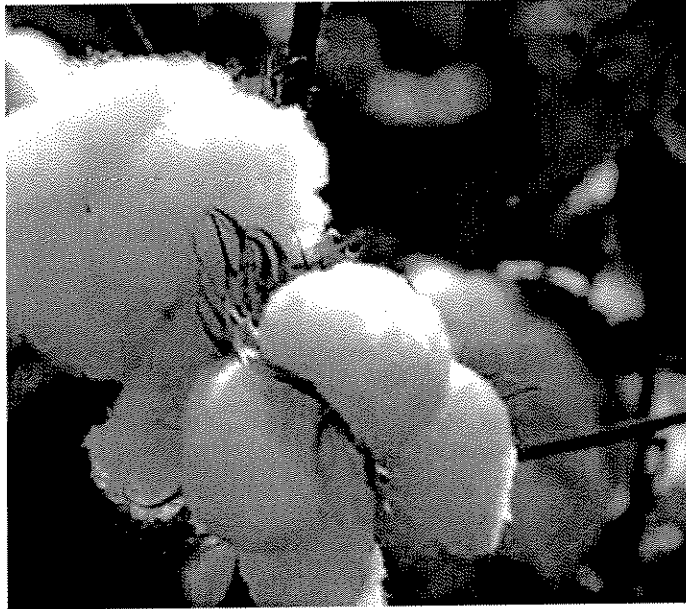


# **Labor Conditions in the Tajikistan Cotton Industry**



**A research report conducted by the  
International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) and  
the Tajikistan Social Institute for Youth and Civilization**

**August 2007**



[www.laborrights.org](http://www.laborrights.org)

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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Over the past five years, the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) has received growing evidence of systematic conditions in the cotton industry that lead to widespread use of forced and child labor, affecting millions of children and adults in countries including India, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Egypt, Pakistan, and China. ILRF is committed to building awareness of the worldwide problem, promoting the use of trade policy instruments to combat child labor in global cotton production, and building ethical alternatives to cotton produced by forced and child labor. This report is the result of a targeted initiative in Central Asia, due to the extent of cotton production in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan combined with the politics of operating within the world's most repressive regimes.

With support from the Open Society Institute, ILRF partnered with the Social Institute for Youth and Civilization in Tajikistan and its network of advocates in the Khojand area to address forced and child labor in cotton harvesting.

Project partners conducted an extensive research study of farmers and workers (students) through surveys and roundtable discussions, primarily in the Sughd region. Researchers surveyed 101 students. Partners in Tajikistan also analyzed contracts signed between administrators and students at four state universities, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the 2006-2007 school year regarding state mandates for cotton harvesting.

The research revealed considerable human rights and environmental concerns within Tajikistan's cotton industry. There are numerous factors contributing to the problem, including a complex and repressive relationship among the government, investors, and farmers, state imposed quotas with short production lead times, ignorance and lack of enforcement of legal rights, low quality raw production, lagging infrastructure and environmental factors, and ultimately, corruption.

Failure of the government of Tajikistan to enforce national legislation against forced and child labor and to implement its international human rights commitments will further contribute to the country's notorious human rights record and the region's environmental degradation. To effectively address the myriad human rights and environmental problems in Tajikistan's cotton industry, ILRF and project partners provide specific recommendations for key institutions in Tajikistan and international NGOs at the end of this report.

## I. DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL PROFILE OF TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan has a population of 6.3 million people, nearly half of whom are under 14 years of age. The major religion is Islam, and major languages are Tajik, Uzbek, and Russian. Average life expectancy is 61 years for men and 66 years for women.<sup>1</sup>

Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Tajikistan was heavily ruled by the Turks, Mongols and Uzbeks. The Russian Empire took over Tajikistan from the Uzbeks. During that time (1897-1917), the nation experienced many economic and political advances, including the introduction of cotton. A revolt against Russian forces beginning in 1916 led to the Russian Revolution and the eventual transformation of Tajikistan into a full Soviet republic in 1929.

During the 1980s a social movement began that led to Tajikistan's declaration of sovereignty in 1991. However, civil war soon broke out. The war lasted five years (1992-1997) and resulted in nearly 50,000 lives lost, 500,000 people homeless, a crippled economy, and a legacy of political corruption and violence. ██████████ was elected president in 1994, and due to a referendum approved in 2003, is set to remain in power until 2020. International observers report that the elections that assured his power have been neither free nor fair. Further, relations with neighbouring countries are hostile, particularly with Uzbekistan.

As a result of this political chaos, Tajikistan is rife with human rights abuses. Human Rights Watch reports that fraudulent elections, media censorship, religious persecution, obstruction of political opposition, and abuses by security forces are among the country's most serious human rights problems.

## II. LEGISLATION REGARDING LABOR RIGHTS

At least in theory, Tajikistan is in full compliance with the international treaties on labour standards. Labor rights provisions are stipulated in the Labour Code of Tajikistan.

**Forced Labor:** Article 8 of the Code prohibits forced labour except when performed during military service and in extreme circumstances. The Civil Code of the Republic of Tajikistan (Chapters 800-802) states that contractual obligations can be changed only by the mutual agreement of all parties, and it is prohibited to place additional obligations on the parties. Article 35 of the Constitution of Tajikistan prohibits forced labour and involvement of women and children in hazardous and underground work. It also guarantees the right to labour, free choice of profession, protection of labour, and social guarantees from unemployment and equal wages for equal work.

**Child Labor:** The Labour Code established a minimum age of 15 for employment in Tajikistan; in exceptional cases (and with the consent of parents and the Commission of Youth Affairs of the local council) employment is allowed for children of age 14 years as trainees performing uncomplicated work. The Labour Code also specifies the amount of hours that minors are allowed to work: between 15-18 years of age the working hours cannot exceed 35 hours per week, and minors between the ages of 14-15 cannot exceed 24 hours of work per week. Tajikistan law also prohibits the labour of persons under the age of 18 in

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News, Tajikistan Country Profile, March 29, 2007. United Nations 2005 statistics.

underground, hard labour, in harmful working conditions, lifting and carrying heavy weights and in other cases determined by law.

The Labour Code provides specific stipulations for students; work hours are restricted to only half of those allowed for non-student minors, and students are entitled to supplementary paid vacations, shorter working hours, and other privileges.<sup>2</sup> Further, Article 19 of the Labour Code prohibits the disruption of the direct duties of education professionals and involvement of pupils and students in agricultural and other labour activities not related to the academic process.

Chapter 26, Paragraph 4 of the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Education” states: “In educational institutions, regardless of organizational legal forms and form of ownership, it is prohibited to divert pedagogical workers from performing their primary responsibilities, involve students, pupils, learners, post-graduate students to agricultural and other works not related to education and upbringing.”

Despite these theoretical legal protections, local authorities and school administrations continue to compulsorily involve students in an annual cotton-picking campaign that they claim to be “voluntary.”

**Health and Safety:** Worker safety is addressed in Tajikistan’s Criminal Code. Article 154 includes punishment for infringement of safety measures for workers. Article 8 of the Labour Code stipulates that employers and local officials are responsible for maintaining healthy working environments, including sanitary and epidemiological safety, disease prevention, and informing workers about safety issues.

Tajikistan is also a party to numerous international human rights treaties to protect workers, including the following United Nations (UN) and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions:

- UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- ILO Convention on Minimum Age (1973);
- ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999);
- ILO Convention on Forced Labor (1930); and,
- ILO Convention on Abolition of Forced Labor (1957).

According to the Constitution of Tajikistan and the Law on International Legal Acts of 1999, Tajikistan recognizes these international agreements as a fundamental element of the country’s legal system. However, in practice these protections are not enforced.

### III. OVERALL ECONOMY OF TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan is widely recognized as the poorest of the post-Soviet republics. The civil war severely affected the country’s economic and physical infrastructure, causing a decline in already frail industrial and agriculture production. In 2002, Tajikistan was ranked number

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<sup>2</sup> Articles 186, 187, 188 of Tajikistan Labour Code.

103 among 162 countries by the Human Development Index, and since then has only risen 11 points.

Tajikistan's economy is mainly driven by agriculture and depends highly on the export of cotton both as a source of income and employment. Agriculture accounts for 60-70% of employment and 20% of GDP. As of 2005, the country's GDP was \$2.3 billion. Tajikistan lost more than 50% of its GDP during the civil war, as well as an estimated \$7 billion in physical damage.<sup>3</sup> The country's main exports include cotton, aluminium, electricity, fruit, and textiles. Cotton and aluminium provided 80% of total export earnings in 2004.

“Continued privatization of medium and large state-owned enterprises would further increase productivity, however, [Tajikistan's economic situation] remains fragile due to uneven implementation of structural reforms, weak governance, widespread unemployment, and the external debt burden.”  
- CIA World Factbook

An estimated 67-80% of the country's population lives below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> Over two thirds of the population lives on less than \$2.15 a day. The average monthly salary is slightly above \$20 and the unemployment rate remains high.<sup>5</sup> The majority (74%) of Tajikistan's impoverished population resides in rural areas.

Since the civil war, the country's economic woes have been further exacerbated by a lack of progressive investment in the agriculture sector and environmental degradation. Arable land decreased from 905.6 thousand hectares to 718.6 between 2004 and 2005, largely as a result of water mismanagement.<sup>6</sup>

#### **IV. TAJIKISTAN'S COTTON INDUSTRY**

According to the Asian Development Bank's Country Strategy and Program Update for 2005-2006, cotton - Tajikistan's only commercial crop - contributes 15% of the country's exports, 39% of tax revenues, and 22% of the GDP, and employs 50% of the country's labor force. As the fourth largest exporter of cotton in the world, there is a great demand on workers to maintain production.

##### ***History of Cotton Production in Tajikistan***

Prior to the country's independence, the Soviet Union provided all financing for the country's cotton industry. The Soviet Central Planning Authority set production quotas for the country each year. Tajikistan's Ministry of Agriculture was given inputs including infrastructure services to plan production for the year. AgroProm and the Ministry of Agriculture were responsible for allocating the capital necessary to meet target quotas established by the government to local administrators known as Hakumats.

The targets given to the Hakumats were based on the determined quality and production capabilities decided by the Ministry, however the Hakumats paid little attention to these recommendations and simply passed unrealistic quotas on to farm managers. The farm managers were nominated by Hakumats and elected by their workers, who received salaries. Both the farm managers and workers received in kind basic necessities or other products at subsidized prices.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org).

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org).

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, Tajikistan Country Brief 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Tajikistan state statistical committee.

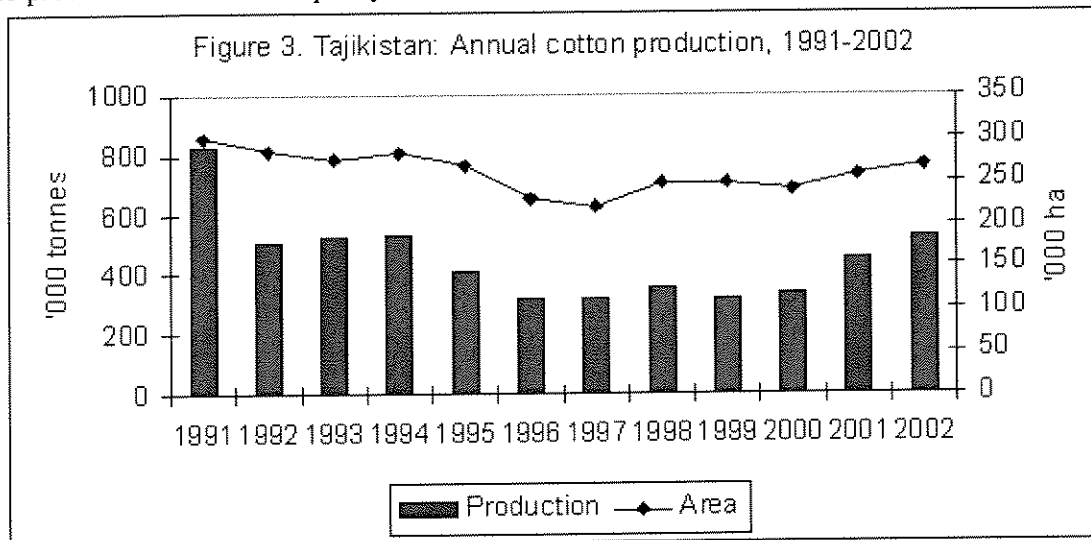
The raw cotton was transported to assigned ginneries for further processing and then to the appropriate Soviet authorities. Meticulous production records were kept whereby payments were made back to AgroProm against the farmer's account. Farmers did not meet the allocated quotas were generally replaced.

After the civil war, the government lacked the resources necessary to sustain cotton production. As a result, independent financiers emerged to provide an alternative means of financing for the country's industry. [redacted] was the first such company, which company lent the government \$138 million USD from [redacted]. Other foreign financiers began entered the financing market and making loans directly to farmers through local brokers in Tajikistan.

The primary public financing institution for the cotton industry is [redacted] (formerly [redacted]). However, foreign financiers have followed [redacted]'s lead by entering the market; they are commonly referred to as "futures companies" that loan through local brokers. Newly restructured farms enter into contracts with these futures companies, who provide inputs up front on credit to the farmers. In exchange, farmers are expected to produce a certain amount of cotton destined for predetermined gins. Once the raw cotton is processed into lint for export, the farmer's account is credited based on the prevailing price on the Liverpool Stock Exchange. If the farmer does not deliver the expected amount of cotton, debt is incurred with accruing interest.

### *Cotton Production Trends*

Since becoming a sovereign nation in 1991 and the subsequent civil war, Tajikistan has experienced a sharp decline of nearly 200,000 tons of cotton production. While production increased somewhat between 1991-2002 (as demonstrated in the figure below), the level of production in comparison to areas planted indicates a lack of the country's ability to produce at maximum capacity.



Source: FAO/WFR Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Tajikistan August 1, 2002  
 Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y7285e/y7285e00.htm>

Cotton production decreased again in 2005, due to poor weather and fewer planting areas. Poor quality inputs and the industry's lack of mechanization continued to affect overall production, as evidenced in the following table.

Production and Yields of Major Agricultural Crops, 1985-2005					
	2004	2005		2004	2005
<i>in thousands of tons</i>			<i>in kilograms per hectares</i>		
Production			Yield		
<i>of which:</i>			<i>of which:</i>		
<b>Raw cotton</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>Raw Cotton</b>	<b>1910</b>	<b>1516</b>
Grain	734	935	Grain	1970	1970
Feed corn	295	339	Feed Corn	14223	12210
Potatoes	527	555	Potatoes	17400	19620
Vegetables	679	718	Vegetables	18300	18680
Fruits	144	148	Fruits	2400	2430
Hay	443	219	Hay	2060	1380

Source: Tajikistan State Statistical Committee, Available at: <http://www.stat.tj/english/tables.htm>

### ***Cotton Growing Regions***

Tajikistan is separated into five different regions/provinces. The two main cotton-producing regions are the Khatlon region and the Sughd (Leninobod) Region. While 93% of Tajik land is mountainous, nearly seven percent (7%) of the country's arable land is located in the Sughd and Khatlon regions. According to the World Bank, 65% of Tajikistan's total population lives in these two regions. Within these two regions, 72% of the population are considered "poor" and 75% are considered "extremely poor".

The Sughd region is located in the northwest corner of the country well known as the Fergana Valley, bordering Uzbekistan to the west and Kyrgyzstan to the east. There are sixteen different districts in the area, most of which are the country's most fertile cotton producing land.

The Khatlon region is the most populated region and is located in the southwest region of Tajikistan and includes about 25 different districts. Afghanistan borders the region to the southeast and Uzbekistan borders Khatlon to the west. A listing of districts in the Sughd and Khatlon regions are included in the appendix.

### ***Tajik Cotton Export Market***

The State Committee on Statistics for Tajikistan estimated that during the first nine months of 2006, cotton fiber exports consisted of 7.9% of Tajikistan's total exports. However, during the same nine-month period in 2005, cotton fiber exports equalled 74,000 tons, earning \$79.5 million USD. The estimated loss is approximately \$6.6 million USD due to lagging exports in 2006. The following table demonstrates the revenue from exports between 2000 and 2005.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	<i>In Millions of US Dollars</i>					
Total exports, fob	784	652	739	797	915	909
Cotton fiber	84	762	128	193	162	144
Electricity	92	79	67	55	58	53
Other	608	511	544	549	695	712



Source: Tajikistan State Statistical Committee, Available at: <http://www.stat.tj/english/tables.htm>

Tajikistan consumes approximately 10-12% of its total cotton production (approximately 25,000 tons of raw cotton fiber) for its limited textile industry. The remaining amount of cotton fiber is processed in Tajik gins into yarn for export or exported as fiber. Russia is consistently Tajikistan's primary export market, holding nearly 30% of the market share. Tajik cotton fiber is also sold on the Liverpool Cotton Exchange, and to brokers in Latvia and Switzerland. Other CIS countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are among the top importers of Tajik cotton fiber. The *Tajikistan Daily Digest* cited the largest cotton importers during the first period of 2005 as Latvia with 48.3%, Russia with 24.9%, Iran with 14.7%, Switzerland with 6.7% and China with 4.7%.<sup>1</sup> Tajik cotton also appears in various forms in Asian markets including Thailand, Korea, Vietnam, and Bangladesh.

## V. LABOR RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN TAJIKISTAN'S COTTON INDUSTRY

There are significant and growing concerns regarding Tajikistan's deteriorating human rights record, both directly and indirectly linked to cotton production and export. Major human rights concerns in the cotton industry include child labor, forced labor, health and safety violations, inhumane working and living conditions, and inadequate payment, as described below. In addition to these human rights concerns, Tajikistan's extensive cotton production and mismanagement of natural resources is a major factor in the country's environmental degradation.

### *Child Labor*

Given the dearth of capable adults, cotton producers have come to rely on illegal labor from minors to meet state-imposed production quotas. The civil war in the 1990's significantly affected the size of the population, as approximately 50,000 people were killed. Further, approximately 630,000 capable working adults leave Tajikistan every harvesting season for higher paying jobs, primarily in Russia. Many child laborers are forced into their work, as described below.

Child labor is undeniably cheap and immensely profitable. "Children as young as seven are forced to assist with the harvest in all five Central Asian states. In 2004, almost 40% of Tajikistan's cotton was harvested by children."<sup>7</sup> In 2005, approximately 22,775

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<sup>7</sup> "White Gold: The Trust Cost of Cotton" Environmental Justice Foundation, 2005.

people worked to harvest the cotton crop in the Sughd region alone. Most of the laborers were young students under the age of eighteen.

### ***Forced Labor***

Each year, thousands of students are mobilized for the state's cotton harvesting campaign using various threats and violent intimidation tactics at the hands of teachers and university administrators. Despite a clear stipulation in the Law on Education protecting the rights of students from illegitimate action by administrators and teachers, students' rights are routinely violated.

Many universities have specific stipulations against conscripted labor, but these are also empty regulations. Over 500 students at one university alone, ██████████, are forced to abandon their schooling to participate in the state's cotton-picking campaign. Students who refuse to participate are sanctioned heavily, from expulsion to violence. At the ██████████ University ██████████, for example, dozens of students are expelled each year for ignoring the university's cotton-picking campaign (an internal campaign which is in itself illegal).

Of the 101 students surveyed by researchers for this report, 98% had participated in cotton harvesting; 57% did not do so voluntarily. Many students specifically stated that they were forced to participate in cotton harvesting; 76% were threatened with expulsion, exam failure, and debt. Some students are able to pay their way out of the conscripted labor, but they likely face other punishments. An overwhelming majority of students surveyed (88%) indicated that they would prefer to study rather than pick cotton.

Not only are students across the country forced to work against their will, but they are also demanded to reach unrealistic state-mandated production quotas. Most student are not paid if they do not meet these quotas, and over half (52%) of surveyed students admitted to being forced to do additional work if they failed to meet their quotas, including sweeping, cooking, cleaning, picking cotton in the dark, and other punishments.

### ***Working Conditions***

Workers' health and safety is routinely placed in jeopardy by the practices of the Tajik government in compelling labor for cotton harvests. Workers are forced to toil long hours, are exposed to hazardous work (including toxic pesticides), experience inadequate shelter and food, limited access to clean drinking water, and lack medical attention.

Because of the unrealistic state-mandated quotas, many students and children are forced to work extremely long hours, many past dark. Surveyed students remarked that, "At nights we picked the rest of the unpicked cotton" and, "at nights we were not allowed to sleep – we were forced to cut wood."

<p>"At nights picked cotton in order to meet the quota" - Tajik student</p>
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Further, working conditions are unsafe due to a lack of law enforcement supervision. Eighty percent (80%) of surveyed students noted that they were not guarded by law enforcement agencies. While this creates a general safety issue, it also exacerbates problems related to quotas, as workers regularly steal from each other's cotton on the farms where they are paid by the amount produced.

Aside from the detrimental health impact of long hours of manual labor, cotton picking is hazardous in nature. Workers use dangerous equipment and are regularly exposed to toxic pesticides. To further exacerbate these problems, most have no access to medical attention. Surveyed students noted that they were not checked by a doctor for the entire duration they were forced to work in the fields, and even those with obvious illnesses or injuries rarely receive treatment. This neglect results in undue illnesses, complications or even death from untreated illnesses, and even suicide.

### ***Living Conditions***

In addition to inadequate working conditions, the living conditions that students are required to reside in during their labor are also harsh. Nutrition and hygiene are of particular concern. Half of students surveyed complained that the living conditions were “bad.”

In terms of food, students report inadequate calories for the work that is required and unsafe food preparation. A clear majority (72%) of surveyed students described the food as unsatisfactory. Despite a lack of calories, students are often forced to refuse meat when it is offered because it becomes spoiled from not being boiled properly. There is also a general lack of sanitation in preparing meals, resulting from the general poor hygiene at the farms and a lack of clean water for cooking. Some students reported that the only water available was from irrigation canals.

“Even a dog did not eat the food that they organized for us.”  
- Tajik student

Personal hygiene is also a major concern. Students are often promised a bath, but ultimately are forced to take showers outside, enduring cold water and air temperatures, as well as unclean water.

The living arrangements provided for students are often a considerable distance by foot to the fields where they toil (1.5 km on average) and to water sources. Farmers often become irritated by foot traffic through farms. Students are not always provided beds to sleep on or other basic necessities.

### ***Payment***

The amount and frequency of financial compensation is of particular concern. Many students surveyed reported never receiving any payment. This is in large part due to many farmers’ stipulation of paying only workers who pick above their quota. However, as previously mentioned, these quotas are often impossible to meet. Further, the payment that many students would receive often goes directly to their food, or else they are forced to split their salaries with cooks and tea house workers.

In response to how much and how often workers are paid, one student responded:  
“Little! Clean cotton costs \$3.5 USD and we were paid 10 dirhams [approximately \$2USD] for our work. Humiliating.”

### ***Environmental Degradation***

In addition to the myriad human rights abuses inherent in Central Asian cotton production, years of mismanagement of natural resources have resulted in considerable



### ***Farmers' Inability to Access Bank Loans***

Adding to the farmers' persistent indebtedness to investors, farmers lack proper access to credit from banks that would allow for them to purchase necessary inputs through cash or credit. Given the complex relationship with investors, farmers are not allowed access to bank loans that would provide them with hard cash to service some of their debts effectively, purchase materials and supplies at fair market price, and pay their employees properly.

Local farmers surveyed for this study cited their heavy dependence on investor companies as the main reason they are unable to obtain credit from banks. Farmers estimate that a \$2,000 USD loan at a 5% interest rate for 1 hectare of land would be enough to significantly develop the sector at the farmer level. Farmers indicated that direct access to bank credits to develop independent financing operations would considerably improve their financial situation. However, farmers' pre-existing contracts with investors and the absence of bank accounts among farmer companies have kept them from realizing such independent financing.

“Current investor contracts do not place equal responsibilities and obligations between the lender and borrower parties.”  
- *Asian Development Bank*

### ***Duopoly in Purchasing Inputs and Selling Outputs***

The fact that the government and investors are the only entities with which farmers can purchase materials and supplies and sell their cotton contributes to their indebtedness and repression. Investor-farmer contracts (for which farmers have little input) stipulate that investors are solely responsible for providing inputs to farmers, but they are not required to provide them at real market price. As a result, investors provide necessary materials and supplies at a heavily inflated price, thus increasing farmers' indebtedness to them. For example, one farmer in the Zafarabad region recalls paying nearly \$70 USD for 200 kg of saltpetre bypass, a material fertilizer, when the real market price is only \$30 USD. This happens frequently with fuel, which is in short supply and high demand among farmers. Other necessary inputs include seed, fertilizer, and other growing materials and equipment.

Furthermore, once the raw cotton is produced, farmers do not receive the full market price for their raw crop since the state and investors are the only entities to which farmers can sell. The government and joint venture companies are the only entities in the country allowed to purchase raw cotton and produce the cotton to further stages, such as lint, yarn or fabric for export or to be sold for further processing either in the country or abroad. In the Sughd region, for instance, ~~Khujand Invest Cotton~~ and ~~Maschoh Invest~~ are the main procurement companies that contract with international cotton exporting companies such as ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ for international sale of the cotton at its various stages of production.

### ***State Imposed Quotas and Short Production Lead Time***

Unrealistic state imposed quotas on cotton production affect local farmers' ability to decide which types of crops to grow. Heavy influence to grow cotton as the major cash crop originates not just from the state, but also from investors and the prominent “futures companies” in the region (such as ~~Khujand Invest Cotton~~ and ~~Maschoh Invest~~), many of which are owned and operated by relatives of government officials and authorities.

Further, the state and investors tend to operate on very short ordering schedules, leaving farmers little time to pick the cotton and meet a company's order. As a result of this rushed environment, workers are forced to pick cotton for long hours in inhumane conditions.

### ***Ignorance of Legal Rights and How to Protect Them***

Most farmers unfortunately are not privy to financing or legal education that could aid them in reforming their business to be more profitable or ward off the investors' tendencies to exploit their ignorance of their legal rights. This is only exacerbated by the government's failing to enforce existing legal rights, as described later in this section.

### ***Failure to Meet International Quality Standards***

While farmers are forced to purchase inputs at *above* fair market-rate prices, their goods are sold at prices *below* the market rate internationally. Although the government recently adopted a decree to improve cotton to international quality standards, in practice there have been no improvements. The Minister of Agriculture claims that the cotton produced in Tajikistan should meet international standards, but the country still adheres to CIS standards. The CIS standards were developed by Uzbek scientists and do not take into account higher standards in, for instance, the strength of a grade of cotton. The lack of such international standards attributes to the current lower export price of Tajik cotton. The Minister estimates that losses accrued on account of the outdated CIS standards equals on average \$80-85 USD per ton of exported cotton. The Minister projects that the increase in quality standards and shift toward international standards could raise Tajik cotton export profit nearly \$15 million USD in a given year. To make up for the loss in *quality*, farmers are under considerable pressure from the state to produce a high *quantity* of raw cotton, inherently leading to worker rights violations.

### ***Corruption***

All of the above problems are exacerbated by a corrupt political environment. ~~President R. R. R.~~ has made light of the debt issues faced by struggling farmers. On March 9, 2005, the President signed the Farm Debt Resolution Strategy (FDRS) and held a strategy retreat was held in June 2005; in September 2005 the Prime Minister signed the strategy work plan into law. Additionally, an Independent Commission for Debt Resolution was created with representatives from the State Advisor on Economic Policy and the National Bank of Tajikistan. However, these laws did not address fundamental problems in the system, namely a lack of regulatory oversight of investor lending to agriculture.

As the only commercial crop of Tajikistan, cotton is attractive to the local authorities for the purposes of personal financial gain. According to grassroots sources, government representatives are "involved" in illegal revenue generation from investors and farmer cooperatives. Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Tajikistan 144 out of 159 countries. Tajikistan has made some attempts, at least on the surface, to combat corruption by trying officials and judges for taking bribes. Given that the current practice of cotton harvesting and production gives millions of US dollars to government officials and investors, the policy of monoculture is not likely to change. At least 10% of cotton export revenues go directly the budget of republic, and likely the pockets of its officials.

### ***Lack of Enforcement of Labor Rights***

Despite Tajikistan's international commitments to protect labor rights and significant related developments in national legislation, these laws are continuously violated. Factors include the inefficiency of law enforcements system, soft sanctions for violation of laws, small labor force, abuse of power and positions, and widespread corruption.

On January 1, 2003, the government held a special meeting to address forced labor of students in cotton fields, in theory emphasizing that such a practice is prohibited. The resulting Decree No. 87 (February 14, 2003), issued by the Minister of Education, states that all heads of regional, city and district Departments of Education must prohibit forced labor of students. However, this decree has been continuously ignored by the local administrators.

Labor laws in Tajikistan are "enforced" through a weak system of labor inspection. There are few labor inspectorates for the number of establishments they have to cover. Worse, the inspectors are untrained, underpaid, inefficient, and in most cases, corrupt. Their budget is very limited that they cannot travel even outside the major cities, and thus cannot monitor the agricultural industry where the most of the children work. Despite a State Labor Inspection decree to receive and consider complaints about labor rights infringements and take measures to eliminate violations, in practice this decree is not followed. For example, in 2004, six workers submitted written complaints to the Office of Public Prosecutor in the Sughd region regarding forced labour, but the government ignored their claims.

Provisions to protect workers under the Labor Code are not observed either. One factor is that the fines for such violations are too minimal. According to Article 41 of the Administrative Code of Tajikistan, fines for labor rights violations range from only one to ten minimal wages (\$2.50 USD to \$25 USD).

### ***Legalization of Forced Labor in University Contracts***

Universities in Sughd region frequently abuse their authority, setting illegal conditions for enrolling students by mandating their participation in cotton harvesting. Students enrolled are forced to follow clearly illegal and unconstitutional requirements. "Contracts" between administrators and students are not analyzed by the public attorney's office. The forced labor inherent in these contracts is a blatant violation of the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, Civil Code of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan

One third (32%) of students surveyed for this study were not familiar with these contracts; of those who were, students noted only vague mention of cotton harvesting. Many contracts simply state that "students must participate in public events," leaving the universities free to interpret the "agreement" as "willingness" to participate in cotton harvesting. The four universities analyzed within this study address the issue accordingly:

- ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~  
According to university contracts with students, students must follow all the orders of ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ Paragraph 4.1.5 includes a provision whereas, "The Student must take active part in the public life of the University, including agricultural events, at the order of the government authorities". A description of these "events" is conspicuously vague.

- [REDACTED] The university's contract with students does not have provisions specifying KSU's responsibilities to create conditions necessary for successful and fruitful study of students and providing maximum opportunities for them to thrive. Contracts state that KSU reserves the right to expel a student if s/he does not follow the internal rules. As a result, dozens of students are expelled from the University each year for ignoring the cotton-picking campaign (by violating the internal rules of the University).

- [REDACTED] Chapter 3 of TSUC's agreement with its students stipulates that students are obliged to take part in the public life of the University, city and region. Again, "public life" is conspicuously vague and open to free interpretation by the university.

- [REDACTED] As with other universities, [REDACTED] contract with its students mandates participation in "public events." In this agreement, [REDACTED] reserves the right to expel students from the University for violating any provisions of the contract. Each year, more than 500 students from [REDACTED] are forced to participate in the country's cotton-picking campaign as a "public event."

### ***Lagging Infrastructure and Environmental Factors***

Tajikistan's cotton growing capacities are decreasing while Tajik raw cotton is sold for exceptionally understated prices. Surveyed farmers cited transportation as a primary challenge - there is already such an extensive shortage of fuel that in some districts there isn't enough to transport harvests in the fields to the ginning plants for further processing.

Farmers lack the knowledge (and the access to gain such knowledge) of better business practices, including bank financing and modern technology to create higher yields of better quality cotton. Tajikistan's lagging infrastructure and very low mechanized cotton industry result in lower crop yields, further exacerbating the pressure on farmers to produce greater quantities.

As previously mentioned, years of mismanagement of natural resources have resulted in considerable environmental degradation that will continue to negatively affect cotton production. Rather than addressing the root cause of the problem by repairing the drainage system years ago, Tajikistan and neighboring countries have instead kept moving to new plots of land and destroying them as they go along. Over one-third of previously arable land has been destroyed by salinization. This factor is expected to continue to increase as the government continues to neglect its ailing natural resource infrastructure.

All of the combined factors leading to farmers' heavy debt lead to the need to hire the most inexpensive labor possible. Without access to the cash or credit necessary to mechanize their production, farmers are forced to rely on physical laborers, most often students who are forced to work in the fields.



## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively address the myriad human rights and environmental problems in Tajikistan's cotton industry, the authors recommend the following actions for key institutions in Tajikistan and international NGOs.

### **President of the Republic of Tajikistan:**

- Strengthen control over the activities of local government administrations to prohibit forced labor, particularly forced labor of children. For example, commit all the mayors of cities and districts (official representatives of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan at the local level) to report monthly on their actions to prohibit and prevent forced child labor.
- Create a special monitoring group, consisting of public associations and international organizations, to identify instances of forced labor in Tajikistan.
- Investigate cases of involvement of government officials in corrupt relationships with investors and farmers, and appropriately punish those found guilty of organizing or authorizing forced labor.
- Promote information exchange with the public through the President's web site, and ensure timely and appropriate reaction to citizens' complaints and reports of forced labor in the country.

### **Government of the Republic of Tajikistan should:**

- End the compulsory state procurement system and allow farmers to trade their cotton in the open market.
- Minimize the state intervention in agriculture production at the local and national levels.
- Review the system of state quota and prices paid to farmers that encourage child and forced labor in cotton production.
- Increase the prices paid to cotton producers to reflect real market prices.
- End the practices of mobilization of public employees, students and school children in the annual cotton picking campaign, and punish local officials who are responsible for promoting conscripted labor.
- Adhere to the UN and ILO conventions banning forced labor and child labor and ensure their enforcement.
- Conduct a complete audit of operations of investors (aka "futures companies"), together with the representatives of [REDACTED], to identify and address exploitation techniques.

- Audit contracts between investors and farmers to identify cases of fraud and commitment to forced labor.
- Develop and adhere to an agricultural policy that would facilitate export of crops other than cotton in order to prevent soil depletion and soil erosion.

**International Investment Companies:**

- Strengthen control over the activities of investors and ensure legal, transparent and rational use of funds on their part.
- Demand the use of rigorous independent supply chain monitoring for cotton fiber for export.
- Cooperate with local and international organizations working to prevent forced labor and create a list of investors involved in forced and child labor.
- Publish regular reports on what investment companies are actually doing to prevent exploitation and forced labor.
- Establish policies denying investments for the companies that encourage directly or indirectly forced and child labor.
- Pressure the Tajikistan government to make the cotton sector more transparent and financially equitable.

**Attorney General of the Republic of Tajikistan:**

- Strengthen control over rigorous and mandatory enforcement of the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, Labor Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Education” in relation to forced labor among students.
- Conduct regular inspections of the activities of investors for fraud against farmers.
- Launch criminal prosecution against government officials and school administrators responsible for involvement of schoolchildren, young people and public employees into forced labor.
- End the practice of legalizing forced labor as a “voluntary” participation in the annual cotton-picking campaign, and investigate each case appropriately.
- Investigate cases where students are expelled from schools and universities during the cotton harvest and orders issued by school principals and university heads regarding these incidents.
- Raise the issue of forced labor, fraud by investment companies, and debts of farmers regularly to the Coordination Council of the law enforcement agencies of Tajikistan.

**Minister of Justice of the Republic of Tajikistan:**

- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the national legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan with the aim of implementing international obligations to prohibit forced labor and labor discrimination.
- Facilitate a discussion on the issue of forced labor in Tajikistan and make a legal analysis of the decisions and orders issued by government officials.
- Conduct a legal analysis of contracts between universities and students in order to abolish any provisions allowing forced labor.
- Analyze and legally evaluate agreements between investors and farmers with regard to their compliance with the current legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan.
- Analyze the registration documents of investor companies to monitor compliance with the charter goals and objectives.

**Minister of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan:**

- Prohibit the practice of mass involvement of schoolchildren and students in cotton-picking campaign and ensure comprehensive implementation of the state education program in secondary schools and universities.
- Stop and prevent the practice of “voluntary involvement” of schoolchildren and students in the annual cotton-picking campaign.
- Demand that school principals and university heads strictly follow the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Education” and the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Special and Higher Education.”
- Punish and dismiss those heads of universities and schools who encourage forced labor.
- Create a “Parents’ Committee against Forced Child Labor” for systematic monitoring and analysis of unlawful practices.

**International NGOs:**

- Increase public awareness among consumers of labor abuses in all aspects of the cotton industry, and promote ethical alternatives to cotton produced by forced and child labor.
- Work with local NGOs to effectively assist workers. Specifically, address rehabilitation of former child laborers, legal strategies to sanction offending employers and win redress for abused workers, and engagement with domestic and multinational corporations to push for systematic changes in sourcing practices.
- Support continued domestic advocacy in Tajikistan, including round table discussions with farmers, continued fact-finding regarding the extent of farm debts and their impact on the forced and child labor problem, education and outreach among

university students (particularly regarding contractual obligations to contribute farm labor), and support domestic advocates to bring criminal and administrative cases in local courts.

- Promote the use of trade policy instruments to combat child labor in global cotton production.

**APPENDIX 1: COTTON GROWING DISTRICTS IN TAJIKISTAN**

<b>Districts in the Sughd Region</b>			
Aini	Istarawshan	Quairoqqum	Jabbor Rasulov
Asht	Isfara	Mastchoh	Chkalov
Ghafurov	Kanibodom	Nov	Shahriston
Zafarabad	Kuhistoni	Panjakent	Ghonchi

<b>Districts in the Khatlon Region</b>				
Baljuvon	Ghozimalik	Qabodiyon	Panj	Chubek
Beshkent	Danghara	Qizil-Mazor	Sarband	Jilikul
Bokhtar	Yovon	Qumsangir	Farkhor	Shahrtuz
Vakhsh	Kolkhozobod	Muminobod	Khovaling	Shuro-obod
Vose'	Kulob	Norak	Hojamaston	

## APPENDIX 2: COMPANY LAND OWNERSHIP PER DISTRICT

The information below identifies the major companies, their main activities in Tajikistan, and the amount of land they occupy in descending order (which totals approximately 68,881 total hectares of land in Northern Tajikistan).

Major Cotton Companies Active in Northern Tajikistan	Company Classification	Land Occupation in Hectares
[REDACTED]	Investor / Procurement Company	22,209
[REDACTED]	Investor / Procurement Company	11,667
[REDACTED]		8,600
[REDACTED]	A closed type of Joint Stock Company	5,415
[REDACTED]	Joint Stock Company	5,268
[REDACTED]	Joint Stock Company	2,725
[REDACTED]		2,650
[REDACTED]		2,200
[REDACTED]		2,098
[REDACTED]	A closed type of Joint Stock Company	1,720
[REDACTED]		1,470
[REDACTED]	A closed type of Joint Stock Company	1,017
[REDACTED]	Joint Venture	960
[REDACTED]	Joint Venture	882
<b>TOTAL LAND OCCUPATION</b>		<b>68,881</b>

The Zafarbad district is located in the Sughd region, where much of the farmer surveys were conducted. The Zafarbad district is a major cotton growing area in the Sughd region and serves as a good sample of the presence of invested companies in the country, particularly in the north. There are approximately 1,560 different types of active companies in the region, including joint ventures, state, and private cooperatives. Of those companies, 1,200 do direct business in the cotton industry of Tajikistan. Practically all of the cotton companies active in the Sughd region also do business in the district of Zafarbad. The following chart presents the companies active specifically in the Zafarbad region in descending order, as well as the districts they occupy. Also exemplified are the percentages of the company's holdings in the Zafarabad district in relation to the other districts where they are present in northern Tajikistan.

Company	District	Amount of Occupied Land (Hectares)	Percentage of Total Occupied Land
[REDACTED] Cotton	B. Gafurov	7,545	34%
	Asht	5,417	24.4%
	<b>Zafarabad</b>	<b>3,042</b>	<b>13.7%</b>
	Kanibadam	2,345	10.6%
	J. Rasulov	1,939	8.7%
	Mastchah	1,096	5%
	Ganchi	555	2.5%
	Ayni	200	0.9%
	Istaravshan	70	0.32%
[REDACTED]	Mastchah	7,400	63.4%
[REDACTED]	<b>Zafarabad</b>	<b>4,267</b>	<b>36.6%</b>
[REDACTED]	Zafarabad	2,650	100%
[REDACTED]	Zafarabad	2,200	100%
[REDACTED]	<b>Zafarabad</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>47.7%</b>
	Istravshan	338	16.1%
	J.Rasulov	296	14.1%
	Spitamen	274	13%
	Asht	120	5.7%
	Ayni	70	3.3%
[REDACTED]	<b>Zafarabad</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>52.1%</b>
	Mastchah	487	47.9%
[REDACTED]s	<b>Zafarabad</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE SURVEY WITH SAMADOC FARMER COMPANY AND ITS USE OF STUDENT/CHILD LABOR**

#### **Main information**

Which year was your farm established? 2004

How many hectares of cotton does your farm grow? 6,0

How many employees do you have in your farm? 4

#### **Information about pickers**

How many students work in your farm during the cotton harvest season? 25

For how long do students work in a cotton field? –

How much do you pay for 1 kg of cotton? 13 dirham

How and on what basis are students hired in your farm? Verbal agreement

#### **General Nature of the Activity**

How many employees work permanently in your farm now (2006)? What about last year?  
And in the year of the establishment of the farm? 4

What is the profit of your farm now? No profit

What about in 2005? No profit

And in the year of establishment? – No profit

How much are your employees paid in your farm? 20 somoni

Does your farm have<sup>st</sup> debts from other state/investment farms? Yes

#### **Fertilizers**

Which fertilizers do you use? Ammoniac selytra

Please name your suppliers of fertilizers? from creditors

#### **The price of cotton**

What is the price of cotton? USD 750

Do you think there are alternative buyers of cotton? No

Which companies buy cotton normally? Our creditors sell it to foreign countries

#### **Barriers and Obstacles**



Please tell us how problematic are the following factors for the functioning and development of your business

	Not problematic	Little problematic	Problematic enough	I don't know
Debts	1	2	3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4
Corruption	1	2	3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4
Lack of human resources	1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	3	4
Low salaries for employees	1	2	3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4
High taxes	1	2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	4
Funds	1	2	3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4
Transport	1	2	3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4

## APPENDIX 4: COMPILATION OF SURVEYS OF STUDENT WORKERS

### BASIC INFORMATION:

Sex:

M-61

F-40

*At which university do you study?*

**HFTUT, TGU, TGUK, HGU**

*Which year?*

5<sup>th</sup> -25 people

4<sup>th</sup> - 32 p.

3<sup>rd</sup> .- 24 p.

2<sup>nd</sup> -18p. 1<sup>st</sup> -2 p.

### General information

*Are you familiar with the contracts about training between universities and students?*

Yes

No

*If yes, is the obligation of students to participate in cotton harvesting campaign stipulated in that contract?*

**No there is no mention about that. The contract only says that students must participate in public events. In the contract of TGUPB there is a provision stating that students are obliged to participate in agricultural works. Do not remember. I am not aware.**

*Have you ever participated in cotton harvesting?*

Yes

No

*Which year?* **In 2001 – 2 people**  
**In 2002 – 12 people**  
**In 2003 -25 people**  
**In 2004 – 41 people**  
**In 2005 – 51 people**  
**In 2006 –3people**

*Did you go to pick cotton voluntarily?*

Yes

No

*If not, on what basis:*

***I was forced. The university threatened to expel. On the basis of the TGUPB contract. By the order of the rector (head of the university). For the benefit of the organization.***

*Did the university put conditions in case if you do not participate in cotton harvesting?*

Yes  No

*If yes, what kind of conditions.*

***I was threatened with dismissal. I was threatened with failure at the exams. I was told if I do not go to pick cotton, I will pay 500 somoni or will be expelled. I was threatened that I would not be allowed to do exams. I was told that if I pay I can choose not to go to cotton picking.***

*During the cotton harvesting campaign you prefer (to study or pick cotton)?*

To study   
To pick cotton

*How is cotton picking reflected in your education?*

Well   
Badly   
No reflection

*How do you assess the living conditions?*

Well   
Badly   
No reflection

*Are you satisfied with the food provided?*

Yes   
No

*If not, then why?*

***The same type of food, only pasta, they give us little, the technology of cooking if not observed and the hygiene is observed, not tasty, no sugar, no clean water, we drank from irrigation canals, lack of vitamins. No nutrition. They fed us with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade pasta. Even dog did not eat the food that they organized for us. Everything is boiled and not tasty and the cook was not good. Always the same: pasta and soup, I think the leftovers from lunches were added to dinners.***

*Do you suffer from chronic or serious diseases?*

Yes   
No

*How often are you checked by a doctor?*

Once a week \_\_\_\_\_ 15  
Once in a fortnight \_\_\_\_\_ 7  
Once in a month \_\_\_\_\_ 12  
Never \_\_\_\_\_ 63  
Every day \_\_\_\_\_ 1pers.  
5-6 times a day \_\_\_\_\_ 1pers.

Are you guarded by the law enforcement agencies?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ 17  
No \_\_\_\_\_ 80  
For 2 days \_\_\_\_\_ 2

Who pays for your expenses to visit home?

**No-one. Parents. University has never paid.**

**The visit home was organized by the university and it paid the expenses. The organizers of the university paid the expenses. Until the centre it was paid by the university and after that myself.**

Are you forced to do other additional works, if you don't meet the quota on cotton?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ 52  
No \_\_\_\_\_ 47

If yes, then what kind of work?

**To clean vegetables, sweep the building, help the cook, clean the barrack, some girls were forced to pick to meet quota even if it was already dark, helped in any work, cut wood, help to make fire, carry water, collect wood, at nights picked cotton in order to meet the quota, educational works, do shifts. Pay for expenses. Worked at the university. At nights we were not allowed to sleep, we were forced to cut wood. We were forced to clean toilets. At nights we picked the rest of the unpicked cotton.**

Is your work to pick cotton paid?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ 71  
No \_\_\_\_\_ 28

If yes, how much are you paid and how often?

**Paid only in case if picked a lot.**

**Very little, I do not even remember how much.**

**I was paid after I came back from cotton picking, approximately 20 somoni for each.**

**Paid after each season, depending on how much you picked.**

**Paid only if you picked above the quota.**

*Paid only to those who picked 100-120 kg.  
Paid for ten days, 10 dirhams for 1 kg..  
Paid 40 somoni per month.  
Received 30 somoni for 10 days.  
Received 25 somoni for 10 days, but not in time.  
Received 6 somoni for 10 days.  
Received 15 dirhams for 1 kg. They were late with payment for 1-2 weeks.  
After coming back received 14 somoni each  
Received 9 somoni per week, not in time.  
Paid 7-9 somoni, but not in time, everything depended on the brigadier.  
12-14 somoni per week.  
Little! Clean cotton costs USD 3,5 and we were paid for our work 10 dirhams.  
Humiliating.  
Paid for 10 days depending on how much we picked  
0,25 dirhams for 1 kg, but late.  
20-30 somoni for 10 days.  
0,20 dirhams for kg, but late.  
50 somoni for 30 days, but at the end we did not get even a penny.  
Everything we received we spent on food  
At the end received 89 somoni.  
At the end received only 6 somoni.  
At the en received 23 somoni.  
Don't remember, what we received cannot be called money!  
7 dirhams for kg.  
10-15 somoni for 10 days.  
Paid little and rarely.  
13 dirhams for 1 kg, were paid rarely 30-35 somoni in total.  
Money was taken for food.*

## APPENDIX 5: ADDITIONAL RESPONSES FROM A STUDENT SURVEY

In general in our brigade has 35 people, but the number of people arrived was more than 400. The exact number of students is not disclosed.

They introduced several daily regimes for students:

- 1) The first group wakes up at 4:00 a.m., at 6.00 a.m. they are already in the fields; take a break from 12.00 to 14.00. Then they continue working from 14.00 to 17.00.
- 2) The rest of the students wake up at 6.00 a.m., at 8.00 a.m. they are in the fields, have lunch from 12.00 to 14.00 and from 14.00 to 18.00 they continue working. All of us work eight hours a day.

During these eight hours each student must pick 50 kg. One kg of cotton costs 13 dirhams, but recently I have found out that we will be paid only 12 dirhams, because they need to pay for the work of the tea house people and cooks.

Those who do not pick cotton were subject to the following punishments: some wake up very early in the morning and cut wood to prepare tea. Some clean the places around barracks. These punishments depend on the “teacher’s creativity.”

The distance to the field is approximately 1-1.5 km. We used to walk this distance by foot. Farmers are not happy with us. They say that we are causing only harm. If they pick cotton themselves, they can manage to do it in 10-15 days, but we drag it for a month, and then all the money that we get are from their accounts.

At the beginning the attitude of students was very bad, and then they got used to it. They say as a joke: “Cotton is in the morning and during the day – to work like in heaven, in the evenings to rest like in heaven, and in the nights to sleep like in heaven, because cotton is the symbol of a holiday.”

As expected, the teachers totally support the position of the university.

The hot meal is once a day. We do not complain for food, but some of the food, mainly meat, gets spoiled and we had to refuse food with meat. The food is normal. It costs approximately 3 somoni a day. In the mornings we have butter, one bread for three, and a hot meal for lunch and dinner. The cost of the food is compensated from the cost of the cotton. The food is cooked in the kitchen and we have self-service.

The hygiene is not good. There is no bath, at least for 20 days that I was here, there was no bath.

Cotton picking is a good work from one hand, but on the other hand it is bad.

The first day when we arrived:

- 1) I would like to note that the living conditions were much better than in other barracks. We slept on the floor i.e. there were beddings on the floor and under beddings there was a thin cellophane. There were two small windows in the barrack and we could hardly get light

through them. We were 35 people and we hardly fitted in the barrack. One even slept on a compact bed in front of the door. The barrack was full of mice.

In our barrack we did not have any problems with water. Outside there was a pipe from which we could get water from the lake. After walking we noticed that others had problems with water. Even those who are in the quarters had to walk 100-150 meters to get water. The boys do not have problem with that, but for the girls it was a problem! We had to go with them to get water to drink.

There were problems with the food at the beginning. But it was good that we took water and food for three days.

In the mornings we received butter (one butter for 12 people), sugar and bread (one bread for three). For lunch we ate something light, soup or pasta. There was a problem with lack of calories in food, potatoes were not properly boiled and everything was not boiled properly. Food was prepared in a place with no hygiene. Every day we received meat but it used to get spoiled every day. There was no place to keep that kind of food.

In the first season the payment for food was 2 somoni and 60 dirhams. It was equal to 20 kg of cotton. The menu included only: pasta, vegetable soup, soup with rice and just soup. It was good that once in two weeks they cooked plov and thanks to parents, who came to visit us.

One day during the time when we were picking cotton they announced that cotton costs 20 dirhams. From this they would take 3 dirhams for tax, 2 dirhams for teachers and 2 dirhams to the person who makes tea and to the cook and we would receive at the end 13 dirhams. The payment for cotton is fine but it is not divided into periods. By the way, we received payment only for 15 days, and we were told that we would receive for the other 15 days at the university, as if they did not receive the money yet.

The collective farm made some mistakes. Nobody was there to guard the cotton and as a result while weighing the difference was in tons. They had to subtract it from our kgs. By that time I personally picked more than 500 kg., but received money only for 400kg and the same was with others. Some were even in debt.

Regarding the hygiene, we were promised a bath, but we had to take shower with cold water outside, especially at nights it was cold. Some even had flu. My friend got sick. He even had blood coming out from his nose because of high temperature, but the teacher still sent him to the field. I felt really sorry for him. We were not checked by a doctor from the first day until the end. Here are some examples: today my friend, who had pneumonia three months ago went to see a doctor to complain about pain in his throat. The doctor even did not write him a prescription for medicine. Another sick student went to see a doctor and he was released for 10-12 days. Several days ago one student had pain in his stomach and could not sleep for three days, besides he had a diarrhea. And our "good" doctor did not give him a diagnosis. After three days he was taken to the Zfarabad hospital, where he was treated for three days.

Before we left to pick cotton we found out that one student had rheumatism, but nobody believed him and said that he would go anyways. It has been already five days that he has been suffering from pain. Because of him we hardly sleep at nights. We even took him to the hospital so that he could have some shots from pain. He was released on the sixth day.

One day one student was taken to the hospital with the suspicion of appendicitis, but thankfully those suspicions were not correct.

There are no guards. Although among students of our university there were no accidents, but not far from us someone was killed and there was one suicide.

Once three local guys beat three of our students. One of them even had a knife, thankfully nobody suffered. When we went to help them, local guys run away, but one of my course mates was lying unconscious. After that we did not have any accidents.

One day many students were punished at once for picking little cotton. Some were made to cut wood and some did the cleaning. When the teacher was asked what is the reason for punishment, despite the fact that they picked cotton. He replied it was “for the sake of a matter.”