Notes from the Field: Kulob’s Major Bazar in Fire

By Swetlana Torno

About 85% of the main bazar (market) of Kulob, a city in southern Tajikistan where Swetlana is conducting her field work, burned down on her arrival to the field site in the middle of January. While the speculations about the causes oscillate between a short-circuit fault of the overloaded electricity lines and alleged torching, a lot of people lost their shops and entire array of products which were stored directly in their shops in the market. The cleanup took place in collective efforts from the side of state institutions, NGOs, private persons and volunteers and already three days after the incident the reconstruction works of the bazar began (picture 1). The governor of Kulob city promises that the bazar will be reopened in time for Nawruz festivities, the Persian New Year, and those who lost their shops will soon be able to return to their previous income generating work place. As for now, quick vendors set up provisional stands along the main road, parking lots and free spaces surrounding the market (picture 2).

Since the Independence of the Republic of Tajikistan in 1991, the face of Tajik bazars changed enormously: Whereas during the decade after the Independence women restrained from selling at the markets, today it became one of the main sources for married and single women to generate income for their households and families (picture 3). The burning of the outside parts of the bazar, where different types of garments, fabrics, electronics, leather articles, office and kitchen supplies were sold, on the one hand deprived a profound amount of women of their working place. On the other hand, men who engage in sessional labor or labor migration to Russia and would spend the winter jobless, are now able to find employment in the reconstruction works of the market (picture 1).

Picture 1: Men engage in the reconstruction of the market in Kulob, 2 weeks after the demolition

1 For local media report see http://old.news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/sakhovat-v-ogne, 16.01.2014.
Picture 2: Quick vendors set up provisional stands around the market

Picture 3: The food hall of the marked was spared by fires (about 50% of the vendors on Tajik bazaars today are women)