towards state organs and even due to their pronounced engagement in local social affairs. Thus, they are the actors

⁷ Water is a scarce resource in Pakhtaobod. Especially during the cotton season water shortages appear. As the irrigation of the cotton fields officially takes priority over the irrigation of private plots, regularly allocation conflicts emerge not only between the *farmers*, but between all actors involved in agricultural production (*farmers*, peasants and households). Even in cases where the 'irrigators' (state employees) of the local WUA (Water Users' Association) are not able to find a solution or to enforce a directive, the *rais* of the *mahalla* is able to lay down binding decisions.

with whom the *rais* of the *mahalla* discusses the livelihood-situation of single households in their respective neighbourhood. Together decisions are made regarding which households are to be provided with social assistance and how the resources for such are to be raised.

Many households in Pakhtaobod are reliant on state assistance. Interestingly, the promise of state benefits in Pakhtaobod generally regarded as being bound to return services towards the village community and particularly towards the agricultural producers. Households receiving financial or material support are obliged to fulfil tasks delegated to them by the *mahalla*-administration. Such services may include the regular clean-up of their neighbourhood, the clean-up of the village's irrigation channels and particularly the provision of workforce in the case single *farmers* are in need of support on their acreages. Thus, since the receipt of social benefits is bound to a contribution of labour-force by the respective receiving household, the distribution of social assistance serves the local administration as a mechanism for mobilising the population for assisting local agricultural production processes.

But state provided means are short and do not suffice for the benefit of all households in need. Thus, additional mechanisms are employed by which means for redistribution within the local community are mobilised:

7.4 The local mobilisation and distribution of state and communal resources

Reciprocal exchange e.g. of products and support among relatives, neighbours and friends are of extraordinary importance in connection with securing one's livelihood. But moreover, in emergency situations households can rely on material and financial support provided by the local community. A prominent role thereby is played by the *sadaqa*:

This institution is employed in a 'closed' manner in Pakhtaobod. This means that the giver of the donation is not known to the respective receiver. It is the *mahalla*'s task to allocate such additional provisions. The *rais* and his assistants approach potential donors and ask for the means necessary for the support of single families within their neighbourhood. The decision which individual family should benefit from such donation, the giver always conjointly agrees with the *mahalla*-rais and the respective *kishloq*-*oqsokols*.

The same holds true for the organisation of *hashars*. Today it is the task of the *rais* of the *mahalla* to mobilise labour and money among the members of those households affected by the malfunctioning of irrigation canals, water pipes, electricity devices, etc. and for covering the costs for construction materials, machines and technicians. For the realisation of larger infrastructural projects, the local *farmers* and entrepreneurs are directly requested by the *hokimiyat* for the provision of workers and even of money. Thus, the institution of *hashar* is today no longer limited to the provision of workforce. It may moreover comprise of the provision of financial resources for the realisation of public infrastructural projects. Often, the local *farmers* are directly compelled to such forms of 'voluntary' services to the community by the *hokimiyat* according to lists compiled by the *rais* of the *mahalla*. For projects such as the construction or renewal of a local school or hospital for which the local government lacks budget, the *farmers* are – in addition to the provision of financial resources - obliged to place their working *brigads* at the construction companies' disposal. The respective amounts of labour force and financial means to be provided generally comply with the amount of acreage transferred to them in the course of privatisation and the economic potential of private actors.

Such grants which single members of the community provide are in Pakhtaobod not publicly

announced. But the *mahalla*-administration which is mobilising the labour and financial means and managing the projects keeps precisely account of such intra-communal financial and material donations and forwards these to the regional state-administration. Thus, through *hashar* as well as through *sadaqa* provisions, well-off members of the community have as 'sponsors' the opportunity or need to legitimise their relative wealth and status less towards the local population but rather towards the *mahalla* and the district-*hokimiyat*.

In the same fashion, the *farmers* are asked to offer food to the community on public holidays and at celebrations. Farmers obey, as they know that opposing the *hokimiyat*'s interests would mean trouble for their business. Such kinds of services show how the *farmers* are identified as wealth-producing and capable actors that should reciprocate the community with some service. But moreover, in Pakhtaobod where community is constituted more by cooperation and collective production than on kin-affiliation and ethnic belonging, these collectively (within the production unit or the neighbourhood) celebrated festivities like the annual *darvishxonas* are of high importance in strengthening a collective identity based on common residence and colleagueship.⁸ While in Soviet times the *kolkhoz* provided the therefore necessary means and organised such official festivities, these are organised by the *mahalla*-administration today. These collective festivities have the function of presenting the respective financers as benefactors of the community. This even counts for the festivities organised for the main state commanded holidays like Independence Day or the celebration of the successful accomplishment of the *viloyat*'s cotton quotas.

Thus, such as in the times of the *kolkhoz* when the management of the agricultural enterprise cared for the social security of the inhabitants of the village and its infrastructure, in Pakhtaobod today the local administration and the *farmers* are obliged to meet their obligations towards the population and they are even pushed to that effect by the state. With the privatisation process, the responsibility of the *kolkhoz* was downright devolved to the *farmers*. On the one hand they offer a large number of persons a formal occupation who would otherwise be without work and any prospects of later pension payments, on the other hand they took over the responsibility for the fulfilment of the national production quotas. It is common view that the *farmers* - as the people to whom the lands of the former *kolkhoz* were transferred to - also adopted some kind of social responsibility towards the local population. As we have seen above, this responsibility they fulfil e.g. through the provision of *sadaqa*- and *hashar*-resources or the financing of collective festivities. As they comply with this inherited charge, they are in return supported by the population.

The welfare of the entire rural community and its individual members is still strongly bound to the welfare of the agricultural producers or the prosperity of the local agricultural production system. The population in terms of social security still benefits from a collective-like and locally embedded agricultural production system and its transfers. Contrary, the local farmers are highly dependent on the support and the labour force of their workers and the local population. This bolstered the stability of social order shaped by a world-view based on a 'collective' or '*kolkhoz* identity' which is not only strengthened by joint festivities but even by the *mahalla*.

Showing even characteristics of collective self-administration, the *mahalla* as a strong local actor could receive the local population's legitimisation to influence local decision-making processes since it even complies with its responsibilities towards the community by providing (mobilising and redistributing) state and intra-communally provided social security. As an organ of control and strongly involved into local agricultural production processes, locally embedded it also disposes of authority and legitimacy for regulating local affairs.

⁸ *Darvishxonas* are arranged in spring in every *kishloq* of the village in the beginning of the new cropping season.

Given all that, rural community change in Pakhtaobod can not be understood as a story of disintegration. The dismantling of the collective farms did not necessarily contribute to the dismantling of the 'solidarity groups', also if these are not 'traditional' or based on kinship or tribal affiliation identified by Roy (2000). Today the affiliation to distinct kin-groups - like traditional, pre-Soviet identity patterns in general - can not be considered as being of any importance in the beliefs of the people of Pakhtaobod and they are particularly not of any relevance in local decision-making processes. Rather, local identities are based on common locality (neighbourhood/ *kishloq*, *mahalla*), common background (school, education, friendship) and especially a shared past within the same agricultural enterprise, the *kolkhoz* or the '*brigad*' as the respective working unit (collegiality). Especially among the *farmers* and their respective brigad workers solidarity and reciprocal support are strongly pronounced. The whole village community is not backed up by any commonly shared identity. Only belonging to the same *mahalla* and the same *farmer xojaligi* represents a coalescing moment in territorial terms. Soviet institutions are still important for the present social order as a frame of reference which is moreover exhibited in daily life terminology, while traditional or pre-Soviet institutions and identity patterns are not of relevance.

8 The case of Darband: political self-regulation in the mountainous areas of Surkhondarya – a case of community change

The situation in the Tajik village of Darband turned out to be a different one. Here, in Soviet times three *kolkhozes* existed.⁹ Besides limited production of grain (rain-fed cultivation on not irrigable acreages in the mountains), cattle-breeding was operated (sheep farming for meat production and horse breeding for the production of *kumis*, a fermented dairy product). In 2005 the three local *shirkats* were dissolved and all employees of the former collective farms lost their job. The acreages were abandoned to private farmers (about 100 Hectares per *fermer*). But as the rain-fed grain cultivation in the mountainous areas is by far less labour-intensive than cotton production, only a small part of the population is currently employed here. In the case that a workforce is required, the *farmers* today almost exclusively employ close relatives. Thus, the local agriculture is of merely marginal relevance for the population's daily life. Today, only the local hospital, two schools, a 'Minibank', the *mahalla*-administration and a nearby recreation home for children (former pioneers' camp) offer regular employment in the village. Some few people found employment in the transport sector and in petty and retail trade. Furthermore, short-term wage labour plays an important role in Darband.

8.1 The organisation of agriculture in Darband

Though an 'official' *tender*-procedure in Darband, those persons could seize the lands of the former *kolkhoz* here who disposed of good contacts to the representatives of the district's *hokimiyat* or the necessary financial means for influencing the process of privatisation. This process was less determined by state regulations than by connections, status and corruption, and thus many of today's *farmers* did not have any stake in the agricultural production within the *kolkhoz* before.

Moreover, the *farmers* are not confronted with strict production quotas ordered by state authorities, as seasonal fluctuations do not allow a prior planning of any production-volume, rather these are individually negotiable with the *hokimiyat* on the basis of unofficial agreements. State organisations are, in general only to a minimal degree, involved in the local agricultural production process. The *farmers* are more or less independent of state organisations like the regional MTP (Motor Tractor Park) or distribution centres for agricultural inputs. Fertilizers and pesticides are not employed on the grain fields perched high on the mountainsides. The agricultural machinery of the former collective had been sold in the course of its dismantlement or abandoned to their respective drivers. These now may offer their services to the *farmers* as private entrepreneurs.

Thus, in contrast to strong state control and intervention in the cotton area, agriculture in Darband is rather left to its own resources. The mountainous area is hardly integrated into the national economic system. Here, agriculture exhibits the emergence of a liberal economic system in which

⁹ Darband is today administratively divided into three *mahallas*, established after independence according to the territories of the three *kolkhozes* that once existed. Most time of the research stay was spent in the Derbentskiy *mahalla*. Thus, if in the following paragraphs the term 'Darband' is used, it is generally about the Derbentskiy *mahalla*. In this *mahalla* a total of 708 families are living. The official number of inhabitants is assessed with 3078. But like in Pakhtaobod, the number of people temporarily working abroad is not registered officially. Therefore, this number can not be regarded as being precise.

households and private farmer enterprises - exempt from strong control and intervention by central state organisations - organise their business or livelihood in a kind of self-regulation. The *farmers* established as private entrepreneurs running family enterprises. As such they are as well perceived by the population. The grain production is thus of merely low relevance for the population's daily life.¹⁰ Private livestock-breeding, subsistence production and work migration offer potential for maintaining individual households' livelihoods. A high extent of individualism and division of labour dominates.

State control and its presence on the local level are weak. Due to a lack of capacities, the state generally withdraws from the regulation of agricultural production as well as from controlling and shaping local policies in a community which is economically of peripheral interest. This is apparent in the relative autonomy in which the *farmers* in Darband operate, in the lax land-regime (no strict production quotas; unregulated pasture-usage and sharecropping-agreements) and non-interference in local affairs.

The state organs also do not hold any stake in the system of land leasing. Inofficial agreements between the *farmers* and tenants to whom acreages of a usual size of 10 hectares are left, constitute the basis for the tenancy. These are almost exclusively the *farmers'* close relatives who may this way act as sharecroppers.¹¹ The *hokimiyat* is not involved in such arrangements. The tenants contribute their share for the joint *farmers* production plans and keep their respective surplus for meeting their own family's consumption of flour and selling surpluses in the village. Due to the fact that grain is processed locally, several privately run mills could start operations in the village.

Moreover, the state has withdrawn from the processes of livestock breeding and abandoned its authority over grazing lands. Large pastures are available in the mountainous surroundings of the village. Private shepherds watch the flocks. Rights for this land use are directly acquired from the *farmers* of the village. The *hokimiyat* handed the grazing lands over to the *farmers* together with their acreages and thus abandoned its control over the local livestock production. Such self-contained action in the organisation of share-cropping arrangements and the lax regulation of land use reflect a low interest on the sides of the state in a direct involvement in the agricultural production processes state in the mountainous area. Consequently, the state does not need to hark back to the local administration in order to carry out any management or control function in the local agricultural sector.

8.2 The *mahalla* and the governance of local affairs

The *mahalla* is not in any way involved in the local agricultural production processes. In their operation, the *farmers* who are themselves directly in contact with representatives of the *hokimiyat* are not dependent on any mediational function on part of the local administration and have the exclusive responsibility of the fulfilment of their (individually negotiated) production quotas. Moreover, cultivating grain they are not in need of any support on sides of the local population. There is no mobilising function of the *mahalla* necessary.

But also in the regulation of local affairs unconnected to agricultural matters, only a marginal role is attributed to the *mahalla*-administration. It has no relevance in the mediation of conflicts within the community and the intra-communal mobilisation and distribution of resources for social assistance.

¹⁰ Comparable with the importance of dry cotton plants as heating materials in Pakhtaobod, straw is of importance in Darband as it is needed by the population as fodder for animal husbandry after the harvest. It is solely sold to the population. Only relatives of the *farmers* may procure straw free of charge.

¹¹ The cultivation of products aside from grain is not possible on the rain-fed areas.

Individual actors (*kishloq/* neighbourhood-*oqsokols*, the *leaders of the local kin-groups*, the *avlods* and *shokhs*) are - due to networks established already in Soviet times - able to directly address the *hokimiyat* in the district-centre Boysun with their own interests or the interests of their clientele (neighbours, friends, *avlod*- and *shokh*-members) and in this way bypass the *mahalla* in mediating between the population and state organisations. The *mahalla* locally disposes of relatively low authority, and in the eyes of the population it does not own any legitimacy to really intervene in local matters:

In Darband, it causes infuriation among the population that the decision-making processes regarding the sample of households to be provided with state assistance are not transparent. It is criticised that decisions concerning this matter are made only by the *rais* who was appointed to his office by the *hokimiyat* solely by means of bribery and support by influential inhabitants of the village and who is said to only benefit his own relatives and those persons bribing him:

Already the former *rais*, a former member of the *kolkhoz*- and later in the *shirkat*-management, had caused local discontent. At Soviet times enjoying respect among the population, in his position as a *rais* he started enriching himself financially by means of his office. This misconduct caused criticism among the inhabitants. Several village authorities from all local *avlods* - even from his own - urged him to resign his position as they would otherwise inform the *hokimiyat* and initiate an official investigation by the *procuratura* (public prosecutor's office). The *rais* resigned due to he knew that he not any more disposed of public and the *oqsokols'* acknowledgement.

For the following 'election', a young man applied for the office who was a *shokh*-member of the former *rais* which had been deposed due to a local initiative. Though, a regular election among the village's inhabitants (as it is destined by law) was not arranged. The relatives of the young candidate (*shokh*-affiliates) supported his intention to become the new *rais* due to his family was relatively poor and in need of a member gaining a regular income as a state employee. As his uncle (the former *rais*) did not enjoy respect within the village anymore, the relatives of the young candidate approached the leaders of the other *avlods* and *shokhs* and asked these not to intervene against the appointment of their relative through the *hokimiyat* which had been bribed before for deciding in favour of their demands.

Thus, more than an organisation of communal self-governance, the *mahalla* in Darband represents a kind of family business and a *mahalla*-office a resource by which its holder may access financial means provided by the state to channel these towards family members and relatives. Regular meetings of a village-*kengash* (council) are not arranged. Such are only summoned by the *rais* for short term in case important local matters are to be decided upon. Subject matter is generally not the performance of the local farmers. These are as well not the only people representing the population in the council. In most cases the *rais* convokes only persons sharing a close kin-relationship or having economic ties with him. This way, the *kengash* in Darband is not a representative body of the population. The *kengash* is to be considered here rather as an instrument which may provide an official legitimisation for individually made decisions towards the *hokimiyat*.

Due to such poor and illegitimate performance, the standing of the *mahalla* has suffered very much in the eyes of the population. Like state organisations in general it does not enjoy public confidence. As it disposes of low authority, for a local participative or locally legitimised policy making it is accorded a marginal role. In fact, the leaders of the single kin-groups and other reputable and influential persons (members of the former *kolkhoz*-management, *farmers* and entrepreneurs as neighbourhood-*oqsokols*) are more important authorities in the regulation of local affairs. These may locally exert a certain degree of control over the *mahalla*-administration's performance and even substitute the *mahallas* functions:

8.3 Approved self-regulation in the periphery of the central state – the role of ‘traditional’ authorities

Even if it is seemingly - due to the common reference to the term *oqsokol* – about ‘traditional’ village authorities, this description does not really apply. Though actually performing traditional functions of the *oqsokols*, the characteristics of these societal actors have changed:

All inhabitants of Darband are related to one of three *avlods*. The population is divided into the *Bujagi*, the *Mo`a Maligi* and the *Shoda Khojagi* which are respectively again subdivided into a number of sub-clans/ branches (Taj.: *shokh*). Every person in the village exactly knows about the *avlod*-affiliation (which is inherited from the father) and often even the *shokh*-affiliation of the respective other inhabitants.

Although one’s own *avlod*-affiliation is often emphasised and prejudices or disregard vis-à-vis the other *avlods* is frankly manifested, it does not seem to be of real relevance in peoples’ interaction: ‘Darband is a tree with three trunks and various branches, but their roots do all have something in common.’¹² While in the past only marriage relationships within each *avlod* had been taken, meanwhile anybody is related to each other and *avlod*-affiliation seemingly has really lost its relevance with the multiplicity of marriage relationships that have been incurred with each other except for jokes and humorous teasing. Such local identities which definitely still play an important role in Darband do not manifest in the shape of institutions. They serve rather as a frame of reference for orientation than for action. Much more significant are in contrast on the one hand the identity as a Darbandian itself, on the other hand the one of the *shokh*-affiliation:

The Darbandian identity itself is a strong one due to the fact that these people are unexceptionally Tajik speakers within an Uzbek environment. Networks and marriage relationships are strongly geared to the Darbandian community (almost all young people in Darband are being married among kinsmen/-women, whereby these may hail from other regions of Surkhondarya). No Uzbek males or other ‘nonnatives’ live in the village, as no Darbandian would sell any land to these.¹³

The *shokh*-affiliation is of relevance more in the local context. As *shokh* the closer kinsfolk is perceived. It represents the most important unit for reciprocal support e.g. in food products, labour, financial resources and clientelistic support towards state bodies which are usually provided only to close relatives (to the respective *shokh-amaki* (affiliates), not in general among members of the respective *avlod*), neighbours and friends. Though, in local political decision making and alliance-building the *shokh*-affiliation is not a mandatory factor. As observed occurrences show, conflicts between members of two different *shokhs* do not imply that other *shokh*-affiliates automatically take sides.

Every *avlod* and *shokh* has an *oqsokol* as leader and representative of the kin-group. But for the election or stipulation of an *oqsokol* not the age of the respective candidate is decisive. It is more the economic power and the kind of network-capacities and thus influence towards representatives of state organisations the respective person disposes of. The *avlod*- and *shokh-oqsokols* are of significant relevance in decision-making within the village such as the conciliation of intra-communal

¹² N.K. (local sharecropper and poet), 04.05.2007

¹³ Towards Uzbeks, generally disaffection and disdain, especially towards representatives of the state authority (police, staffs of the state’s bureaucracy/ administration, politicians etc), predominate. After independence, corruption as a ‘behavioural pattern especially among Uzbeks’¹, is common practice anywhere. Not any state service is available without informal payments. Moreover, Tajiks formerly holding higher positions in the state apparatus had been replaced by members of the Uzbek majority, whereby the people in Darband saw their representation in and direct influence over decision-making processes on the district- and *viloyat*-level diminishing.

conflicts, the organisation of *hashars* and *sadaqas* as well as especially mediators in the interaction of village inhabitants with the *hokimiyat* and other state organisations.

Just as in Pakhtaobod, the members of the former *kolkhoz*-management, who due to their key positions in the past (as managers, book-keepers, expeditors or cashiers) could appropriate significant material resources, constitute even today the village elite. Most notably, these actors - due to networks established or entered in the past - still maintain strong connections to state representatives which may be opened to their respective clientele. But even if these actors generally dispose of a strong and powerful position within the village, this does not mean that the ordinary population finds itself in a rigid relationship of dependence towards them. The plurality of such actors potentially to be approached, social control within the respective kin-groups or neighbourhoods and not least the local variety of alternatives to autonomously procure an income avert the evolution of dependence relationships of individual households towards single actors.

Due to subsistence production, livestock and work migration, the population is in economic terms relatively independent from state provided social assistance payments distributed by the *mahalla*. Most families have at least one or several of its members seasonally or constantly holding down a job in Russia. Moreover, most families in Darband are engaged in subsistence on private enclosures (here of a usual size from 10 to 20 *sotikh*/ 0.1-0.2 Hectare) which have permanent and plentiful irrigation.¹⁴ Furthermore, almost all families are in possession of (usually at least 20) sheep and goats and cows which may cover the personal consumption in meat and milk products and may serve as financial security. In case individual profits gained in subsistence production and livestock breeding are not sufficient, local means for the distribution of social assistance and the provision of public goods are existent.

8.4 Communal mechanisms for the provision of public goods

In Darband it is not the *mahalla* through which the allocation and redistribution of labour and financial or material resources within the community are mobilised and managed. In contrast to Pakhtaobod, *hashars* and *sadaqas* as 'traditional' institutions of reciprocal support are employed here in an 'open' manner.

In the course of an 'open *sadaqa*', the receiver of a privately provided donation is always informed about the identity of the respective giver. Such provisions are organised by *shokh*-, *avlod*- or *kishloq-oqsokols*. These approach the well-off inhabitants in the village and ask for financial or material support in case they get to know of difficult living conditions of individual households within their kin-group or neighbourhood. Even well-off people take their own initiative. Interestingly, in Darband, however, no relationships of dependence are created due to the fact that no demands or reciprocations are bound to the assistance. The people simply refer to the close kinship relations among the inhabitants of the village and a Muslim's duty to help a neighbour in need.

Additionally, the functional organisation of the *hashar* in Darband is very different from the one in Pakhtaobod.¹⁵ *Hashars* for the realisation of communal projects are like local *sadaqa* organised in an

¹⁴ These plots have already been in the possession of the respective families for generations. These properties are usually not sold but handed down within the family, and they were after the dissolution of the *kolkhoz* not subject to any state regulated reallocation.

¹⁵ Private *hashars* e.g. in case a family needs support in the repairing or the construction of a house are today relatively seldom organised. With such works, in more and more cases craftsmen and wage workers are charged. Especially well-off members of the community are supposed to pay their workers and not to claim on nonpaid and time-consuming workmanship provided by other inhabitants.

‘open’ manner: The amounts of money or material contributions and labour which are provided by single individuals for the purpose of a communal project are publicly announced, often in the course of a public festivity which is arranged after its successful conclusion. Mobilised are the necessary resources by the people within their respective neighbourhood themselves or again with the help of people disposing of authority and reputation acting then as the persons responsible for and managing the project. Thus, more a legitimisation of the respective giver’s own status and a reproduction of prestige towards the community take place. In case already existent infrastructural devices like bridges, roads and irrigation canals built in pre-Soviet times are to be reconditioned, the population expects that the therefore necessary resources are provided and the labour-force is raised by those persons whose ancestors had organised the *hashar* for originally implementing the project in the past. The financing and mobilisation of a *hashar* in such cases represent an obligation assumed by inheritance. Thus, the *hashar* as a communal institution features a very ‘traditional’ character in Darband. The *mahalla* is usually not involved in and the *hokimiyat* not informed about such projects.

In this region, in which no intensive agriculture is operated, the state more or less withdrew and is not present on the local level.¹⁶ The embedding and anchoring of the new administrative structure could not be arranged here as the locality is left to an environment of political self-regulation. Social security is not bound to the processes of agricultural production any more in which the *mahalla* is withal not even involved in. Thus, the local administration could not take over the social functions of the former *kolkhoz* and is thus of only low relevance for the daily life of the population and in the local organisation of social security.

¹⁶ The *hokimiyat* does not intervene or at least show any interest in interference in the village’s internal affairs. It urges to a communal conciliation of conflicts and does not exercise any control over the performance of the local administration.

9 Conclusions

In the rural areas of Surkhondarya there are village communities which due to geographical and economic conditions strongly differ in their organisation of social security and local governance patterns as well as in terms of the relevance of the state as a local actor in connection with it. The comparison of both cases points out that predictions regarding a general trend in the development of local communities in Uzbekistan are hardly to be made. This shows evidence from a locality in a cotton area and a village in a mountainous area of the province. Especially in the agricultural sector patterns of production are in both localities very differently shaped, on the one hand with regards to the organisation of production processes and the degree of intervention on the part of central state organs in these, on the other hand regarding the latter's relevance in providing for the population's social security.

The research started with the presumption that - due to the high relevance of cotton for its economy - the Uzbek state is providing more means for social security in the cotton producing areas and thus binds these regions by a more voluminous supply of welfare benefits more strongly than other regions which are not of economic or strategic (budget-) interest. Contrarily, in the mountainous areas in which no cotton is cultivated and which are thus of less importance for its central political interests, the state was assumed to rarely invest in social security to strengthen its legitimacy. In the course of my field research, this presumption turned out as being of merely limited appropriateness. The government is endeavoured to maintain at least a basic social welfare system all over the country to ensure a minimal degree of social security of the population.¹⁷ This ubiquitous and to the same extent regardless the respective economic relevance of a locality. The cotton production seems actually to be based very much on the exploitation of the *farmers*, their employees and the local population.

The discovered livelihood strategies and economic activities which the individual households in the mountainous and the cotton areas of Surkhondarya respectively follow are generally similar and do not differ from those followed by households in other rural areas of Uzbekistan. Rural households show a high flexibility as they engage in various economic activities, agricultural and non agricultural ones: subsistence production and cattle rearing play a very important role, but this is not always sufficient for providing for a family's livelihood alone, especially in a cotton region where natural resources are occupied by the state's extensive production system.

¹⁷ This e.g. with the payment of at least minimal maternity and child allowances, unemployment compensations, disability benefits and pensions which often represent households exclusive cash income.

Agriculture and the local governance of social security

The population in terms of social security still benefits from a collective-like and locally embedded agricultural production system and its transfers. Due to the fact that the state had a strong interest in the maintenance of proven production patterns and thus an adherence to Soviet structural and institutional frameworks, *kolkhoz*-institutions live on in the combination of private farmer enterprises and the *mahalla* which together in a certain way inherited the organisational and social functions of the *kolkhoz*. This bolstered the stability of social order shaped by a world-view based on a 'collective' or '*kolkhoz* identity' which now relates to the single farm units and which is not only strengthened by joint festivities but even by the *mahalla*. The *mahalla* as a newly introduced administrative body in the local governance arena could be established as a mediator between the state, the local farmers and the population. Its organisatory capital the *mahalla* does not draw from a legal framework, but from the entanglement of the agricultural and the social sector. Locally embedded it disposes of authority and legitimacy for regulating local affairs.

In contrast, the mountainous region - due to the absence of a highly state-regulated production system a politically and economically peripheral region - exhibits the emergence of a relatively liberal economic system under an environment of political self-regulation. The local grain production is of merely low relevance for the population's daily life. A high extent of individualism and division of labour dominates. Privatisation caused an end to collective agriculture and broke down the *kolkhoz* structures. Logics of collectivity and its institutions do generally not any more have distinctive importance for the lifeworld of the people.

The *mahalla* generally plays a marginal role in the local political economy. Disposing of only marginal authority and legitimacy for the governance of local affairs, the local administration is a weak and locally not embedded actor and did thus not find its standing in an adapting social order. Links of reciprocity and solidarity as the 'glue of community life' today are a contextual interrelation of kin-affiliation and *kolkhoz*-succession. Soviet as well as newly emerged economic actors are generally strong in the internal regulation of local matters. In this locality from which the state more or less withdrew, social destabilisation was cushioned by a mixture of 'traditional' and non state structures. Thus, decollectivisation lead to a successful change of the system and social order. How the state and the community interact and how institutional arrangements did change or adjust in order to ensure security and stability on the local level in recent years is therewith very different from the cotton area. This is expressed i.e. in the mechanisms of social security provision which are respectively employed.

Mechanisms of social security provision – the interaction of state and community

Many households are dependent on centrally provided social assistance benefits or financial and material support within the community. Organisational patterns of provision are shaped by the respective existing institutional setting, and thus an analysis of these offer insights into the configuration of the respective local social order:

In the cotton region, through the *mahalla*-administration the state still reserves itself room for influence on the intra-community allocation of resources here and exploits communal mechanisms of welfare provision or resource redistribution like the *sadaqa* and *hashars* which provide in addition to state assistance social security to the population. These two 'traditional' institutions still exist, but interestingly the manner in which these are employed differ whereby distinct orientations of legitimisation are expressed: while in Darband these institutions offer single individuals the opportunity to legitimate ones social status towards the community, in Pakhtaobod a legitimisation towards the state takes place. Here, these two traditional institutions have been modified and instrumentalised by the state for the purpose of a social security provision without an expenditure of state resources.

While devolving the responsibility for coping with the needs of the local population to the *farmers*, the functional entanglement of the agricultural and the social sector is enforced. The local administration represents the therefore necessary link. In its actions the *mahalla* is highly controlled by the *hokimiyat*. The latter does make sure that the local administration ensures that the *farmers* act responsible towards the population. Its social functions as a state-implemented actor in some respects procure the state a legitimisation for its extensive interventions in connection with the production of cotton and the absorption of its returns.

In the mountainous area, regional state organisations do not intervene in the village's internal affairs. On the one hand they urge to a communal conciliation of conflicts and do not exercise any control over the performance of the local administration, on the other hand they do not interfere in local processes of welfare redistribution. Here, the *hashar* and the *sadaqa* as communal institutions feature a more 'traditional' character without any involvement of state bodies. Processes of reallocation take place within the community itself. Resources are mobilised not by the *mahalla* administration, but are based on traditional solid relationships, family networks and kin structures. Thus, a mixture of 'traditional' and communal institutional arrangements prevented a potential institutional gap which could have been resulting from the disintegration of the *kolkhoz*. Like Verdery (1996) depicts, a high degree of self-contained action exactly on the local level as necessary arrangements of self-regulation substitute non-existent state structures, a function the organisation of the *mahalla* could not assume. Such investigated developments in these two different Uzbek settings do challenge general statements which speculated regarding post Soviet trends in rural Central Asia.

‘Recomposed solidarity groups’ or ‘eroding social contracts’?

Concerning the question of community change, it seems that both the metaphor of a preservation of the *kolkhoz* as such as a group of solidarity or even a ‘recomposed tribe’ described by Roy (2000) and that of a ‘broken social contract’ (Kandiyoti 2003) do not entirely fit the social processes coming along with decollectivisation, neither in Pakhtaobod nor in Darband.

In the mountainous area, the *kolkhoz* structures disintegrated and no longer have any relevance in the local setting, neither in the mental concepts of the people nor in the shape of their interaction or present economic patterns. A *kolkhoz*-society does not exist any more. Social contracts are of individual kind, constrained to single actors and not structuring the whole community or connected to local organisatory patterns of the agricultural system. Such are rather based on reciprocal bonds among family members, close kin-affiliates and neighbours.

In the cotton area, evidence questions the assumption of local solidarity and identity produced by ‘traditional’ social institutions which would have survived first collectivisation and then the period of the *kolkhoz*. The introduction of the *kolkhoz* established a new order which is to a large extent still relevant in the post-Soviet context. But the *kolkhoz* can not be considered as a solidarity group as such. Solidarity is related to the extended family and friends, and even more pivotal to the newly established economic entities, the farmer enterprises which more or less evolved from the former *kolkhoz* brigades. These were preserved and thus offer individual networks which are ‘alleviating the burdens of change’. Against the idea of a ‘broken social contract’ one may argue that accordingly as well the logic of reciprocal obligations, dependencies and compensations that characterised the relations between the different social actors during the *kolkhoz* has survived and is still operating in the present setting. The reforms established a new economic order without upsetting the social order which is characterised by a stable relationship between the state, rural communities and local elites: More than a radical rupture with the past community commitment of the *kolkhoz*, the reforms proposed a re-regulation of agricultural production, though in continuity with patterns of production, loyalty and reciprocal dependence between state authorities, producers and the local population that already characterised the social setting before the reforms.

This contradicts the assumption that post-Soviet reforms in the agricultural sector were a ‘predatory’ act on the communities, solely aiming at an enhancement of state revenues. If in the perspective of the state de-collectivisation was first and foremost a matter of solving problems with the efficiency of agricultural production, from the local perspective it was rather a matter of attempting to maintain the old structures intact. A ‘real’ or radical privatisation would have led to a disintegration of this system. Decisional independence on the sides of the producers or a production solely left to market mechanisms would perhaps have led to an improvement of the output of the new farms and consequently an increase rural wages, at the same time creating a broad segment of a poor and unemployed rural population totally dependent on state assistance and local patrons. But the rural elite was not offered the opportunity to become a new landlord class in Uzbekistan.

Strongly pronounced patronage structures we do not find in both settings. Actors with political and economic capital tend to their clientele, be these friends, relatives or employees. The farmers exhibit a paternalistic responsibility towards their workers and the local residents in general. Thereby, relationships are less coined by relationships of dependence, but by reciprocal relationships which are comparable to those established in the *kolkhoz*.

Institutional stability vs. structural change

To conclude, compared to Soviet times, one can hardly speak of a real change of the system in the investigated cotton area of Surkhondarya. Though official privatisation, continuity exists in the collective economic and social organisation. A collective identity and mutual interdependencies stabilised the social order which had been shaped in Soviet times. Modified Soviet and communal institutions still constitute an integrated network of organisations that regulate the livelihoods of the rural population. A *mahalla* serves for bolstering the societal organisation which had been accomplished by the *kolkhoz* before and for abating local social stratification and destabilisation. This organisation and its institutional mechanisms function rather here where the state expresses its interests through the local administration.

In the mountainous area, after the disintegration of the *kolkhoz*, social order adjusted to a new liberal economic and political environment. State control and its presence on the local level are weak. In Darband, rather 'traditional' and communal institutions and actors shape governance processes and provide social security to the population. These coin the configuration of this order and thus the shape of local governance here. A factual system change happened, but not the one the reforms had intended or the survey of formal regulations would have suggested.

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