

Chapter 5

Livelihoods of the ‘New Livestock Breeders’ in the Eastern Pamirs of Tajikistan

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Abstract This chapter focuses on the adaption of livelihood strategies based on livestock breeding in the Eastern Pamirs to the new politico-economic conditions in post-Soviet Tajikistan. Furthermore, its effects on the changing socio-economic structures are analysed. Peculiarities like the introduction of a household responsibility system and the disorder during the years of the Tajik civil war eased private livestock appropriation and delayed all further steps to reorganise the societal set-up. By recording and interpreting household biographies, it could be revealed how individuals perceived opportunities and chances during the transitional period and how their economic decisions altered their livelihoods. Given the growing gap of socio-economic disparities within the community, the significance of the livestock-based economy could be shown in terms of the division of labour, pasture user rights, herd management, entrepreneurial and trade opportunities.

Keywords Post-socialist transformation • Livelihood trajectories • Livestock economy • Eastern Pamirs • Tajikistan

5.1 Introduction

Around the turn of the millennium, the collective farms (*kolkhozy*) were dissolved in the Eastern Pamirs, and the distribution of their livestock assets was implemented formally in an egalitarian way. The rationale allocated a certain number of livestock

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units for each member of a household, being a resident of the sub-district of the respective *kolkhoz*. However, a decade later, most households were not successful in starting a business in animal breeding, and substantial inequalities in livestock ownership between the households exist today. On first sight, this observation seems surprising, as the vast majority of the Eastern Pamirs' population identifies livestock breeding as their most important income source. Only a few economic alternatives exist in this peripheral high mountain region. The livestock economy is affected by the meagre local purchasing power. Other opportunities for enterprises are still less developed. This leads us to the question: What hindered the majority of the households to participate successfully in the livestock economy after the implementation of an egalitarian distribution mechanism for livestock assets?

The transitional setup in the Eastern Pamirs differed from that of adjacent regions in post-Soviet republics. Just before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a reform was introduced in the district, when responsibility for economic success of the then-state enterprises was transferred back to individuals: animals could be leased out to people who were formerly employed as herders, bureaucrats and teachers. Hence, many of them had no livestock herding and breeding knowledge. The post-independence civil war in Tajikistan delayed all further steps to reorganise the societal setup. The absence of law enforcement by the state caused a kind of power vacuum that encouraged the herders to act on their own behalf. They took opportunities to appropriate collective livestock and to control the pastures. Consequently, during the 1990s, livestock assets decreased substantially until the late dissolving of collective enterprises.

Since the livestock distribution, independent decision-making has been a challenge to the 'new livestock breeders'. Their previous experience was guided by a strong dominance of Soviet geopolitical interests that ensured high levels of supply for livestock production and their well-being.

In the following, the present-day livelihoods of the Kirghiz and Pamiri communities in the Eastern Pamirs will be described and interpreted in respect to changes in the socio-economic setup that significantly affects the applied livelihood strategies. It will be shown how individuals have perceived opportunities and chances during the transitional period and how this perception influenced their actions as stakeholders. The presentation of the evidence is guided by the following specific questions: How did the households relate to changing politico-economic frame conditions, and what shifts in strategies were undertaken in order to sustain their livelihoods? How is the socio-economic structure of the local population affected, and how has pasture use been impacted in the Eastern Pamirs?

5.2 Fieldwork-Based Approaches

Today, pastoralism is practised by small-scale, household-based enterprises. This overlapping of economic and social life qualifies the household as the elementary unit of analysis and interpretation. The findings presented here are based on extensive

fieldwork conducted starting 2003, though mainly between 2007 and 2010 over a span of 14 months in the Eastern Pamirs.

The utilisation patterns of pastures as the crucial natural resource were recorded in order to gain insight into the spectrum of pastoral practices. Interviews with 280 pastoralists took place in two sub-districts selected for my case study over a period of 3 years. I visited and interviewed my counterparts repeatedly in their seasonal pasture camps. Data on previous and present-day usage rights, pastoral practices, provision of winter fodder, along with composition, size and ownership of the herds were gathered. Another sample of 70 households was selected to record their life histories, where information was collected about their perceptions, experiences, livelihood decisions, their rationales and the outcomes during the different phases of change in the Eastern Pamirs.

The informational base was supplemented by data on pasture use, pastoral production and economy in the collective and state farms during the Soviet era as well as the subsequent transition period. Documents were consulted that have been archived by farms, district and province administrations. Enquiries about historical contexts are based on work in regional archives and provided helpful insights into the current situation. Key informants and eyewitnesses were interviewed for their authentic views and personal experiences with and during the transformation processes.

5.3 District Murghab in the Eastern Pamirs

The Eastern Pamirs, a high mountain desert of Central Asia, are located in the easternmost part of Tajikistan. Two characteristics mark this region. First, after the colonisation by the Russian Empire, the region experienced significant geopolitical changes. Since the 1930s under Soviet power, the area became a borderland that was closed, detrimentally affecting regional mobility and exchange patterns (Kraudzun 2011; Kreutzmann 2009a, b). Second, the combination of a sparse vegetation cover (Vanselow 2011; Walter and Breckle 1986) and its peripheral location contributes to limited choices for livelihoods based on local resources. Pastoralism seems to be a prime adapted strategy.

Nowadays, Murghab district is bound in the east by the autonomous province of Xinjiang in China, in the south by Afghan Badakhshan, and the northern boundary was established after the dissolution of the Soviet Union between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Eastern Pamirs comprise the major part of the Pamir Plateau and are widely congruent with the Murghab district which is part of the autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan (cf. Fig. 5.1).

The high mountain plateaux have been used by members of two different communities for centuries. Combined mountain farmers originating from the deeply incised Western Pamir valleys cultivated food crops on irrigated terraces there and drove their cattle herds to the Eastern Pamir pastures during summers. The second group consisted of Kirghiz pastoralists. Some evacuated from conflict-prone regions

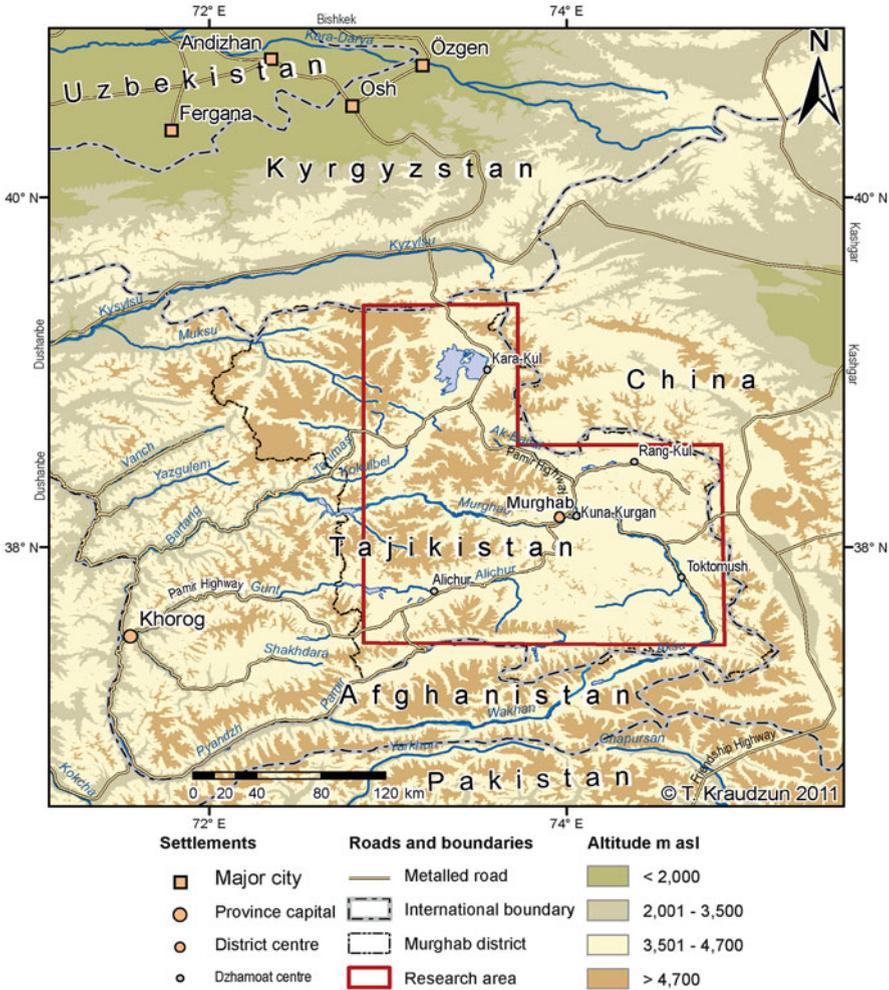


Fig. 5.1 The location of the research area Murghab district within Central Asia

to the remote Pamirs, initially on a seasonal basis and later on permanently (Dor 1975; Maanaev and Ploskikh 1983; Stankevich 1904).

In former times, the pastoralists depended on the exchange of their livestock surplus with basic foodstuffs and other goods in agricultural markets such as Kashgar and Osh. Furthermore, their pastures were spread over a wide range of the Pamirs. Beginning with the establishment of the Russian administration, the trans-boundary mobility of the pastoralists was increasingly constrained. A prominent example of ‘closed frontier nomadism’ is that of Kirghiz pastoralists in the neighbouring Afghan Pamirs.¹

The valuable pastures of these high plateaux are situated on an altitude that ranges from around 3,500 m asl in the lowest valleys up to 4,700 m asl. The mountain peaks reach to more than 7,000 m in the northern and Western mountain ranges. The orographic environment and its latitudinal location cause low temperatures throughout the whole year, with an annual average of only -1°C to -3°C in the valleys. Moreover, the climatic situation is marked by extreme aridity with precipitation values below 100 mm per year (cf. Agakhanianc 1965; Walter and Breckle 1986).

Based on these natural preconditions, an extensive and seasonal livestock herding of yaks, sheep and goats seemed to be a self-evident option for agricultural activities. The population density today is still low in this district, with an area of 38,300 km² but only 14,000 inhabitants, consisting of 77% Kirghiz and 23% Pamiri people. Half of the population is living in the district capital and economic centre Murghab, the other half in far-flung villages and hamlets (Statotdel Murgab 2008b).

5.4 The Historic Legacy

5.4.1 *The Soviet Modernisation Project: Secure Livelihoods*

Prior to the Soviet collectivisation, the pastoral production was organised by kinship-based groups who moved jointly to seasonal pastures. These communities were marked by huge disparities in the socio-economic status between households. The whole group operated as a political and economic unit and was governed by the head (*bay*) of a wealthy household, who usually owned most of the group's livestock (Gotfrid and Gafiz 1930:30; Shibaeva 1973:104).

After the establishment of the Soviet power in the region, the major goals were to persuade the local population of the advantages of state-led, integrated rural development and to convince them of the utility of a completely different organisation of economic activities, sometimes with force – to produce in collective farms. Every endeavour was made to improve the supply with foods and goods² (cf. Fig. 5.2). Eleven *kolkhozy* were established quickly in 1940–1941 and finally reorganised into four *kolkhozy* and one *sovkhos* specialised in yak breeding (Sovnarkom TadSSR and KP Tad 1943; Taipov 2002:71). The district's assigned role within the Soviet economy was to breed livestock to be delivered to processing plants in lowland regions (TK³ 05.04.09, VV 05.07.08, Antonenko 1985; Kleandrov 1974). However, the economic performance was dissatisfying; only during a short period of the 1960s did the *kolkhozy* produce a surplus (Statotdel Murgab n.d.).

The main rationale for the exceptional endeavours introduced to the Soviet Pamirs was based in the geopolitical significance of the long external boundary shared with China and Afghanistan. The control of this vast border region is dependent on appropriate infrastructure, effective administration and, last but not least, the pastoralists' loyalty and knowledge. Consequently, the Pamir highway, the first

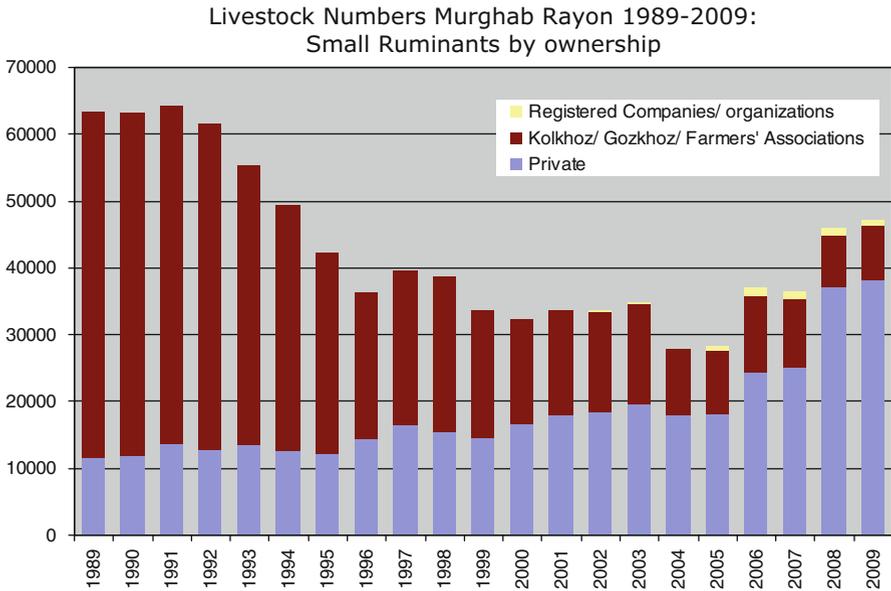
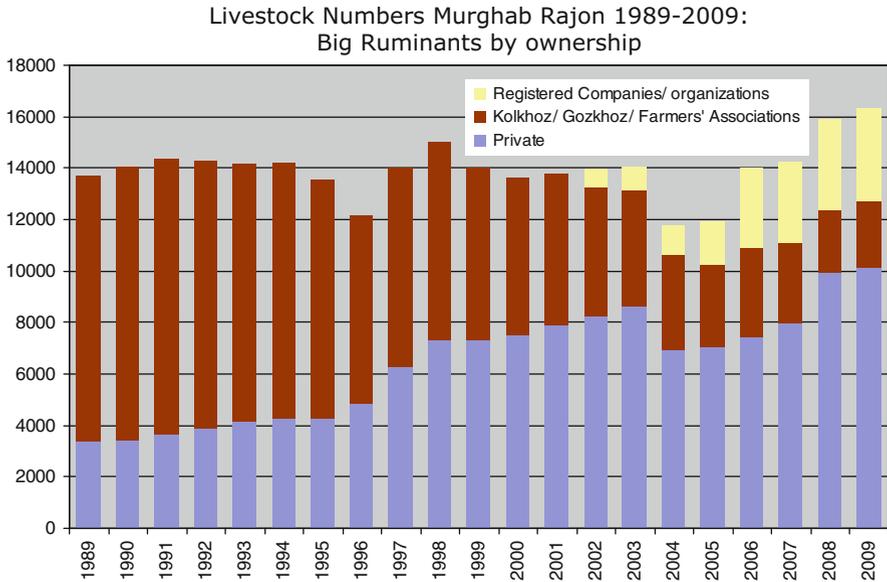


Fig. 5.2 Livestock numbers in Murghab Rajon (Source: Statotdel Murghab time series n.d.)

metalled road in this high mountain region, was advanced over a distance of more than 700 km from Osh to Khorog (cf. Fig. 5.1). Furthermore, modern buildings with administration, education and social infrastructure were erected starting with the establishment of Murghab as a district in 1932 (Taipov 2002). With the progress of



Photo 5.1 ‘Moscow supply’: Countless trucks of the transport trust ‘Pamirskoe avtotransportnoe upravlenie’ (PATU) in Murghab that was financed and controlled by the supranational administrative level of the Soviet Union (Source: El Registan 1936) (Special thanks go to Markus Hauser for providing the author with the scanned photograph from his Pamir Archive Collection)

the development efforts, many people were employed in non-agrarian sectors. To establish a modern administration and high living standards, the region was in need of a variety of professions. Many young specialists, mainly Pamiris originating from the Western Pamir, came to work in the administrative centre of Murghab (AA 28.05.08, LH52 13.05.09). Although they were directed by the state after their professional education, most of them were pleased by the privileges that stemmed from this. The allowance paid for living under high mountain conditions attributed an additional 50% income, combined with a comparably rich provisioning with consumer goods – called vernacularly ‘Moscow supply’ (cf. Photo 5.1) – resulted in satisfying livelihoods (BT 18.05.09).

The livelihoods and living conditions of the pastoralists were changed by the reorganisation of the agrarian sector. After the collectivisation, most of the pastoralists were settled in villages, where the production infrastructure of *kolkhozy* was set up. Mechanisation and the centralised supply with production inputs like fuel, combustible fuel, forage as well as a supply infrastructure for the population with foods and goods required many specialised workers and the establishment of a sophisticated administration and accounting system. Living and working in the *kolkhoz* centres, most of the households left the arduous herders’ life on the pastures behind them. The renowned feature writer of the *Izvestia* newspaper El Registan pictured it as follows:

Moscow has climbed the ‘Roof of the World’! It has come armed with knowledge, technology, culture, to change the backward lifestyle of this peripheral area. (1936:Ch. 4; translated by the author)

However, the core of the pastoral production in the Eastern Pamirs remained unchanged. Herders still moved to seasonal, sometimes very remote, pastures, where they lived permanently and took care of the herds. A great amount of effort was made to ease their work and improve their living conditions. A farm manager of the Soviet period remembers:

[In Soviet times] each herder had to engage only in his core mission: herding the animals. Unlike today, every herder even had a mount and an assistant to control the herd. For each additional task he was assigned additional workers. ... lambing brigades, ... shearing brigades, ... hay making brigades. (TU 11.04.09)

The herders received backstopping for most labour-intensive phases like lambing and shearing. A supply with emergency forage in times of snow-covered winter pastures and with combustibles during the gestation period was limiting climate-related losses in the herds. Sales vans of the state shops delivered foods and goods to the pasture camps, even regular movie screenings with mobile cinemas were organised. The herders, who lived with their families in the pasture camps, were regularly checked by mobile doctors, and their children were educated in boarding schools.

To conclude, livelihoods were secure, and socio-economic living conditions were good, given the region's peripheral location, and especially in comparison with neighbouring countries. On the other hand, private economy and trade were quite uncommon. For example, a '*kolkhoznyj bazar*' like in most Soviet towns, where the population usually sold the private agricultural surpluses, did not exist. The then-mayor of Murghab remembers: 'The shops were full, there was no need for [private] trading, and any privately organised distant trade was outlawed as "*spekulacija*"' (KK 06.05.08).

5.4.2 The Transitional Decade: Uncertainties and Opportunities

The framework for the transition period was partly set in the late Soviet period, when the Soviet power was increasingly failed to compensate for the inefficiency of the *kolkhozy*. A reform – similar to the household responsibility system in China (cf. Kreutzmann 2009b, 2011; Lin 1996) – was introduced locally in order to transfer responsibility for the economic success of state/collective enterprises to individual employees/*kolkhoz* members. From 1988 on, livestock was leased out to the 'new livestock breeders' formerly employed as herders, bookkeepers and teachers. A herd and a set of seasonal pastures were allocated for each livestock tenant, and he was assigned an account in the *sovkhos* bookkeeping. He was made responsible for the economic efficiency of 'his' small virtual enterprise. All production inputs, like transportation services or fodder, were booked on the tenant's virtual account as expenditures and had to be balanced with the delivered animals as production output (TK 05.04.09).

This tenancy system worked well in the last years of the Soviet period, but it collapsed a few years after independence. The hyperinflation of the Russian Rouble, in

combination with growing uncertainties of the management of the livestock-purchasing enterprises, contributed to the discontinuation of the hitherto existing exchange relations. The supplies to the Pamirs ceased, and the state farms were in need of everything to make a living except their own production based on livestock. Then, with dramatically inflating prices and without livestock sales, most of the tenants ran into debts to the *sovkhos*. The vast majority of goods needed to be imported and became very expensive, whilst cash was scarce and losing rapidly in value.

The livelihoods suffered from this economic crisis, as salaries were missing and household savings were devaluated by the inflation. Households were in a desperate situation because after witnessing five decades of social security in the Soviet Union, they had no experience of how to cope with this severe economic crisis. At first sight, subsistence economy and migration were two appropriate options to sustain a livelihood.

Taking the first option, livestock was the most obvious resource. Private ownership was strictly limited in the Soviet time, so private herds were still insignificant and most livestock was owned by the *sovkhos*. These animals were accessible particularly for livestock tenants. They took opportunities to appropriate state livestock, either for immediate consumption, to barter for daily needs, or to integrate into their private herds.

The *sovkhos* sheep were very cheap. To tell the truth, for 4–5 bottles of vodka you got a big sheep ... or 20 packs of cigarettes.... 1991, 92 – in those days there was still much *sovkhos* livestock, but the law enforcement was not active anymore, it was complete anarchy, you just gave little to the tenants and got the best animals, they utilised the livestock as if it was theirs. (LH37, 24.05.09)

During the absence of cash, livestock was the main currency for local exchange. Usually, the appropriated animals of the *sovkhos* herds were declared by the herders as loss. The oblast' level criticised the sharp decrease in livestock and tried to intervene with repeated inspection teams.⁴ After all the subsequent audits and livestock censuses, most of the tenants had a negative balance on their *sovkhos* accounts and were missing considerable amounts of the entrusted animals. Though, even if the damages had to be compensated, the missing assets calculated in prices of the initial tenancy system were easily repayable after the hyperinflation. In retrospect, the tenancy system can be seen as a 'simulation' of privatisation with the difference that individuals who failed were bearing only limited consequences.

Emigration was a second option: In 1993, the records mention 798 people (not including undocumented migration) who left the district, four times more than in the subsequent year (Statotdel Murgab n.d.). This development is in stark contrast with previous immigration. The post-independence civil war in Tajikistan forced many migrants from the lowlands into the Pamirs and further isolated the region (Herbers 2001). In order to alleviate the disastrous supply situation, the Aga Khan Foundation organised humanitarian food supplies within the framework of the 'Pamir Relief and Development Project' (Bliss 2006:300). This meant the import of a yearly supply of 300–1,800 tons of foodstuff for the district Murghab (MSDSP 2005). With the advent of these provisions, the exchange relations based on the Soviet system ceased entirely.

After the failure of the tenancy systems, the *kolkhozy* returned to the earlier Soviet-style management. Meanwhile, the number of the small livestock had decreased by 45% since independence. On the other hand, the animals in private herds accounted already for about one third, growing to more than a half of the district's total livestock before the official privatisation took place (cf. Fig. 5.2). De jure, very few pastures were allocated for the strongly limited private livestock during Soviet time. However, most of the former tenants continued to work as herders for the collective livestock – very often on the plots that had been allocated for them before. They felt already like proprietors on the pastures which they had worked as tenants.

5.4.3 Final Reorganisation: Distribution of the Collective Assets

At the turn of the millennium, the four still existing collective farms were dissolved. Subsequently, their former members were gathered to form new collective structures called *associations of dekhan farms*.⁵ They inherited the land titles for the pastures and the remaining livestock. However, the animals were distributed equally amongst their members. Depending on livestock assets and village population, a household⁶ – consisting of 5.8 members on average – could receive between 1.2 and 5 head of big livestock and 6.2 and 56 head of small livestock.⁷ Yet the impact of the redistribution remained limited for most of the households, given the remaining share of only 62% small livestock and 37% big livestock of the 1991 livestock assets to be distributed (cf. Fig. 5.2).

Since the procedure was initiated by the district administration and communicated to the population as a distribution of the livestock, the population perceived it as straight privatisation of the *kolkhoz* assets. The distribution mechanism led to a legal ambivalence, in which the administration counts the distributed livestock de jure as owned by the *associations of dekhan farms*, whereas the people have integrated the animals de facto into their herds and perceive them as their own.

The second most important asset of the *kolkhozy* was the means of transport. All vehicles were privatised straightforwardly. Usually, the *kolkhoz* drivers had the first possibility to buy the trucks. Although the prices were favourable, cash was hardly disposable within most households in that time.⁸ Only a few individuals, who had already started a successful business in the 1990s, were able to equip themselves with the needed transportation.

The same applies for the third most important asset of the *kolkhozy*. Buildings and stables were offered for sale right after the dissolution of *kolkhozy*. Initially, the users would have preferred to rent them. Only recently, these assets have become contested because their ownership can serve to strengthen and underline claims for certain pastures.

The livestock distribution had some immediate effects. Despite the livestock allocations for their private herds, most households were uncertain of how to start a business that would ensure their livelihoods. This insecurity and inexperience triggered

many decisions to sell their animals immediately. The then-head of the district administration's agriculture department assesses the outcome pessimistically:

Most of the people did not know how to develop their own livestock business. ... They regarded the [distributed] livestock as a gift from above. For the first time after many years they were in a position to make their purchases – they just had to sell one sheep on the bazaar. ... After a year, these people had spent everything, and no livestock was left. (MD 17.05.09)

The main livestock buyers were households that were economically successful already in the 1990s. By this formula, the livestock distribution had only limited levelling effects.

5.5 Present-Day Livelihoods: Failure and Success

After the peace agreement of 1997, Tajikistan's economy began to recover after 5 years of civil conflict. Following this, the state was increasingly able to raise wages and pensions⁹ – a development that improved the livelihood situation in the district of Murghab, where most people with formal jobs are employed by state-funded organisations.

In addition, an external actor stopped playing a leading role for the local economy: until 2003, the Russian federation was financing and managing the control of Tajikistan's borders with Afghanistan and China. Many local people were hired as contracted border guards. With an extraordinary high salary for local standards, every employed soldier and labourer was usually able to entirely support his household. A former contract soldier assessed that 200–300 households benefitted in this way (JI 19.04.09). Furthermore, many products were purchased by the affluent Russian soldiers on the local market. The considerable inputs to the local economy ceased when the task was handed over to the poorly financed Tajik border guards. This created a significant income gap in many local livelihoods.

5.5.1 *Livelihood Options in the Local Economy*

Today, only one-third of the population of working age people are employed formally, of which 68% are engaged in the state sector. Official statistics show a share of employment of only 15% in the villages, whereas in the district centre, 45% of the working-age population are declared to be employed (Statotdel Murgab 2008b).¹⁰ About 17% of the households supplement their livelihoods with informal jobs, and 21% receive remittances from household members who out-migrated in order to seek employment. In sum, these resources combine to an average of 450 TJS per household, but the income is distributed very unequally. More than two-thirds of the Murghab households spend less than the 400 TJS necessary for minimal needs,¹¹ 10% with at least 1,000 TJS can afford sufficient amounts of consumer goods and

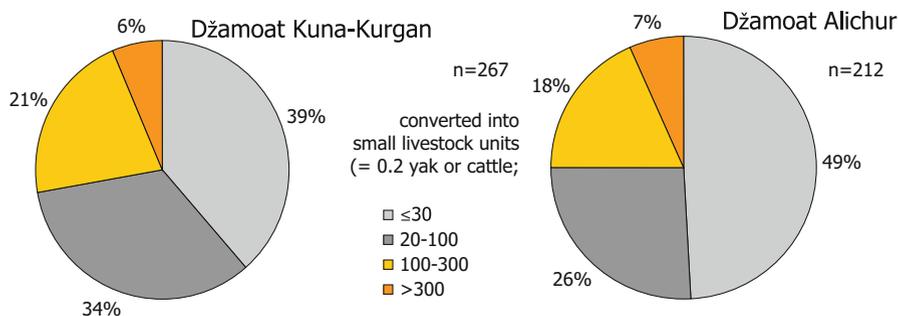


Fig. 5.3 Herd sizes of pasture users in two sub-districts of the Rajon Murghab (Source: Selkhozotdel 2007b)

only 2% of the population, with more than 2,000 TJS, can purchase everything they desire.¹² Interpreting these figures in comparison with the previously mentioned minimum needs level, we might conclude that some additional livelihood sources are still missing in our discussion.

Informal incomes are often irregular and remain unaccounted for. For example, bartering complements the livelihoods to a large extent. For many households, livestock is the main productive asset that generates a surplus beyond their limited regular income. Furthermore, animals are the main household savings. To maintain their herd productivity, every household needs a set of yielding seasonal pastures, good relations to a knowledgeable herder and/or a sufficient disposable workforce. In the district, an average household owns 18 small livestock and five yaks for subsistence and barter (Statotdel Murgab 2008a). Significant and big disparities are reflected in the variegation: between a third and a half of pasture users are in a position to sustain their livelihoods out of their small herds (Fig. 5.3). Furthermore, *teresken*, a dwarf shrub, is extracted for energy purposes, supplementing livelihoods as a barter or cash commodity (Samimi et al. 2011). Altogether, the majority of the households have difficulties earning livelihoods sufficient to meet their basic needs, not to mention its robustness against economic shocks.

5.5.2 Household Biographies and Livelihoods

The population of the Soviet Pamirs witnessed an egalitarian societal organisation with widely equal living conditions and opportunities. The sharp decline after the disintegration of the Soviet exchange and supply system was felt by all citizens. The 1990s were marked by negative trends of the regional economy and external emergency aid. At the same time, private livestock numbers developed steadily, whereas collective ones lowered (cf. Fig. 5.2). The enforcement power of the district and *kolkhoz* administrations was weak. Private and collective animals were mixed in the

herds, providing many opportunities for herders to appropriate livestock. Since the official statistics were usually extrapolated from reported numbers, significant corrections became necessary when inspections figured out the real numbers.¹³

Anyway, most of the herd owners were not able to make their private livestock economy a viable livelihood. The reasons stated in interviews were almost identical. Most named the lack of financial resources and insecurities about economic decisions, especially after the well-remembered failed experiment with earlier tenancy schemes. There were few incentives for establishing sustainable livelihoods when emergency aid covered much of the basic food requirements for a period of 11 years (MSDSP 2005). Developments in western Tajikistan were not encouraging as well: the civil war abated only slowly. The Pamir region remained more or less isolated from adjacent markets that could and would purchase livestock products.

But why were some households able to successfully start a livestock business – even before the dissolution of *kolkhozy*? In order to illustrate the triggering factors, some examples of household biographies will be presented that provide some hints as to how people perceived the events of the transitional period and what they based their decisions on for adapting and coping with the perceived realities of the time.¹⁴

Egembay (age of 50, LH08) is an extraordinarily wealthy livestock owner representing a five-person household. The foundation for his success was laid already 20 years ago. His father was amongst the few who exploited gaps in the tight Soviet control system by using his position to gain assets. As a truck driver delivering supplies to the pastures, he was in permanent contact with many herders. Amongst those were herders who did not keep the maximum number of permitted private livestock.¹⁵ He convinced these individuals to declare his illegal livestock as their own by filling-up their quota. In this way, he managed to gather a herd of 10 small and 50 big livestock by the end of Soviet control. Egembay himself continued to manage the growing herd with his father. They sustained the high livestock numbers even during challenging times. Additionally, his brother's son, as well as the family of his daughter, got involved in the family enterprise. In order to exercise effective control over the hired herders, they rotate living in the pasture camp. Their example shows how acquired experience and good access to valuable information can support the quick start of a livestock business. Egembay continues to be successful because his management is in tune with present-day requirements, resulting in large private herds of 1,500 small and 500 big livestock.

Janybek (age of 56, LH03) was one of the *kolkhoz* specialists who has a profound knowledge about livestock breeding and management. In the final years of the Soviet period, he worked as a breeding expert (*zootekhnik*) and head of a farm department. During the difficult transformative periods, he occupied positions as a bookkeeper and even became the chief economist of the *kolkhoz*. At the same time, he was successful in his private livestock breeding, maintaining a herd of 60 small and 15 big livestock. However, he lost most of his animals in devastating weather of April 1998, when the pastures were covered with crusted snow (*zhut*), and commented: 'Knowledge about livestock helps nothing here. It is God who distributes ... in the Soviet Union, the adherence to the rules of herd management guaranteed good results'.



Photo 5.2 Herding animals on the winter pasture on the Alichur Pamir near Chatyr-Tash. Given the hard job and the great responsibility for the valued livestock, most hired herders feel underpaid and unattended (Photograph Tobias Kraudzun, March 25, 2009)

Accepting this damage as god's will, he changed his focus to trade and opened a shop in the Murghab bazaar. However, he had to acknowledge that his business did not generate earnings. His only benefit was to purchase supplies at cheaper prices in Osh. He had to start breeding again, though out of the ten heads of small livestock allocated to his household during privatisation, half was missing when he went to the herder entrusted with them. After taking over the remainder, with difficulties he managed to develop a medium-sized herd that is alternating between 60 and 100 small livestock – depending on occurring and extraordinary expenses. His and his wife's pensions are the main cash income source for the five-person household. To economise, his sons regularly gather a small team and drive to pastures eligible for digging *teresken*. The dwarf shrubs are sold or used for heating the home and cooking. Recently, Janybek took out a loan to buy 15 small yaks. However, he is not sure that the additional returns will outweigh the high reimbursement rates and pay back his investment.

Ismail (LH36) was not involved in herding during the tenancy system, but was working as a driver for the Russian border troops for a few years. His strategy was to use his salary to set up a herd. The investments were quite low in the period of weak control, when many animals were extracted from the *kolkhoz* herds and offered at reasonable prices. Living in Murghab town, he contracted his herd for maintenance to a herder (cf. Photo 5.2). Whenever a large number of offspring and adult

animals were lost, he would release the shepherd and hire another one. His judgement on hired herders is typical:

You cannot please them, no matter how good you support them. The first season, they are working well. Then they get out how to embezzle animals. You have to kick them out. If they cannot defraud, they leave claiming they were not supported. (Ismail, April 19, 2009)

Although he replaced the herder four times, the herd size did not increase as he aspired. In 2007, he ventured to open a shop, where he expected to earn around 600 TJS monthly. But soon after the initial investment, he had to support his sister who had to undergo an expensive surgery. Ismail sold animals to cover the expenses, thus diminishing his herd from 150 small and 30 big livestock to 120 small and 20 big livestock. He seems to be quite optimistic that he might recover the herd loss, but largely it depends on the faithfulness of the hired herder.

These three examples illustrate a number of factors that have influenced the chances for success in private livestock business. Significant organisational and management skills were required to build a herd during the period of post-Soviet *kolkhozy*. Although the limitations for private livestock ownership were relaxed, there were officially only a few pastures allocated to graze private animals. Every owner had to make informal arrangements with herders – or to be one himself. On the one hand, the post-independence disorder and the lack of control eased opportunities to acquire livestock. There was a window of opportunity to increase one's own herd either free of cost or for very low investments. On the other hand, only a few people availed these chances and developed long-term visions in the livestock sector.

The often stressed livestock distribution of the former *kolkhozy* had no long-lasting and significant impact on households. First, less than half of the population benefitted from the distribution. Second, many animals merely existed on the distribution lists. Third, the small numbers of distributed livestock were of little importance for already successful herders. Poorer people, for whom the distributed livestock was a considerable input, were too inexperienced to maintain their herds. Most of them lost their animals in the first year by selling them in order to cover daily needs.

5.6 Conclusions

Only some households became successful livestock entrepreneurs. In contrast, the vast majority of the local people did not take the appropriate economic steps. This was mainly influenced by three factors. First, the realities of the current economic crisis in comparison to their previous experience were discouraging for them. Second, their perception of being first and foremost dependent on external support was somewhat endorsed by a steady supply of humanitarian aid during a period of 11 years, by the big economic impact of the Russian border troops' presence and by the continuing large-scale subsidies for the local administration from the national

level. Third, many of the ‘new livestock breeders’ were discouraged by the collapse of the tenancy regime which can be seen as failed ‘simulation of privatisation’.

Another positive factor is the availability of workforce committed and experienced in livestock breeding and management within the network of relatives. The lambing and calving season is crucial for the productivity of a herd. During this period, the product of several factors influences the survival of offspring. These include the motivation of, control over and support for the hired herder. Furthermore, protecting the animals against predators all year round, but especially on the winter pastures, keeps livestock losses low. These dependencies make the relationship between livestock owners and herders decisive (cf. Photo 5.2). The regular complaints about fraud of animals on the side of the owners, as well as about scant support and unfair treatment on the side of the hired herders, indicate the negotiation processes between both as pivotal.

Specialised professional knowledge and experienced professionals, as they were employed in the Soviet system that allocated and divided labour in the livestock sector, have been beneficial in some cases in increasing herd productivity. However, it has rarely helped to develop coping strategies to tackle and adaptation strategies to overcome the present economic crisis.

At present, when after a period of decline livestock numbers have recovered to levels known from the Soviet period, the competition between pastoralists has increased. The availability of accessible fertile and suitable pastures is shrinking. The chances of ‘newcomers’ to access seasonal pastures are rather limited. The growing competition for pastoral resources has effected that most pasture users do not relocate their livestock four times a year to seasonal pastures anymore. The rotational cycles have been adapted to the changed valuation of pasture resources. De jure, the associations of *dekhan* farms distribute pastures according to users’ herd sizes. De facto, many individual claims are enforced by justifying them as based on customary law dating back to the tenancy period. The changed appreciation and the growing competition have led to evidence of under- and overgrazing. Pastures near the settlements and some without strong user claims are heavily frequented and seem to get degraded. Large areas that are claimed by powerful and influential livestock owners are partially under-utilised (Kraudzun 2009; Samimi et al. 2011). Conflict seems to be inevitable in such situations, constraining the further development of the livestock economy, as well as the sustainable use of natural resources.

However, the pastoral livestock economy is embedded in a wider range of livelihood activities. The Eastern Pamirs are linked to national and regional exchange networks and are part of the domestic and international labour market. Survival of pastoral households is augmented by migrants’ remittances, trade and commerce. Thus, the human-environmental system is modified by substantial external agents, contributions and dependencies. The case of the Eastern Pamirs exemplifies that an understanding of local and regional resource utilisation needs to be embedded in a wider set of communication, cooperation and exchange relations. Nevertheless, the pastoral practices of Kirghiz and Pamirian mountain dwellers form a significant backbone for the survival of their households in a harsh environment.

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Interview Partners

AA: Adylbek Atabaev, 28.05.08

BT: Bekzhol Taipov, Murghab 31.03.09, 18.05.09

MD: Murzabay Dzhoosbbaev, Murghab 22.10.07, 09.04.09, 17.05.09, 03.09.09

JJ: Jurmat Ismailov, Murghab 19.04.09

KK: Kökönbek Kamchibekov, Murghab 06.05.08

TK: Teshebay Kolchokabev, Murghab 05.04.09, 16.05.09

TU: Tashbay Usenov, Kamar-Ötök 11.04.09

VV: Vakhid Vakhidov, Dushanbe 04.07.08, 05.07.08

Notes

1. This term was coined by Nazif Shahrani (2002 [1979]); cf. the Chap. 4 in this volume by Ted Callahan.
2. For example, more than 7,500 tons of goods were brought into the Pamirs in the planning year 1936–1937 to supply about 29,000 people who were living in the region in 1935, according to regional archival documents (GosArkhiv-GBAO 1936:1-3-27).
3. Full names of quoted interview partners are listed below.
4. In the state farms of Murghab district, animal loss increased in 1993 by 4,051 head of sheep and goats and 670 yaks in comparison to the precedent year, constituting 10% respectively, 7% of all stocks (USKH GBAO 1994).
5. In this case, each member household of the dissolved *kolkhoz* was regarded as a *dekhan* farm (literally peasant farm). De jure, a formally registered business was addressed by this denomination; de facto, it just referred to a household as an economic unit. For an overview of other types of *dekhan* farms, see Robinson et al. (2010).
6. Statistical tables based on the official population register show smaller household sizes, but de facto households sharing a budget and a table include often relatives and young families. The figure referred to here is derived from a survey conducted in Murghab in 2008 (Kreczi 2011).
7. By default, all inhabitants of a village were members of the *kolkhoz*. However, they amounted only to 47% of the district population (Statodel Murgab 2000; Selkhozotdel Murgab 2007a). The population of the district centre Murghab and of the sub-district Alichur, with a persisting state farm, were not considered.
8. Trucks, as the most desired means of transport for seasonal herd relocations, were sold for the equivalent of 80–200 USD. This comparatively small amount equals the wages earned in 30–70 months (based on wages in 1999).
9. From 1998 to 2003, the officially fixed minimal wage has increased almost sixfold (Goskomstat RT 2004).
10. In official statistics, every occurrence of employment is considered, including part-time positions with salaries insignificant for earning a livelihood.
11. An average Murghab town household comprises 5.8 members and requires a minimum of about 400 TJS monthly for purchasing only the imported consumer goods. This calculation is based on consumption data (AgentStat 2010) refined with information from my own enquiry

of household consumption in Murghab. The vast majority of foods and dry goods have to be imported from outside. Only locally produced goods and raw materials extracted from nature can be substituted through workforce and support networks. The respective costs are omitted from this minimal value, including them would increase the margin of basic needs to 700 TJS or even to 946 TJS (Kreczi 2011).

12. Numbers in this paragraph are calculated from a livelihood survey conducted in Murghab in 2008 by Fanny Kreczi (2011). I gratefully acknowledge her sharing of these data.
13. After an inspection, both numbers for private and collective livestock had to be corrected for all livestock by 9% – the private upwards, the collective downwards. A similar correction was necessary after an inspection took place in June 2007: 6% for yaks and even 11% for small livestock – again upwards for private and downwards for farmers association's livestock (MD 17.05.09, cf. Fig. 5.2).
14. All biographical interviews were conducted with the household elder. Other household members often helped out with specifying dates and adding to memories. Nevertheless, the biographies reflect merely the assessments of the household head, disregarding the intra-household variations. All names of my interview partners have been anonymised.
15. In Murghab district of the late Soviet period, it was allowed to keep an amount of six small livestock and one yak with a calf. Livestock beyond that was 'contracted' by the *kolkhoz* for a (low) acquisition price set by the state.

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