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FAMILY PLANNING
TRAININGS FOR THE
NEWLYWEDS IN
TAJKISTAN

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BISHKEK

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KEY POINTS

- The population in Tajikistan tends to lavishly celebrate different occasions of their lives. According to the study conducted in 2015, the main reasons of lavish celebrations include social pressure from neighbors and friends, insistence of elder people in keeping the traditions (that constantly change) and organizing celebrations as the way out of poor reality.
- In 2007 the Government of Tajikistan passed the Law on Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Celebrations of the Republic of Tajikistan, which was the first such law in the region. From 2007 the Committee that regulates the current law established thousands of commissions throughout the country for monitoring its implementation. Aiming on reducing unnecessary expenses for celebrating different occasions, the law regulates the number of guests, hours of celebrations and reduces the number of events.
- However, the recent study has shown still ongoing wasteful celebrations among the population of Tajikistan. People, obeying to the regulations of the law, develop the traditions of needless over-consumptions at the celebrations.
- Taking into account the current crisis in Tajikistan; the crisis in the Russian Federation; returned migrants, whose salaries in Russia cannot provide for their families; consequent decrease of remittances, resulting on the fall of Tajik somoni, and the constant increase of prices - all make the Law on Ceremonies more important now than it was in 2007. Budget reallocation in the families could be the way to save resources and avoid going into debts or taking credits.
- Hence, the paper offers an additional mechanism to enhance the Law on Ceremonies and help people to understand its strengths and benefits.



INTRODUCTION

Still six months before the wedding date, but family members are already preparing the dowry and necessary items for numerous celebrations. The Law actually prohibited choygashtak (the pre-wedding event, organized by the bride for her friends, relatives); but, still me, as a bride, have to organize oshi nahor (the morning plov for males) (Roche, Hohmann 2011). My father searches for appropriate furniture for the apartment, as we have to purchase everything inside the house, whereas the groom has to have an apartment. “Along with eight national dresses we have to have certain accessories for each ... including gold ... to be accepted by the family [of the groom] you have to have a nice pot of gold” (respondent).

The groom, in his turn, can also number a long list of obligations the traditions demand him to fulfill. Looking at the major expenditures, the list includes celebration of the wedding at the restaurant for 150 people, providing the bride with a dowry, having an apartment where the couple can live and taking care of all expenses during the wedding day, as rent of cars, bride gown, smoking and other accessories.

That’s the ordinary turmoil in the families, which usually starts long before the wedding. And in families with several children/grandchildren this turmoil is quite constant. According to official statistics, the percentage of people living under the poverty line in Tajikistan is 32 per cent for 2015, with about 60 per cent in 2009. At the same time, the population tends to lavishly celebrate every occasion of their life, starting with the first 40 days of a child and ending with funerals. These celebrations do indebt households for several years, forcing them to reduce expenses on education, nutrition and proper clothing for their children. The government of Tajikistan was aiming to trace the tendency of conspicuous consumption and implemented the Law on Celebrations in 2007. The law in its turn regulates the number of permitted rituals, number of guests and hours of a celebration. However, people still

find ways to violate the law or, abiding to all rules, still manage to celebrate it overwhelmingly. It has been revealed during field research in summer 2015 in the framework of the MA Thesis under the Politics and Security programme at the OSCE Academy. The Thesis called “Conspicuous Consumption in Central Asia: Tajikistan’s Law on Weddings and Celebrations” has portrayed that overconsumption happens due to social pressure from neighbors as well as misunderstanding the benefits of abiding by the law. Interviewees, who have been randomly selected, indicated that they are very well informed about the rules of the law. However, throughout the discussion respondents demonstrated lack of understanding towards the aim of taking the law, while describing many up-to-date textiles for sewing dresses, which they usually wear only once.

The current paper aims at enhancing the general understanding of the existing law by suggesting a mechanism that could have helped the population to understand benefits of following the law. Hence, the implementation of the law can include the training that will help explain inefficiency of lavish celebrations, capturing along other important issues. Therefore, the overall aim of the paper is to provide with an analysis of the shortcomings of the law and explain how training could amend the law to improve the situation. Further, there is a short introduction to the Law on Ceremonies, supported by the current situation, followed by the actual suggestions to amend the Law and tips for monitoring.



LAW ON CEREMONIES

In 2006, the president of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, instructed the government to formulate measures to regulate lavish celebrations. After a year of research among the population, the group of lawyers proposed the draft of the Law to the Parliament of Tajikistan. On June 18, 2007, the government ratified the Law on Ceremonies, with the aim to “secure genuine values of the national culture ... and improve social and economic living stan-

dards” of the population. To prevent the overconsumption, the Law regulates ceremonies as weddings, funerals and circumcision by limiting the number of allowed guests, amount of celebrating hours and cancelling numerous rituals. Concerning the birthday parties, the Law bans its celebration in public space at all.¹ It consists of 16 articles, where each ceremony is elaborated separately. In the same year the Committee on Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies have developed a huge system of monitoring in every district of the country. All local authorities in Tajikistan devoted a special department or committee for regulating the Law on Ceremonies: 68 committees in 68 districts and cities and 427 in rural areas.² Apart from the committees, each state organization, ministry or any other enterprise that employs at least 30 employees has to allocate a small commission that would regulate the implementation of the Law. Hence, a total of 13,939 commissions were opened by 2014. Despite the high number of events, local representatives have a list of celebrations and are expected to monitor all under their jurisdiction. In case of violations by the public, the Law brings administrative punishment both to the hosts of the celebration and to the owners of the restaurants and cafes.³

Even if the Law on Regulation of Ceremonies has a wide and updated monitoring system, it does not manage to cause the actual reallocation of the budget. As it has been revealed during the research for the MA thesis, the main problem towards adopting the Law is lack of resistance towards cultural and social pressures, lack of knowledge on better money management, and as a consequence huge debts for several years. Looking to the implementation of the law, thanks to its huge monitoring and fining system, people are well-aware of its rules. For example, each respondent have recalled the exact allowed number of guests, amount of

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- 1 Danzer, Alexander et al. “Tajikistan Household Panel Survey: Migration, Remittances and Labor Market.” p. 15.
 - 2 Government of Tajikistan. “Rafti l’roi Qonuni Jumhurii Tojikiston ‘Dar Borai Tanzimi An’ana va Jashnu Marosimho Dar Jumhurii Tojikiston’ [The Flow of Implementation of the Law Regulating Events in the Republic of Tajikistan].” December 2014
 - 3 Government of Tajikistan. The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on Streamlining of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies. Public Law 331, 8 June 2007.

hours, and the allowed events for celebrations. However, still, people, by not understanding the pillars of the Law continue with the needless over-consumption during celebrations.



WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

It would not be accurate to say that rich demanding traditions occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Still, those traditions have expanded and became hardly bearable by the local population. During the last two and a half decades Tajikistan has gone through many hardships, and lavish celebrations can be a way out for the population from the reality. People spend time, efforts, make plans and try to reach the standards set up by their friends/neighbors, in order to keep the status and dignity.

The document shared by the Committee states that in 2014 a total of 156,789 ceremonies were held throughout Tajikistan, for a total estimated expenditures of 569,808,403 somoni (US\$89 million).⁴ On average, each ceremony spent 3634 somoni (US\$568), which the government claims is a dramatic decrease from before the Law having been implemented. The way of estimating those numbers is already a huge question that remained not-answered by the respective Committee. Still, the maximum the Committee could count is spending on a restaurant, covered by the groom; remaining uncounted other events organized by the bride and groom, dowry from the side of a bride, oshi nahor, dowry-presents from the side of a groom, engagement and nikoh spending, and many other expenses that vary in different districts.

The issue that the Law was not understood by the population was highly argued during data collection for the research. According to the data from the Committee, the government organized 16,777 meetings with local populations during 2007-2014, ex-

4 Using exchange rate of S6.4:US\$1 per National Bank of Tajikistan (NBT), July 2015.

plaining the objectives, goals and conditions of the Law. The audience included students, civil society members, local activists and other local populations. However, a number of randomly selected respondents stated only the prohibitions of the Law, without understanding the main aim of reallocation of the budget. Even if those meetings actually took place, now, in the frames of a current crisis, we have migrants returning back home, who are not aware of the pillars behind the Law.

Now let us look to the current situation. The middle age of Tajikistani population is 22, saying that the majority are young and potential subjects to the Law on Regulations.⁵ According to the recent report of the Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, the rate of marriages from 2009 to 2014 has been decreased from 100.7 to 95.5 per 1000 persons, whereas this data directly contradicts with the data to the Committee on Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies. At the same time the report claims an increase of divorces from 5.6 in 2009 to 9 per 1000 persons.⁶ Here we can refer to the media, which highlights the recent boom of divorces in Tajikistan, directly related with the migration to Russia.⁷

2015 happened to be disastrous for the Tajik economy due to the rapid decrease of remittances from Russia. The increased number of unemployed population can be explained by the crisis in Russia, where the migrants mainly head to. Migrants, receiving their salaries in Russian Rubles lost nearly a half of the value because of exchange rate fluctuations. Migration agencies do not state numbers, but many migrants return home as they cannot bear their families and stay in Russia for the salary they get. Official rate of unemployment is less than 5 per cent. However, young people walking in groups down the streets during the working days vividly ruin reliability of the official data on unemployment. According to official data, the rate of remittances has fallen by

5 TajStat. "Tajikistan in Figures" (2013).

6 TajStat. "Tajikistan Begins Using New Poverty Measurement Methodology to Strengthen the Country's Poverty Reduction Efforts" (2015).

7 Rahmonali Dodarkhujaev. "Tajik Labour Migration Boosts Divorce Rates". Global Voices, Central Asia. January 2016.

65 per cent during January-September 2015 in comparison with the same period in 2014.⁸ Migrants' remittances to Tajikistan previously have been a major source of foreign currency in Tajikistan, which have led to a fall of Tajik somoni.

Tajik somoni lost half of its value to the US dollar during 2007-2016, from the rate of exchange of S3.44 to the dollar 2007 to S7.83 in 2016.⁹ Consequently, the prices for everything have increased twice at a minimum. The recent turmoil with the US dollar in Tajikistan must be mentioned. The Tajik National Bank has accused the exchange spots in the streets as a reason for a crisis/deficit of US dollars in the banks of Tajikistan.¹⁰ These prohibitions now lead to the establishment of a black market. If the official rate of the US dollar is 7.83 (as of February 9, 2016), people referring to the banks are not able to purchase the foreign currency. Thus, people do purchase dollars from each other unofficially with a far higher exchange rate.

Consequently, the population of Tajikistan faces hardships now much more, than it was during the last 8 years of the Law's existence. Hence, understanding the aim of the Law for the budget reallocation is a matter of survival and healthy nutrition for any random family in rural spaces. Therefore, certain amendments in the Law that would have contributed to the understanding of the population are necessary to implement as soon as possible.

8 Fews Net. "Remittances Continue to Decrease Alongside Depreciation of the Tajik Somoni". Famine Early Warning Systems Network. January 2016.
9 TajStat. "Tajikistan in Figures." (2013), NBT. Exchange Rate as of February 9, 2016.
10 Asia Plus. "Natsbank RT Raz'yasnii Prichiny Zakrytiya Obmennykh Punktov" [National Bank Clarified the Reasons of Closing Exchange Points]. December 4, 2015.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the research conducted and the current trends in Tajikistan, instead of forcefully banning overconsumption it would be more effective to require passing small trainings for couples before registering their marriage. This training could include not only the better way of money management and budget reallocation, but also family planning.

Under family planning it is meant to explain the importance of children planning in accordance with the financial situation of the family: explaining the values of providing for qualified education, good nutrition and consequent importance of contraception in the family. The population of Tajikistan is rapidly increasing while the state is the poorest in the region with the high rate of returning migrants. At the same time, we can see families in the rural spaces with 5+ children, which give some food for thought. Moreover, family planning could cover common plans for the future, or discussion of the work the couple would be engaged in.

Another positive point of those preliminary seminars could be finding out more about each other. Arranged marriages are still practiced both in rural and in urban spaces, and couples blindly bound their lives with the person they do not know. Thus, these seminars can contribute to better understanding of each other, and setting some goals for the future.



IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The process of registering marriage already includes a list of requirements as passing the medical checks, submitting list of cer-

tain documents, arranging celebration etc. Thus, the prior family planning training could facilitate taking wise decisions from the very beginning.

At the same time, the committee has nearly 14 thousand commissions widely distributed all over Tajikistan. Consequently, before giving a permission to register the couple, the commission could require the approval document about passing the training on family planning. At the same time, it is highly important to monitor the trainings themselves and observe the comprehension of the couples as far as the information provided. By these observations, training can be developed and improved in the way that is understandable to different audiences. Moreover, it is required to prepare respective trainers for the particular seminars.



CONCLUSIONS

In the current situation, the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on the Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies brings an important message for every household. People have to be more critical to traditions around and think more of budget reallocation in the families. However, forcefully implemented measures do not contribute to the understanding of the population of the Law on Ceremonies. Thus, people by obeying the articles of the Law continue overconsumption in unregulated activities.

Consequently, this paper proposes an urgent amendment to the Law on Ceremonies, as to add family planning trainings for each newlywed couple. These seminars can contribute to the understanding of the population about efficient budget reallocation. In light of the Law on the Regulation of Celebrations the seminars can be included into the scope of work of already created commissions.



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