



Looking back to look forward

Learning the lessons of conflict prevention in the Ferghana Valley



May 2011



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SAFERWORLD

MAY 2011

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Duncan Hiscock and Maija Paasiaro. Field research conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan by Anna Matveeva, Denis Krivosheev and Maija Paasiaro, with the assistance of Malika Boyumradova, Rakiya Abdurasulova and Aina Oskombaevna, contributed to the production of the report. Julie Brethfeld and Luitgard Hammerer also provided useful comments and suggestions and Deepthi Wickremasinghe copy-edited the final report. Saferworld is grateful to all communities, development and conflict prevention practitioners and policy makers for sharing their experience and insights in working in this region. Saferworld would like to thank the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for financial support. The views expressed in the report are those of Saferworld and do not reflect the views of UK DFID or SIDA.

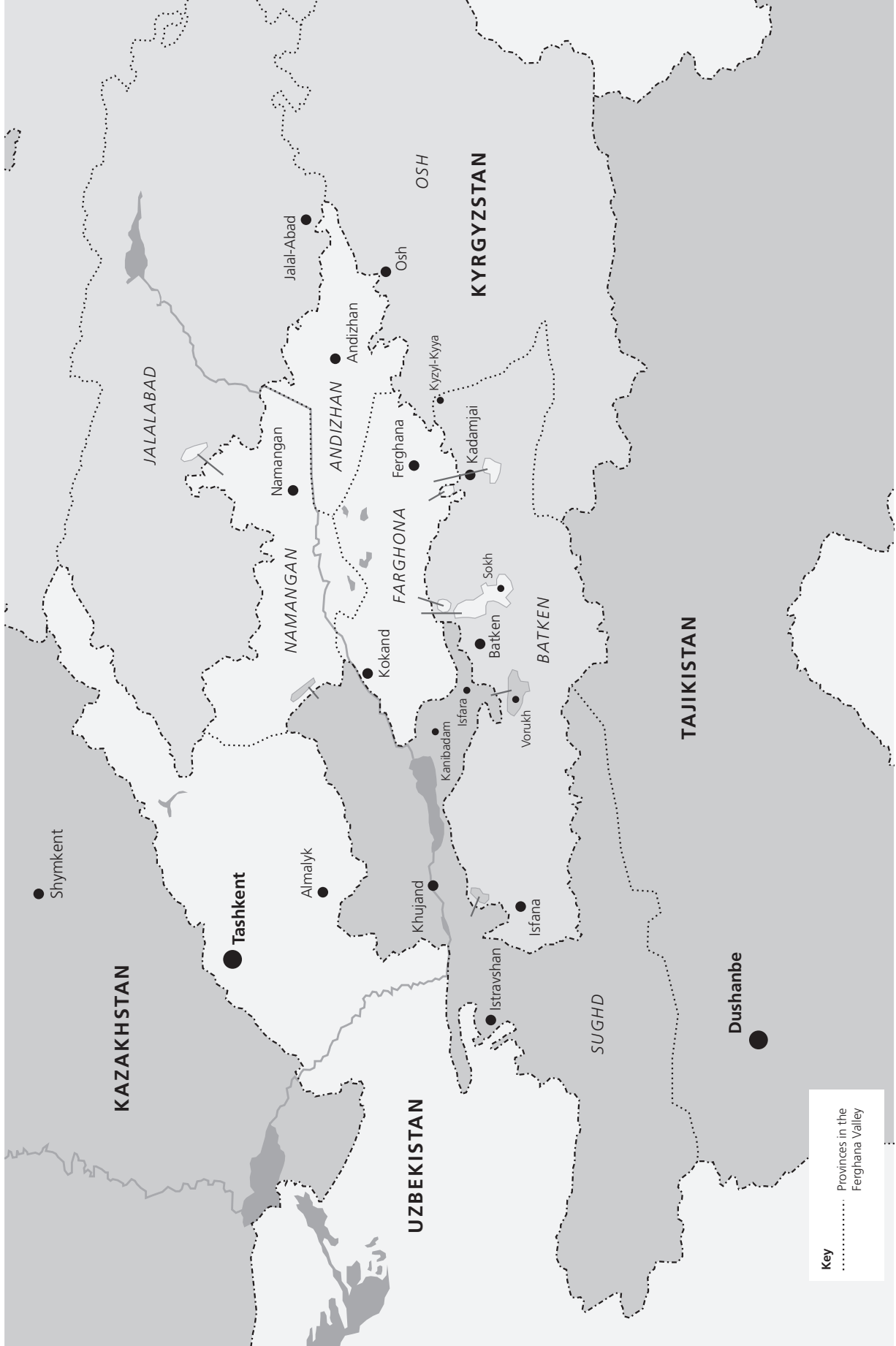
Acronyms

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
BOMCA	Border Management Programme in Central Asia
CADAP	Central Asia Drug Action Programme
CBO	Community-based organisation
CSO	Civil society organisation
EU	European Union
GTZ	German Society for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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Ferghana Valley



Executive summary

THERE HAVE BEEN CONCERNS about the potential for serious violent conflict in the Ferghana Valley for over 20 years. The violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 again demonstrated that these fears are not unfounded and raised the spectre of even more serious bloodshed in the near future.

A variety of international donors have taken an interest in Central Asia since the early 1990s, funding programmes or projects that aim to mitigate or prevent conflict. Types of intervention have included: relationship building; creation and support of capacity to mediate and resolve conflict; community mobilisation; economic and infrastructure rehabilitation; and building local capacity to understand and respond to conflict.

This report asks what can be learnt from previous donor-supported interventions that have directly or indirectly, sought to prevent conflict and promote peace. It is intended that these lessons will inform current and future programming. The report focuses on the voices of the *beneficiaries and practitioners* of conflict prevention interventions themselves to evaluate what has been effective and why. It is structured around a number of issues that have been identified as being central to conflict dynamics in the area:

- Ethno-nationalist sentiments
- Resource shortage and mismanagement (particularly land and water)
- Border (mis-)management and crossing procedures
- Drugs, extremism, organised crime and weapons
- (Weak) governance at national and local levels

For each issue, this paper looks at local perspectives on conflict dynamics, relevant programmes that were undertaken and then at their impact. On this basis, the authors have extracted some lessons and recommendations for the future. There is also a brief section that provides background information on the region and its conflicts for readers who are not familiar with the Ferghana Valley (section 2).

Lessons learnt around building relationships across communities

- Low-cost interventions such as, sports and social gatherings, festivals, teacher exchanges, camps and excursions have the potential to have a high-level impact on the lives and relationships of individuals.
- Rather than international actors or local civil society organisations (CSOs) organising such events for communities, implementing organisations should support community members or local authorities to organise such events themselves. This increases ownership and impact and builds local organisational/mobilisation capacity. It can also improve relations between communities and local authorities where the latter are active participants or organisers.

- Outsiders are sometimes required as facilitators to a process which brings diverse people together, but this should be used to kick-start a longer-term process.
- Tolerance is best taught through encouraging constructive interaction in other activities, rather than teaching people about tolerance *per se*. Hence, any activity can have a positive peacebuilding impact if it brings people from different backgrounds together in a safe and open environment.
- Local CSOs need support and guidance to make sure their ways of working are conflict-sensitive and inclusive.
- Local-level interventions need to be linked to national-level efforts to address the dangers of excessive ethno-nationalist political discourse.

Lessons learnt around conflict-sensitive economic development

- Economic development can have very positive impacts on peace, providing that all the relevant parties believe that they are benefiting equally. It is therefore critical that all economic development programmes in areas at risk of conflict and fragility are *conflict-sensitive* (even if they are not perceived as peacebuilding programmes). Simply put, this means understanding the context and the likely impacts that the programme will have and then planning the programme in such a way that at a minimum it does no harm and ideally maximises the positive impact on peace and conflict dynamics.
- To maximise their peacebuilding effects, economic development interventions should be designed in a way that they strengthen ‘connectors’ and ‘local capacities for peace’ (i.e. existing links between conflicting or potentially conflicting communities and existing individuals, groups, structures or mechanisms with the capacity to affect conflict dynamics).
- Economic development interventions that are intended to contribute to peacebuilding should make this intention explicit and build participatory conflict analysis and regular reflection on their peacebuilding impact into the project design and implementation to ensure local ownership also of the peacebuilding objective of the intervention.
- Infrastructure projects can also have a positive peacebuilding impact, small-scale projects are unlikely to have much wider impact beyond the local level. Again, it is important that infrastructure projects are conflict-sensitive; it is important to avoid creating perceptions that one side is benefitting more than others.
- Key ways to avoid such perceptions are through regular consultation and transparency. Consultation means not only providing information to both target communities and neighbouring communities, but also eliciting their views and ideas and wherever possible including them in the design and management of the project. Transparency means providing information about where money is coming from and how it is being spent, how companies are contracted and how the project is being managed.
- Infrastructure projects are often unsustainable unless they are genuinely locally owned. This means that the local community and the local authorities must have both legal ownership of the infrastructure (as appropriate) and also psychological ownership; i.e. they must have the commitment and capacity to maintain the infrastructure following its initial installation. One way of ensuring ownership during the project period is to require in-kind contributions from the community and/or the local authorities.

Lessons learnt around stopping border management from causing division

- Current methods of border management are unpopular and may in fact fuel further tensions between communities. There is therefore a pressing need for conflict-sensitive border management procedures and policies. In this regard, EU/UNDP support through Border Management Programme in Central Asia is a missed opportunity as it takes a technical approach to integrated border management which is largely blind to the challenges faced by border communities.

- In order to achieve long-term, sustainable improvements in border management and reduce the potential for conflict, local-level initiatives and national-level reform programmes need to be running in parallel and be linked to each other.
- Any specific legislative measures and other procedures that are strongly relevant to border areas should be carefully analysed for their conflict sensitivity; as part of this, consultations should be held with local communities in order to gauge the likely impact of the proposed measures.
- Although local ownership is of course important for the sustainability and success of any project, an international presence can have a positive impact in some areas where leverage is needed for co-operation or compliance. This is therefore an asset which should be utilised strategically. This can include follow-up visits after the project has finished, to evaluate sustainability and to demonstrate that the donor is still interested in the project.

Lessons learnt around a balanced approach to international support

- While there is clearly a need for programmes to address drug trafficking, weapons proliferation, religious extremism and organised crime, international support should be balanced between such programmes and smaller, more flexible programmes that aim to manage and reduce tensions at a local level.
- Even though these issues are highly sensitive, and thus there are difficulties regarding public engagement on such programmes, it is nonetheless essential to ensure that a) more is done to understand the perceptions of local communities who are affected by such problems, to ensure that they do indeed benefit from such programmes; and b) more is done to consult with and encourage the participation of local communities whenever this is feasible.

Lessons learnt around long-term steps to improve relationships between different communities and different authorities

- Community engagement and mobilisation measures should seek to be as inclusive as possible; i.e. including women, youth, religious groups and other marginalised groups as equal participants (and in a way that respects local sensitivities). This may require some creative means of communicating and consulting with members of target communities, beyond meetings and publishing project materials.
- Build on existing structures and groups wherever possible, as these are more likely to be sustainable after the project finishes. This might include village or *mahalla* committees and groups established under the auspices of other/past projects. If these groups are not sufficiently inclusive or participatory, support can be provided to adapt them, or develop better practices.
- It is important to extract lessons from the community level engagement and translate them into policy and advocacy work at higher levels, as well as using them to promote learning horizontally across communities, regions and countries.
- Donors must recognise that community mobilisation is a long-term process and that support is required for longer periods (e.g. four to five years) in order to have an impact (this also applies to monitoring and evaluating the results of such programmes). It may help to run through several mini-project cycles in order to build cohesion and develop the skills of community members.
- Donors must agree to flexible programming that allows implementers to adapt to local circumstances and needs, as the project develops.
- Projects must find an appropriate balance between engaging with communities and working with the relevant authorities (this will depend on the context). Wherever possible, this should include efforts to strengthen relationships between community groups and local authorities. It will often help to ensure that the local authorities have some degree of formal and psychological ownership of projects.

The report concludes that although it is virtually impossible to make a causal link between precise interventions and long-term conflict dynamics, ultimately, based on the perceptions and views of practitioners and beneficiaries, we may take a positive view of the impact of previous conflict prevention interventions. This research finds that there is, in fact, a place for all of the types of intervention described above and measures are needed to address all the conflict drivers that have been identified. However, certain types of intervention appear to have been particularly effective:

- Creating opportunities for interaction in a tolerant atmosphere
- Creating and maintaining relationships to manage and resolve tensions
- Conflict-sensitive economic development.

As interest in the Ferghana Valley increases again in the aftermath of the June 2010 violence in Kyrgyzstan, donors and implementers of conflict prevention initiatives are encouraged to look to the lessons of the past as they design their programmes and projects. Taking into account the lessons outlined in this report and adhering to the basic principles of good development practice as well as providing longer-term and flexible funding streams will contribute to greater impact and sustainability of future conflict prevention initiatives.

1

Introduction

THERE HAVE BEEN CONCERNS about the potential for serious violent conflict in the Ferghana Valley for over 20 years. The violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 again demonstrated that these fears are not unfounded and raised the spectre of even more serious bloodshed in the near future.

A variety of international donors have taken an interest in Central Asia since the early 1990s, funding programmes and projects that aim to mitigate or prevent conflict. This interest has come in waves: some in the 1990s, a peak in the early to mid-2000s and then renewed concern since the violence in 2010. In theory therefore, there is already a great deal of experience of conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities which can be drawn on to inform future programming, both in the Ferghana Valley and elsewhere. Indeed, one commentator described the Ferghana Valley as “a ‘testing’ region” for conflict prevention approaches as long ago as 2001.¹

This report does not claim to be a full evaluation of conflict prevention in the Ferghana Valley, but it has a similar purpose. It asks what we can learn from previous donor-supported interventions that have, directly or indirectly, sought to prevent conflict and promote peace, so that these lessons can inform current and future programming. The paper is structured around a number of issues that have been identified as being central to conflict dynamics in the area. For each issue, this paper looks at local perspectives on conflict dynamics, relevant programmes that were undertaken and then at their impact. On this basis, the authors have extracted some lessons and recommendations for the future. There is also a brief section that provides background information on the region and its conflicts for readers who are not familiar with the Ferghana Valley (section 2).

This research is based primarily on two sets of sources. The first are monitoring and evaluation reports from the programme implementers and donors themselves. The second and more important source of information is a series of interviews and focus groups that were held with target communities and beneficiaries, including local authorities, government officials, local civil society organisations (CSOs) and other practitioners with relevant experience. This field research was conducted in February–March 2010 and updated in July–August 2010. The research team ran focus group discussions and key informant interviews in six parallel communities along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and in one community on the Tajik side of the border with Uzbekistan. Restricted access to Uzbekistan meant it was not possible to meet with communities in Uzbekistan itself. The communities were selected because they have to share resources (across borders or other national and/or ethnic divides) and they

¹ De Martino L, *Peace Initiatives in Central Asia: an inventory*, (CIMERA, 2001), p 2, www.cimera.org/en/publications/situationrep.htm, April 2011.

have experienced several interventions related to conflict prevention in the preceding decade. It should thus be emphasised that while many of the issues identified on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border are likely to be found elsewhere in the Ferghana Valley, it would be wrong to over-generalise about conflict dynamics in the whole valley on the basis of this research alone.

2

Background: The Ferghana Valley and its conflicts

THE FERGHANA VALLEY is a large, fertile valley in the heart of Central Asia that has been home to various different ethnic groups (some sedentary, some originally nomadic) for centuries, even millennia. As in parts of the Ottoman Empire, different peoples settled side by side, usually peacefully, resulting in a patchwork of different ethnic groups being spread across the valley. The Ferghana Valley has never been a political entity as such; different parts of the valley have been parts of various political entities in different periods of history. Like much of Central Asia, the valley came under Russian influence in the 19th Century and eventually the whole territory was formally incorporated into the Tsarist Empire. Moscow's dominance continued during the era of the Soviet Union. After various territorial restructures, Soviet Central Asia consisted of five Soviet Socialist Republics, three of which (the Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek republics) covered the Ferghana Valley. However, although ethnic identity/nationality and language did play a role in political, social and administrative life, they were far from the most important aspects of identity and were rarely seen as potential causes of conflict.

The situation began to change in the late 1980s, as the Soviet Union started to collapse. In 1989, there was serious violence in Soviet Uzbekistan that was primarily directed against Meskhetian Turks (an ethnic group that was displaced from the Caucasus by Stalin in 1944). In 1990, riots in Osh and Uzgen in south Kyrgyzstan resulted in violence between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks, during which around 300 people are estimated to have died.² Although the situation in Osh was brought under control by Soviet troops, both these events were seen as warning signs that even worse violence could occur.

Since then, there have been several other violent incidents that have been devastating in their own right and have demonstrated that a more serious conflict is indeed a risk, including:

- Violence surrounding incursions by Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)³ insurgents into the Batken area of Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000.

² <http://kyrgyzstan.carnegieendowment.org/2010/06/kyrgyzstans-recent-political-history/>, April 2011.

³ Now known as the Islamic Movement of Turkestan.

- The so-called Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, which began in Kyrgyzstan's section of the Ferghana Valley.⁴
- The Andijan uprising in Uzbekistan in May 2005.⁵
- Violence between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in the Osh and Jalalabad regions of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.
- Growing attacks on law-enforcement agencies and other symbols of authority in Tajikistan, including the Ferghana Valley, during 2010.
- The violent overthrow of Kurmanbek Bakiyev's regime in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010.

The violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 (usually referred to within Kyrgyzstan as the June events) was particularly shocking in scale, resulting in hundreds of deaths.⁶ The situation remains very unstable and both experts and ordinary people living in the region fear outbreaks of further violence.

Over the years, numerous academic and policy papers have analysed conflict dynamics in the Ferghana Valley (or parts of the valley). While they inevitably disagree about specifics, most agree about the key factors that affect conflict dynamics. It is also striking that the same factors tend to be highlighted regardless of when these reports were written, suggesting that they have never really been resolved. For the purposes of this paper, these factors have been grouped together into five categories:

- Ethno-nationalist sentiments
- Resource shortage and mismanagement (particularly land and water)
- Border (mis-)management and crossing procedures
- Drugs, extremism, organised crime and weapons
- (Weak) governance at national and local levels.

Poverty is also always identified as a key driver of conflict. The argument usually goes that extremely poor people who struggle to meet their basic needs are more likely to compete for scarce resources and may have less reason to maintain a peaceful *status quo*. This may well be true, but poverty has been excluded from this analysis for several reasons. Firstly, poverty by itself is too general a concept and it is hard to attribute violence or tensions specifically to poverty; after all, there are many places around the world where people live in poverty which still manage to avoid serious violence. Secondly, this paper looks specifically at measures that were directly or indirectly aimed at preventing conflicts and building peace. Poverty reduction measures are indeed crucial elements of conflict prevention – though they are rarely perceived as such – but they do not automatically contribute to conflict prevention or peace-building. This is discussed in more detail below. Questions around poverty are also touched on in the section on resource shortage and mismanagement, given the relationship between productive use of resources and economic development.

This section briefly introduces each of the five categories listed above, explaining how they relate to conflict dynamics and discussing some of the academic literature available on each topic. (Section 4, which looks in more detail at the impact of previous donor-supported interventions, is based around the same five categories; it also looks in more detail at local perceptions of these factors). A short case study at the end of this section reflects many of the issues outlined here and thus gives the reader a sense of the potential for conflict in the Ferghana Valley.

⁴ International Crisis Group, *Kyrgyzstan: After the revolution*, Asia Report No. 97, 4 May 2005, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/097-kyrgyzstan-after-the-revolution.aspx, April 2011.

⁵ In May 2005 a protesting crowd was violently dispersed by the Uzbek government. See: www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/B038-uzbekistan-the-andijon-uprising.aspx, April 2011.

⁶ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry into the events in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, (May, 2011) www.k-ic.org/en/news/364-kic-final-report-published.html, May 2011.

2.1 Ethno-nationalist sentiments

Since Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan became independent countries, there has been a trend towards the reinforcement of ethnic identities and growing nationalism. This rise in ethno-nationalist sentiments may in part be a natural consequence of political independence (and the failure of the Soviet internationalist ideal). However, it has also been manipulated at times by politicians. Nationalist rhetoric has been used either as a strategy for winning votes or to distract the public from other political and economic problems. This has been identified as a major challenge for the region, particularly when the titular nation insists that its language and culture should dominate.⁷ Given the mix of different ethnic groups throughout the Ferghana Valley, nationalist demands risk provoking the hostility of other ethnic groups; this can easily lead to cycles of violence whereby all problems and incidents are increasingly interpreted through the lens of ethnicity, causing inter-ethnic relations to deteriorate rapidly. Such dynamics have been clearly visible in south Kyrgyzstan during and since the June 2010 violence, with hundreds of unsubstantiated rumours circulating about what the Uzbeks, or the Kyrgyz have supposedly done, or are planning to do.

2.2 Resource shortage and mismanagement

Inherent shortages, mismanagement and competition over resources are regularly noted as key drivers of conflict, particularly at local level. This is particularly important with regard to two basic resources: water for drinking and irrigation, due to new national controls over its sources and disputes relating to its shared use; and land, due to shortages and unequal distribution of arable and pasture land. This is often further complicated by newly drawn or still disputed borders (see below).⁸ Most such conflicts are relatively small-scale. Minor skirmishes related to access to and sharing of resources have been reported since Soviet times, but these have occasionally led to larger-scale clashes involving thousands of villagers, sometimes leading to fatalities.⁹ Land disputes also played a role in fuelling the 1990 riots in Osh and Uzgen and have been identified as a growing cause for concern following the violence in Kyrgyzstan in 2010.¹⁰

2.3 Border management and crossing procedures

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the administrative boundaries between socialist republics were suddenly converted into national state borders. For a variety of geographical, historical and political reasons, these borders are rather complicated, twisting in all sorts of unexpected directions and strewn with various enclaves/exclaves (see map). Sometimes, the new borders divided ethnically or socially homogeneous communities; in other cases, peoples who had lived in the same area for decades or centuries suddenly became ethnic minorities in these new states (e.g. Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, Tajiks in Uzbekistan, etc).

These borders have been identified as a major driver of local level conflict. Increasing restrictions on movement of people and goods across previously non-existent state borders – borders that are not clearly demarcated – and the existence of many enclaves and semi-enclaves (remote territories not accessible by road without entering the territory of another state) create tensions between neighbouring communities, as well as between communities and those charged with maintaining border regimes. This has also been described as a symptom of weak governance (see below).¹¹

⁷ For example, Tabyshalieva, A, *The Challenge of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia. Preventing Ethnic Conflicts in the Ferghana Valley*, Peaceworks 28, (Washington: USIP, 1999), www.usip.org/files/resources/pwks28.pdf, April 2011.

⁸ Passon D and Temirkulov A, *Analysis of peace and conflict potential in Batken oblast, Kyrgyzstan*, (Analysis Research Consulting for GTZ, 2004) www.policy.hu/temirkulov/index.files/ARC_GTZ-Report-Kyrgyzstan.pdf, April 2011.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ www.eurasianet.org/node/63289, April 2011.

¹¹ Kuehnast K, and Dudwick N, *Whose rules rule? Everyday border and water conflicts in Central Asia*, (World Bank Group, 2008), www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDS/IB/2008/07/31/000334955_20080731041831/Rendered/PDF/448580WP0Box321C10Whose0Rules0Rule.pdf, April 2011.

2.4 Drugs, extremism, organised crime and weapons

Another destabilising factor that is often identified in the literature is the history of war in the wider region – particularly the civil war in Tajikistan and the various wars in Afghanistan over the last 20–30 years. It is argued that these wars have resulted in an uncontrolled flow of arms and drugs and have fuelled and exported religious extremism.¹²

It is hard to say how deeply these factors impact upon local conflict dynamics. Few facts are known about the illicit arms and drugs trade through the Ferghana Valley, although the trade certainly exists. Drug money and illegal weapons certainly influenced the scale of the violence in Osh and Jalalabad in 2010 and can be expected to influence future developments.¹³

There is also little consensus on how far religious extremism and Islamic terrorism is a cause of conflict in the valley. The only incidents in the Ferghana Valley that can be directly linked to Islamic terrorist organisations were the IMU incursions into the south of Kyrgyzstan in 1999–2000. However, a suicide bombing in Khujand (Tajikistan) in August 2010 is alleged to be the work of Islamic militants, although its connection to IMU activities is not proven.

It should be noted however, that given the uncertainty about the scale of the proliferation of drugs, extremism, weapons and organised crime, some commentators argue that such threats are exaggerated, either by those looking at the region from a distance, or those wishing to appeal for more aid or sympathy for aggressive measures to combat political opposition.¹⁴

2.5 (Weak) governance at national and local levels

Governance refers here to the relationship between Central Asian governments and their citizens and how power is exercised, both at national and local levels. Two aspects of governance are thought to be particularly problematic from a conflict prevention perspective. Firstly, it is argued that rather than try to resolve social and economic problems, Central Asian governments usually attempt to prevent people from expressing their grievances. If and when the lid is taken (or forced) off, there is a serious risk of profound instability, as happened in Kyrgyzstan in both 2005 and 2010 and in Uzbekistan in 2005.¹⁵ Secondly, the more general problem regarding governance is the absence of an agreed set of rules and laws that are enforceable, communicated to all actors and understood by them. At the international level, the lack of co-operation between Central Asian states hinders a joint approach to resolve common problems and conflict issues.¹⁶ The absence of agreed rules of the game is just as much of a problem at a more local level, meaning that small issues are often left to fester and may develop into more serious grievances. For example, the lack of clarity and implementation of regulations around the use of pasture lands, water and border crossings regularly causes tension and conflict in border communities.

¹² For example, Lubin, N and Rubin, B, *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and dialogue in the heart of Central Asia, Report of the Ferghana Valley Working Group of the Centre for Preventive Action*, (The Century Foundation Press, 1999).

¹³ Interviews with local informants in August, 2010.

¹⁴ Heathershaw, J, and Megoran N, 'Contesting danger: a new agenda for policy and scholarship on Central Asia', *International Affairs*, Volume 87, Issue 3, pp 589–612, May 2011; Megoran, 'Calming the Ferghana Valley Experts: a review essay', *Central Asia Monitor*, No. 5, 2000.

¹⁵ Matveeva, A, *Central Asia: A strategic framework for peacebuilding*, (International Alert, 2006).

¹⁶ Swanstrom, N, 'The prospects for multilateral conflict prevention and regional cooperation in Central Asia', *Central Asian Survey* 23(1), pp 41–53, (March, 2004), www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2004/Reg.coop.in%20CA.pdf, April 2011.

Case study: The potential for violence in Sokh

Sokh enclave belongs to Uzbekistan, is populated by ethnic Tajiks and is surrounded by Kyrgyzstan territory populated by ethnic Kyrgyz. The local population experiences many problems regarding the sharing of resources, such as water. These are aggravated by restrictions on freedom of movement, due to border controls and separation from their ethnic homeland. These factors explain why many organisations have worked in Sokh.

One agency built a water pipe which connected two Kyrgyz territories by running through Sokh. In so doing, the agency aimed both to solve the water problem and to push communities into sharing and jointly maintaining infrastructure. The construction was successful and local civil society organisations provided training in conflict skills to community activists, who promised to look after the pipe.

Some time after the project had finished, a conflict unfolded between Tajiks and Kyrgyz over pasture rights. The conflict moved into the market and escalated rapidly. Tajiks destroyed what they called the 'Kyrgyz water pipe' and local authorities did not try to prevent them. They also threw stones at passing cars, some of which were badly damaged. Men from both communities mobilised and stood facing each other, ready to fight with farm tools.

At this point, several men emerged from the crowd and tried to talk some sense into their fellow kinsmen. They were not internationally-trained mediators, but people with informal authority in their communities – elderly men and tough businessmen. After a while, the crowd calmed down and a fight was averted. An agreement was later reached whereby the Tajiks compensated the car owners for their damages.

3

Donor support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Ferghana Valley

THIS SECTION LOOKS AT DONOR SUPPORT for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Ferghana Valley since the early 1990s from three perspectives. Firstly, it considers how western interests in Central Asia have ebbed and flowed over time and argues that it is helpful to distinguish between three distinct phases of engagement. Secondly, it briefly maps the main western donors and their reasons for being interested in conflict prevention in Central Asia. Thirdly, it seeks to give an approximate classification of conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. This classification is far from precise, but is intended to give the reader a sense of the different types of interventions that are commonly supported in the name of conflict prevention.

3.1 Donor support from the early 1990s to the present day

Donor support for conflict prevention in the Ferghana Valley can be divided roughly into three phases, which should be seen in the context of wider western interests in Central Asia. The first phase covers the period from the early 1990s through to September 2001. During this phase, international engagement in Central Asia focused mainly on supporting the transition of the countries to market economies and on reinforcing democracy and the rule of law.¹⁷ However, most political actors in Central Asia lacked the interest and/or will to implement such reforms. As a consequence, western governments had relatively limited influence in the region.¹⁸

The second phase began abruptly with the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent intervention in Afghanistan by a US-led coalition. Suddenly, Central Asia became a key strategic region for Western interests. Although the war in Afghanistan remained the overwhelming interest throughout (as it does up to the present day), peace and conflict issues became much more prominent,

¹⁷ The EU provided this support mainly through its TACIS (Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States) programme, which was launched in 1991.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: What role for the European Union?* Asia Report No. 113, 10 April 2006, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/113-central-asia-what-role-for-the-european-union.aspx April 2011, and *The Roberts Report*, <http://roberts-report.blogspot.com/2009/02/us-foreign-assistance-in-central-asia.html>, April 2011.

with regard to the Ferghana Valley, as elsewhere. These issues were predominantly seen through a hard-security lens focusing on aspects such as terrorism, religious extremism and organised crime, including cross-border trafficking of weapons, drugs and human beings.¹⁹

In the third phase, international interest in supporting conflict prevention and peace-building initiatives began to wane, particularly the types of local level initiatives which were common in border areas. No distinct transition point into this third phase can be identified. Data on official development assistance is not detailed enough to demonstrate exactly what resources were spent on such interventions each year, but interest apparently began to tail off around 2005–6. There are several reasons for this, but possibly three reasons were particularly important:

- International thinking on the Ferghana Valley was heavily influenced by the idea that problems could be overcome by fostering closer integration between the newly independent states of Central Asia. However, many programmes that sought to promote regional integration had frustratingly few results. Moreover, Uzbekistan became increasingly reluctant to engage in such programmes and its relationship with the international community deteriorated, especially after the Andijan uprising in 2005. This left international support struggling to find a new paradigm through which to promote peace and security in the region.²⁰
- Over time, elites in Central Asia became more adept at utilising Western military and security interests for their own purposes and rejecting interventions that they found less attractive – this probably squeezed the space for peacebuilding activities.
- As the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq deteriorated in the mid-2000s, donor governments may have begun to feel that the Ferghana Valley was not such a concern after all and that resources were best spent elsewhere.

All of these points are exemplified in a 2008 article by Alisher Khamidov which argues that “non-governmental organization initiatives designed to foster such cross-border understanding ... are having a hard time attracting funds from both local governments and international donors.” Khamidov went on to quote a conflict prevention activist in Kyrgyzstan who said:

“Conflict prevention is in decline these days... Governments are preoccupied with other problems [and] international donors do not think it is as important as several years ago. We are now left to ourselves.”²¹

Arguably, the violence in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 heralded the start of a fourth phase of donor support. International actors have once again recognised that the risk of serious conflict in the Ferghana Valley and in Central Asia more generally, remains high. In the aftermath of these events, donors rapidly reassessed their existing programmes and emphasised, or re-emphasised, their commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It is too early to say however, how this will translate into programming over the coming years.

3.2 Mapping key donors and their interests in Central Asia

Most of the standard donors and multilateral organisations are active in the Ferghana Valley, either funding and/or implementing programmes together with local and international CSOs. The main donors/implementing organisations include:

¹⁹ Boonstra J, *The EU Strategy for Central Asia says 'security'. Does this include Security Sector Reform?* EU Central Asia Monitoring, 2009, Policy Brief No. 10, pp 1–2. *European Community Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the period 2007–2013*, p 5.

²⁰ This is the view, for example, of Farukh Turyaev, former director of the Association of Scientific-Technical Intelligentsia (ASTI), in an interview on 15 February 2010.

²¹ EurasiaNet, *Ferghana Valley: Harsh winter's legacy stokes ethnic tension*, 2 June 2008, www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4847a567c.html, April 2011.

- the United States Agency for International Development
- the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OSCE)
- the European Union (EU) (until recently as the European Commission)
- the UK Department for International Development
- the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
- the Canadian International Development Agency
- the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ, previously GTZ)
- the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- Mercy Corps
- The Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)

Support for programming in Central Asia represents a relatively minor share of the overall budget of most of these actors, as it is not seen as a priority region. Moreover, it is important to understand donors' support for conflict prevention in the context of their wider interests in the region, particularly with regard to the war in Afghanistan and energy resources.

Martha Brill Olcott, a prominent scholar of Central Asia, summed up US key strategic interests in the region, in a submission to the US Government at the end of 2009. The order in which those interests are presented is also revealing:

*“Central Asia became an area of direct security concern for the U.S. first to help launch the attack on Afghanistan, and now... as a critical supply route. Second, U.S. interest in... Central Asia’s energy resources also increased, especially since our allies in Europe experienced energy shortages caused by Russian cutoffs of gas to Ukraine. Third and finally, of course, U.S. policy continued to press for the advancement of rule of law, the spread of democratic values, the expansion of civil society and the development of market economies in the region.”*²²

Other bilateral donors have tended to see the region in similar terms.²³ The key point is that conflict prevention is seen largely in terms of the need for stability, because further instability would have a negative impact on vital western interests in the region. It is debatable however, whether stability is the same as long-term, sustainable peace and whether this has skewed the types of support given to conflict prevention in the region (see section 4.4).

3.3 Types of donor-supported conflict prevention activities implemented in the Ferghana Valley

Different approaches have been taken to funding and delivering conflict prevention activities in Central Asia – particularly in the Ferghana Valley. It is thus helpful to categorise the types of programmes that have been supported, although these categories are only indicative. In practice, these categories overlap and many programmes have included elements of several different approaches. A 2001 mapping of peace initiatives in Central Asia grouped interventions into five categories: prejudice reduction; mediation, facilitation and dialogue; topic-focused (cross-border) co-operation; local development for target communities; and conflict assessment and early warning.²⁴ A similar categorisation is proposed here based on the analysis of what recent interventions, suggesting that perhaps the same methods have continued to be used in the intervening decade:

²² Brill Olcott M, *US policy in Central Asia: looking ahead*, (US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 15 December 2009), www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Martha_Brill_Olcott_-_Testimony_-_Final.pdf, April 2011.

²³ See for example: Germany: Krumm R, *Central Asia: The struggle for power, energy and human rights*, (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: 2007), www.fes.de/kompass2020/pdf_en/CentralAsia.pdf, April 2011; UK: Chatham House, Internal dynamics and external interests in Central Asia, (webpage). www.chathamhouse.org.uk/research/russia_eurasia/current_projects/central_asia/, April 2011; France: France Diplomatie, *La France et l'Asie Centrale*, (website in French) www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/asie-centrale_4249/france-asie-centrale_18268/index.html, April 2011.

²⁴ *Op cit* de Martino.

- **Relationship building:** multi-ethnic camps for children and youth, joint celebration of festivals, joint sports matches, etc.
- **Creation and support of capacity to mediate and resolve conflict:** mediation training for elders, local leaders and women and the establishment of formal and informal conflict management bodies, including cross-border mechanisms, dialogue between political protagonists.
- **Community mobilisation:** small grants programmes and community livelihoods projects, including cross-border community work, support for women's groups, etc.
- **Economic and infrastructure rehabilitation:** trade projects – including cross-border trade – business and agricultural training, micro-credits, drinking water and irrigation system repairs, etc.
- **Building local capacity to understand and respond to conflict:** local non-governmental organisation (NGO) conflict analysis training, early warning systems, etc.

Agencies have also differed in the approaches they have taken with regard to which issues they have prioritised, how deeply they have co-operated with national and local authorities and how far they have implemented programming directly or through others.

Different agencies have had different ideas about which issues are most significant and most likely to cause further conflict. Some NGOs, for example those involved in the Swiss Regional Development Dialogue programme,²⁵ Foundation for Tolerance International and Ittifok, have regarded the main problems as stemming from inter-ethnic relations. Others, such as the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED),²⁶ have viewed conflicts from the perspective of local resource sharing, thus emphasising their economic causes. Other actors again, such as the UNDP, have seen more conflict potential in the relationship between communities and state bodies.²⁷

Agencies have taken a range of approaches from strongly bottom-up, grassroots engagement, through to top-down programming run through the state authorities. For example, UNDP favoured the involvement of the authorities from the start, whereas other international NGOs, such as Mercy Corps, have tended to put people first²⁸ and sought to work with communities directly – informing, but not targeting, state actors. Over time however, these approaches have converged, as international NGOs realised that engagement with the state authorities is unavoidable and indeed important for greater impact.

Finally, there have been differences in the scale of programmes and the degree to which international actors have implemented them directly or through others. Some agencies, such as Mercy Corps, have set up large-scale offices in Central Asia and implemented their activities directly in the field. Others, such as the SDC, have worked through local NGOs based in the main cities of the Ferghana Valley and deployed international staff it funded in the field.

²⁵ www.swiss-cooperation.admin.ch/centralasia/en/Home/Regional_Activities/Completed_projects/Regional_Dialogue, April 2011

²⁶ Unpublished report by ACTED/OSCE, *Borders of discord: An appraisal of sources of tension in villages on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border in the Ferghana Valley*, 2005.

²⁷ Interview with former UNDP staff member, April 2010.

²⁸ For example: Anna Young talks mostly about communities and civil society development, not governments in *Ferghana Valley: Reducing the potential for conflict through community mobilisation*, (Mercy Corps, May 2003), www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/file1134154677.pdf, April 2011.

4

Lessons for conflict prevention: Learning from local perceptions of previous interventions

THE PREVIOUS TWO SECTIONS, which have categorised the drivers of conflict and the main types of intervention supported by international donors, have been informed mostly by desk research. By contrast, this section is based overwhelmingly on primary research in the form of focus groups and interviews carried out in 2010 in the Ferghana Valley itself, particularly on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. This research involved a large number of local people and a significant number of local and international practitioners who have been involved in conflict prevention activities over the years. Hence, this approach relies on the voices of the beneficiaries and practitioners of conflict prevention interventions themselves to evaluate what has been effective and why. The authors' role has been to translate these insights into accessible lessons that can be adopted elsewhere.

This section is organised around the same five factors/drivers of conflict that were identified in section 2. For each, the report first presents respondents' views of the factor/issue and then moves on to their perceptions of relevant donor interventions. Each sub-section ends by extracting a number of lessons learnt. It should be noted that this categorisation was not used during the focus groups and is used only as a way to present a large amount of information and ideas in a manageable format.

4.1 Ethno-nationalist sentiments

The focus groups demonstrated that a high degree of distrust of and prejudice against other nationalities and ethnic groups is prevalent on both sides of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and not just in the Osh and Jalalabad regions of Kyrgyzstan, where the worst violence occurred in June 2010 (and which are not on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border). The following quotes are just a few examples of the kind of language that was regularly heard during the focus groups:

"They are different to us and we just can't understand each other."

Youth, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“(They) are uncivilised people from the mountains, with no sense of humanity.”

Male, Tojikon, Tajikistan

“Our village is like a fortress, protecting the rest of Batken against Tajikistan.”

Female, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“The Kyrgyz have become nationalists with no tolerance for others.”

Female, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan

“Tajiks think they are better than us.”

Female, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

This suggests that although the communities living on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border have so far avoided serious violence, the potential for conflict is definitely there, as one participant admitted:

“There are tensions, because of our ethnic differences, but people don’t talk about these openly.”

Male, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

What is of most concern is a feeling – voiced by many respondents – that relationships have deteriorated over the last few years. In Soviet times, neighbouring *kholkhozy* (collective farms) used to organise joint activities. More recently, international organisations attempted to provide opportunities for different communities to interact in the early 2000s, but these programmes have mostly stopped. Hence, there is a feeling that there is now less understanding, that nationalist ideas have emphasised the differences between them and that relationships have suffered as a result:

“Connections between Tajiks and Kyrgyz have been lost, so we have no common understanding and nothing in common: there is no intermarriage and no shared relatives.”

Female, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan

“Young people go back and forth to Russia, so they don’t know each other in the village.”

Male, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“Both Kyrgyz and Tajiks are becoming more selfish, saying ‘we are different, this is mine, etc’ and we can’t share things.”

Youth, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

Not everyone painted such a bleak picture. Older generations are more likely to have retained relationships across ethnic groups, people are prepared to trade with each other and some people understand each other’s languages:

“We always go to each other’s toi [celebrations].”

Elder, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

“We trade with each other all the time and there are rarely any fights at the market. Where business is concerned, money is money and it doesn’t matter who it comes from.”

Youth, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“I have no problems at the Kyrgyz border, because I know their language and can get what I want.”

Female, Tojikon, Tajikistan

However, others saw these issues in a less positive light. There is a growing language barrier, because Kyrgyz and Tajiks do not learn each other’s languages at school and Russian is no longer the *lingua franca*, so increasingly people literally do not understand each other. Changes in economic relations over the last decade also appear to have had an impact on inter-ethnic relations. Even religion is not necessarily a unifying factor. There is a general perception that many Tajiks are becoming more traditionally observant than Kyrgyz, for whom national identity is more important:

“Even if they [Tajiks] say something nice to us, our people think they are saying something bad.”

Female, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

“We work for them, so they see us as lower to them, so they think they can tell us what to do – it’s a matter of pride. They make us angry.”

Youth, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“We don’t recognise [the Kyrgyz] as fellow Muslims – they are far from Islam.”

Female, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan

Perceptions of relevant interventions

Various programmes were carried out to tackle tensions attributed to ethnic differences and intolerance. They were most common in the first half of the 2000s and there have been few such programmes in the last five years or so. These programmes focused mostly on increasing contact between neighbouring communities – particularly in cross-border areas – and promoting a culture of tolerance. They were mostly run by local CSOs supported by international donors.

Many interventions organised joint activities where people from different communities could meet. Activities ranged from cross-border sports, social gatherings, festivals and courses, to teacher exchanges, school excursions and children’s camps. Although these activities were inexpensive and may appear to be relatively unimportant, this research found that they are better appreciated and most fondly remembered interventions. Most importantly, they are perceived to have had a significant impact, as illustrated by this mother’s story:

“My son was beaten up one week before the [cross-border] camp was due to start and so he said he would not go to camp. I convinced him to go, because it may be his only chance to participate in something like this and he came back a changed boy. He was happy and had lots of Tajik friends. They still send SMS to each other.”

Woman, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

Practitioners echoed this view, suggesting that internationally supported projects such as these had helped to reverse the trend of communities growing apart, reviving the old spirit of integration.²⁹

A tougher question is how deep and how sustainable these results are. Some respondents pointed out that one-off trust-building events organised by outsiders were not enough to counteract deep-seated prejudice and change relationships:

“The festival that [the implementing agency] organised was just for show, but behind it, we were no more friends than before.”

Woman, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

This suggests that such activities need to be locally-owned and run over a longer period of time, otherwise their impact will be negligible.

As for sustainability, can such programmes claim to have a lasting effect when inter-ethnic relationships have clearly declined in the last few years? Although it is too simplistic to claim direct causation between the drop in support for such programmes and the recent rise in tensions, there may well be a link. The researchers were told on countless occasions that the situation was better when there were lots of joint/cross-border activities. This would suggest that while such activities do have an effect, their impact decreases over time – which is perhaps unsurprising. Some practitioners estimated that such projects are sustainable for between five and ten years and warned that unless fresh impetus is provided, the situation may deteriorate further.

Another type of activity that was intended to reduce inter-ethnic tensions were specific training workshops and seminars promoting tolerance. These focused mostly on children and were part of other activities, such as camps. Respondents did not specifically identify this kind of training as having had a great impact on their, or their

²⁹ Interview with UNDP Babajan-Gaffurov, February 2010.

children's, lives or perceptions. Practitioners argued that such trainings do provide a useful opportunity to challenge stereotypes and prejudices, yet they too increasingly recognise that training alone is insufficient to change behaviour or attitudes. In fact, providing opportunities for children or young people from diverse backgrounds to learn something useful together, *in a tolerant and open atmosphere*, can be more effective than teaching them tolerance itself.

One challenge for all such events however, was the extent to which they were influenced by a wider context that is much less tolerant. If parents, teachers and peers exhibit prejudiced attitudes around them, training young people about tolerance may have little lasting effect.³⁰ More generally, local level efforts to build relationships swim against the tide when the discourse at national level is increasingly nationalistic and relations between national governments are strained. State-sponsored ideologies around nationhood appear to have gained greater resonance among local communities over the last decade. Indeed, another problem identified was that local staff, of the local NGOs providing training, are themselves not immune to the growing ethno-nationalist sentiments and prejudices present in their societies and sometimes unwittingly help to perpetuate prejudices rather than challenge them.

Lessons learnt: Building relationships across communities

- Low-cost interventions such as, sports and social gatherings, festivals, teacher exchanges, camps and excursions have the potential to have a high-level impact on the lives and relationships of individuals.
- Rather than international actors or local CSOs organising such events for communities, implementing organisations should support community members or local authorities to organise such events themselves. This increases ownership and impact and builds local organisational/mobilisation capacity. It can also improve relations between communities and local authorities where the latter are active participants or organisers.
- Outsiders are sometimes required as facilitators to a process which brings diverse people together, but this should be used to kick-start a longer-term process.
- Tolerance is best taught through encouraging constructive interaction in other activities, rather than teaching people about tolerance *per se*. Hence, any activity can have a positive peacebuilding impact if it brings people from different backgrounds together in a safe and open environment.
- Local CSOs need support and guidance to make sure their ways of working are conflict-sensitive and inclusive.
- Local-level interventions need to be linked to national-level efforts to address the dangers of excessive ethno-nationalist political discourse.

4.2 Resource shortage and mismanagement

There is considerable poverty within the Ferghana Valley. This is closely related to shortages of key resources, particularly water and land. As ever with resource issues, the question is not only whether there is a genuine shortage of the resource, but whether existing resources are being managed efficiently and fairly.

Unsurprisingly, communities were quick to mention problems with water supplies and clearly recognised that tension over water was a potential cause of conflict. Typical problems related to access to canals for irrigation and to communal drinking water taps. Getting access to these taps often involves crossing territory that either formally belongs, or is perceived to belong, to neighbouring communities (or countries). Disputes between upstream and downstream communities – not only across borders, but also between communities of the same country and ethnicity – are also common:

“There is simply not enough of it for everyone.”

Male, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

“To get to the krant [tap] we have to go to Tajik territory. The men can't go, so women and children go and they get harassed or beaten up.”

Female, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

“People in Shurab village block off the water, so that they get more for their gardens and people living further up the valley in Khoji-Alo don’t get any.”

Female, Khoji-alo, Tajikistan

Neighbouring communities also accuse each other of dirtying shared water resources:

“The Kyrgyz built toilets next to the canal, so their waste comes onto Tajik territory. They also throw rubbish in the canal.”

Male, Ovchi-Kalacha, Tajikistan

“We have a lot of illnesses, including tuberculosis, because the Tajiks built their toilets next to the canal and the water quality suffers.”

Female, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

The other issue that causes equal concern for communities on both sides of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border was the shortage of and unequal access to land for pasture, agriculture and settlement. Although both Tajik and Kyrgyz citizens suffer from a shortage of land, the difference in population density between Batken oblast [region] in Kyrgyzstan and Sogd oblast in Tajikistan,³¹ coupled with the introduction of restrictions on the sale and use of land by foreign citizens, means that differences in access to land are now interpreted as national or ethnic disparities:

“The Kyrgyz don’t even use their land, but they refuse to share it with us!”

Youth, Tojikon, Tajikistan

Among the Kyrgyz, on the other hand, there is a perception that they are under threat from an ever-increasing Tajik population.

Some communities noted, however, that labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan has acted as a release valve for community-level tensions. This is partly because the number of people moving away from the area reduces the pressure on resources and partly because the remittances they send back are a major source of income.

Perceptions of relevant interventions

The two national governments have taken some steps to address resource sharing issues, particularly regarding land usage. On the Tajik side, this has included resettlement of border communities, while on the Kyrgyz side, there have been changes to laws on the use of pastures by foreign citizens and buy-back schemes have been introduced for properties sold by Kyrgyz citizens to Tajik citizens (allegedly illegally).³² However, local communities claimed to have felt few benefits from these interventions (see also section 4.3 below).

International actors have also sought to address these issues, not only as part of their support for development more generally, but also as targeted conflict prevention measures, since reducing tensions over resources within and between communities should also reduce the potential for conflict. This has mostly involved the rehabilitation or construction of infrastructure (e.g. water facilities, roads, primary health care facilities and schools) and also the provision of training (in business, agriculture and other livelihood enhancing skills) and funds (e.g. micro-credit and in-kind grants) to support joint economic development.

Predictably perhaps, communities were most positive about the efforts to promote economic development. Although many were disappointed that foreign projects had not had a greater impact (by creating mass employment or building enterprises that would generate employment), there was a perception that economic development will have a positive impact on conflict dynamics, as long as all communities are able to benefit from it:

³¹ Batken oblast’s population density is 25.2/ square km compared to Sogd oblast’s 83.9/square km.

³² Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty article www.rferl.org/content/article/2238562.html, April 2011.

“The best thing is to improve economic relations, for example, cattle breeding. Where business is concerned, we don’t have any conflicts.”

Male, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“Since Tajikistan’s socio-economic situation has improved, things have also got better for us, not only economically, but also in our relations. Our young people can go over to their side and work for them. That means that we have contact with them, we learn Tajik and we can understand each other and then we have fewer misunderstandings.”

Project participant, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

Most respondents viewed cross-border/cross-community training activities positively, both for improving skills and building contacts. These activities need to be thought through carefully however, to ensure that they have maximum impact and benefit both sides equally, as the second quote below illustrates:

“[An international agency] organised training for us, together with the Tajiks. It was very useful training and it was good to learn together with Tajiks. We became friends and made contacts. Now we can do business together.”

Male, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“In 2002 [an international agency] was very helpful in giving us credits to buy goats and they taught us how to plan, calculate income, veterinary training and how to make money etc. But we ate all the goats, so there was no effect. We realise this was our fault, but we were hungry at that time, so there was nothing we could do. The Tajiks who took part in the same programme did well after this training, but we didn’t. Now [the international agency] is training us on how to make greenhouses on the Tajik side. It’s good, but again I don’t think the results will be as good for us, because we’re not farmers, we’re herders. It would be better if they did the goat programme again. We’re ready for it now.”

Male, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

Infrastructure (re)development interventions were also viewed positively by target communities. Such support is very tangible and community representatives in several locations visited for this research could list the donors and implementing organisations that had built *this* or repaired *that* for them. Nonetheless, there was a general perception among communities and practitioners alike that most infrastructure projects were small-scale (i.e. a few thousand dollars apiece) and should have been implemented for a longer time. Thus, although these projects allowed things to somehow continue to function, they were not enough to resolve problems permanently or to affect conflict dynamics significantly.

In some cases, infrastructure projects were criticised not only for their scale, but also for what they actually provided and how. One of the main complaints was the use of low-quality materials (by contractors, or as supplied by implementing organisations). Decision-making procedures were also questioned:

“The quality of the pipes they used was so poor that the water flowed only on the day that [the donor] came to open the project, then stopped.”

Female, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“17,000 US dollars was spent on a water project implemented with the local authority and the community was not involved at all. Not surprisingly, it didn’t work. If they had just asked us, it could have been fixed easily with our help, for not much money.”

Male, Tojikon, Tajikistan

There was a certain level of disbelief that western donors would allocate such small sums and inadequate materials. This sometimes led to suspicion that those who were implementing the project locally, whether CSOs or local authorities, were misusing funds – which could actually add to tensions within the community.

However, this was not the only reason why infrastructure projects can create, rather than reduce tensions. The researchers came across several cases where there have been tensions between neighbouring communities. This was usually because of a lack of

thought about how a project might change the dynamics within and between communities (including neighbouring communities not directly affected by the project), particularly the risk that one side is perceived to benefit more than the other:

“When we had no water, we had no conflicts, because we were all in the same boat – so there was no need for discussions about water. When we got water, that’s when the conflicts started!”

Male, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“Tajiks don’t like to see internationals here in our village, because they think that we’ll get something and they won’t.”

Male, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“They [the neighbouring Tajik community] were against the [project], but we didn’t care and did it anyway.”

Project participant, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

Such concerns affect not only small, local-level projects, but also larger-scale investments such as roads. For example, in 2009 a donor allocated funds to the Government of Kyrgyzstan for the construction of the Isfana-Osh highway. This road goes through territory around Samarkandek, which is disputed, but which the local Tajiks believe is theirs. However, the new road placed this territory firmly within Kyrgyzstan and forced the resettlement of some Tajik households. This caused resentment, especially because it was not easy to get compensation.

Such risks can be alleviated by ensuring thorough context analysis and assessing how the project will affect conflict dynamics and *vice versa*, thus planning the intervention in a way that is likely to alleviate tensions:

“They didn’t like our water project, because they were worried about floods. Then [the Kyrgyz implementing organisation] and [the Tajik implementing organisation] organised joint seminars to raise awareness that there will not be a flood and showed that we can all benefit from this project.”

Male, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

Some infrastructure projects in the region are deliberately joint/cross-border initiatives, either as a peacebuilding strategy and/or because it would be uneconomical and impractical to develop separate infrastructure for different groups. Respondents described some very successful small-scale projects, for example, a medical centre, staffed by a Tajik doctor and a Kyrgyz nurse, which is used by both Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens. It seems that one of the reasons for the success of this medical centre is that the key individuals were committed to improving inter-communal relations.³³

Even where projects were initially successful however, problems were cited regarding long-term ownership and sustainability. Fears were expressed that the medical centre described above could suffer the same fate:

“The water pipes were supposed to be shared, but when the construction was finished, the Kyrgyz didn’t stick to their side of the bargain and said the water was theirs.”

Male, Tojikon, Tajikistan

“[The donor] brought a pump and transformer, but now they’re broken. The local authorities don’t repair them and for some reason the local people don’t have the right to repair them.”

Male, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“Now the staff in at the medical centre have a very positive impact. They treat everybody well, but the problem is what we have seen before: if we build something in common, then after one-two years it somehow becomes the property of Tajiks. I’m afraid that the same will happen to the medical centre.”

Female, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

³³ Interview with female community members, Chorkuh, Tajikistan, February 2010.

Problems around ownership were sometimes about legal ownership – in some cases, infrastructure completed under internationally funded projects was considered private property and did not therefore come under the remit or the budget of local authorities – but were just as likely to be about psychological ownership, i.e. a community's commitment and capacity to maintain the infrastructure itself. Practitioners sometimes found that the social structures around projects were too weak to achieve sustainable outcomes.³⁴ For example, water users' associations rarely functioned beyond project completion:

“[The implementing organisation] came to the village and said they would work on water problems here and I was selected by people to work with them. They built a pipe to bring water to the village and it was my job to collect money from people (just one som per person per month!) to look after the pipe. But nobody would give me this money and instead people just made holes in the pipe [to siphon water to their land]. So the project was unsuccessful, I think. There were other users' associations that had similar problems. We just cannot control the people. [The implementing organisation] organised meetings etc to talk to people, but nothing worked.”

Former Head of the Water Users Association, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

Practitioners found that projects were more likely to be sustainable when there was some contribution from the community (e.g. 70 percent donor funds, 30 percent from the community, mostly in kind). They also recommended signing agreements with local authorities and establishing public ownership of the infrastructure upon completion (see also section 4.5 on governance, particularly the paragraphs on community mobilisation).

Lessons learnt: Conflict-sensitive economic development

- Economic development can have very positive impacts on peace, providing that all the relevant parties believe that they are benefiting equally. It is therefore critical that all economic development programmes in areas at risk of conflict and fragility are conflict-sensitive (even if they are not perceived as peacebuilding programmes). Simply put, this means understanding the context and the likely impacts that the programme will have and then planning the programme in such a way that at a minimum it does no harm and ideally maximises the positive impact on peace and conflict dynamics.
- To maximise their peacebuilding effects, economic development interventions should be designed in a way that they strengthen 'connectors' and 'local capacities for peace' (i.e. existing links between conflicting or potentially conflicting communities and existing individuals, groups, structures or mechanisms with the capacity to affect conflict dynamics).
- Economic development interventions that are intended to contribute to peacebuilding should make this intention explicit and build participatory conflict analysis and regular reflection on their peacebuilding impact into the project design and implementation to ensure local ownership also of the peacebuilding objective of the intervention.
- Infrastructure projects can also have a positive peacebuilding impact, small-scale projects are unlikely to have much wider impact beyond the local level. Again, it is important that infrastructure projects are conflict-sensitive; it is important to avoid creating perceptions that one side is benefitting more than others.
- Key ways to avoid such perceptions are through regular consultation and transparency. Consultation means not only providing information to both target communities and neighbouring communities, but also eliciting their views and ideas and wherever possible including them in the design and management of the project. Transparency means providing information about where money is coming from and how it is being spent, how companies are contracted and how the project is being managed.
- Infrastructure projects are often unsustainable unless they are genuinely locally owned. This means that the local community and the local authorities must have both legal ownership of the infrastructure (as appropriate) and also psychological ownership; i.e. they must have the commitment and capacity to maintain the infrastructure following its initial installation. One way of ensuring ownership during the project period is to require in-kind contributions from the community and/or the local authorities.

³⁴ Dieter von Blarer, author interview, 5 March 2010.

4.3 Border management and crossing procedures

Border communities regularly come into contact with border guards and other agencies (particularly customs and the police). Most are negative about their experiences, perceiving border guards as a nuisance at best and at worst as a threat in themselves. The following quotes provide just a few examples of the kind of complaints that were made:

“We get held on the border for no reason. GAishniki [traffic police] stop Tajik cars, especially on bazaar days.”

Youth, Tojikon, Tajikistan

“Border guards demand bribes – 20 som for every crossing – especially from young men in the evenings.”

Youth, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“Kyrgyz soldiers shoot at children collecting firewood ... and they call that protecting the border!”

Youth, Tojikon, Tajikistan

“Please work with our border guards! They are the ones that cause the problems.”

Female, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan³⁵

Perceptions of relevant interventions

The quotes above indicate that the way in which borders in the Ferghana Valley are currently managed could potentially cause or aggravate a conflict, since the relationship between border communities and the management agencies is largely distrustful, even hostile. In this regard, it may be argued that interventions to improve border management have not had a major positive impact on conflict dynamics. Relatively few comments were made specifically about past interventions on border management, most likely indicating that local people were either unaware of these interventions, or did not think them significant. However, some interventions are perceived to have had an impact – if not by local communities then at least by practitioners.

Interventions regarding border management could be loosely grouped into four categories:

- Awareness raising and support to local communities on border crossing procedures
- Training for border guards on border management and on human rights
- Joint problem-solving meetings between officials from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
- A large-scale international border management programme, Border Management Project in Central Asia (BOMCA)

Awareness-raising projects included activities such as accompanying school children across the border with the correct documents and complying with prescribed procedures, producing booklets on crossing procedures and to training border guards in human rights and border crossing regulations. In one project, representatives of power structures paid visits to the communities to explain the new rules and regulations and social activities involving community members and border guards were organised.

While these awareness-raising projects addressed relationships between communities and border management agencies, they were mostly very small projects and were generally reported to have few long-term effects. This may be because such small-scale projects could not influence the generally high levels of corruption that run through the system from top to bottom. Hence, unless there are top-down reforms that remove structural and administrative obstacles to change, local-level initiatives are unlikely to have a deep and sustainable effect.

Training for border guards and other authorities was equally problematic. The constant cycle of new border guards (usually fresh conscripts) makes it difficult to sustain

³⁵ This last quote was recorded during discussions in August 2010. After the June 2010 events in Osh and Jalalabad and suicide attacks in Khujand, security measures were intensified on both sides of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. This has had a serious impact on border communities, with attitudes hardening as a result.

any changes achieved. One project co-ordinator described her frustration when her organisation provided training for border guards one day, only to find new recruits guarding the crossing the next. Another organisation overcame this same problem by developing appropriate training materials during work with border guards and then working with the border and law enforcement agencies to incorporate these materials into teaching modules for official border guard training courses. According to its programme co-ordinator, the training materials were successful because they had been developed together with the border guards (and tried and tested with them) and the border guard agency had ownership of the materials.

Moreover, the impact of training alone should not be exaggerated. On its own, training is rarely enough to change behaviour over the long term. Training therefore needs to be linked closely with practical experience, so that the contents of the training can be put into action soon after.

The third type of intervention was problem-solving meetings between authorities and security officials from both sides of the border, mapping problems and seeking to identify joint solutions. It was reported that some projects were successful in bringing community problems that could not be resolved at community level, to the attention of higher authorities. The most notable example of this was discussions about Tajik citizens grazing their cattle on pastures in Kyrgyzstan. This matter was brought to the attention of parliamentarians and eventually led to a simplification of the laws on pasture use in Kyrgyzstan.³⁶

One element of these legal changes was the introduction of taxation for pasture use. Some claim that this has helped to regulate cross-border pasture use and thus to ease tensions between neighbouring communities:

“Our authorities have conducted a lot of awareness raising work about illegal use of land and slowly the Tajiks are learning that they can’t just use our land for free. Recently they have started to break the regulations less... We capture the Tajiks’ cattle and meet with the owners and tell them if they continue to break the rules, then we’ll hand their cattle over to their own border guards. Their authorities’ punishments are much stricter, so they have become more obedient.”

Head of a Kyrgyzstan border post

However, members of both Kyrgyz and Tajik communities reported problems with the new law and the way in which it was implemented, which suggests that rather than reducing tensions, the new law may in fact be aggravating the situation:

“The Kyrgyz Parliament’s new law on paying tax for each head of cattle has not resolved all the problems, because if a Tajikistan citizen has a receipt for payment of taxes, other structures come along and ask for money: fire inspection, ecology, sanitary services, etc. All in all, every sheep costs its weight in gold! There are often fights between youth grazing cattle because of this.”

Project participants, Ovchi-Kalacha, Tajikistan

“Using pastures on the Kyrgyz side is now forbidden and the Tajiks are angry, so we are afraid to go out at night onto streets, because of fights. They come and say this land is theirs.”

Youth, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

“When our children were out with the cattle, border guards took them hostage and held them for two days until we gave them a bribe and they released them.”

Project participants, Ovchi-Kalacha, Tajikistan

Lastly, there is a major international programme on border management, BOMCA, which is funded by the EU and UNDP and implemented by UNDP. It aims to introduce integrated border management methodologies at approximately 20 border crossing points, most of which are located in the Ferghana Valley.

³⁶ Interview with Ainura Umatalieva, UNDP PDP, March 2010.

The strengths and weaknesses of BOMCA are discussed in detail in a recent Saferworld publication for the Initiative for Peacebuilding.³⁷ Although the focus of this report was slightly different – it looked at why there had been few opportunities for public participation and engagement in the programme – some of its key conclusions are equally relevant from a conflict prevention perspective. The report argues that because it is effectively strengthening border management regimes that are seen as deeply problematic for many border communities, “...at worst, there is a risk that some BOMCA activities could deepen tensions and mistrust, either between local populations and local authorities and/or between different population groups (particularly ethnic groups who are distributed across state boundaries).” It also suggests that BOMCA’s current approach is “... largely blind to the needs of local communities, [meaning that] it is missing important opportunities to: tackle corruption within border management agencies, address cross-border crime... [and] ...address intimidating behaviour by border guards, including cases where policies and regulations are applied unequally along ethnic lines”.³⁸

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the presence of international actors can increase the legitimacy of progressive measures. It was reported that in some cases, international support allowed local people to be more demanding and more vocal in rejecting violations of their rights. For example, one community-based organisation recalls telling border guards that they had created a shared facility together with UNDP, which impressed the border guards and after that they ceased causing problems for Kyrgyz who used these facilities. However, it is doubtful whether this influence extends beyond the lifetime of the project:

“When UNDP used to work here, Kyrgyz guards gave receipts for every sheep which crossed the border. When the UNDP project closed, the same old pattern returned: the guards demand bribes from shepherds.”

Civil society representative, Jabbor Rasulov district, Tajikistan

Lessons learnt: Stopping border management from causing division

- Current methods of border management are unpopular and may in fact fuel further tensions between communities. There is therefore a pressing need for conflict-sensitive border management procedures and policies. In this regard, EU/UNDP support through BOMCA is a missed opportunity as it takes a technical approach to integrated border management which is largely blind to the challenges faced by border communities.
- In order to achieve long-term, sustainable improvements in border management and reduce the potential for conflict, local-level initiatives and national-level reform programmes need to be running in parallel and be linked to each other.
- Any specific legislative measures and other procedures that are strongly relevant to border areas should be carefully analysed for their conflict sensitivity; as part of this, consultations should be held with local communities in order to gauge the likely impact of the proposed measures.
- Although local ownership is of course important for the sustainability and success of any project, an international presence can have a positive impact in some areas where leverage is needed for co-operation or compliance. This is therefore an asset which should be utilised strategically. This can include follow-up visits after the project has finished, to evaluate sustainability and to demonstrate that the donor is still interested in the project.

4.4 Drugs, extremism, organised crime and weapons

As has been argued in section 2.4, while no one doubts that serious criminal activities relating to drugs, extremism, organised crime and weapons proliferation are an issue in the Fergana Valley, it is difficult to judge exactly how serious these threats are compared with other more conventional, but equally destabilising forms of crime. Moreover, it is hard to identify how far these serious criminal activities affect normal citizens at the local level. Since these issues are extremely sensitive, participants in

³⁷ Brethfeld J and Jeanneret T, With or without you: Why participatory approaches are lacking from an EU funded border management programme in Kyrgyzstan, (Initiative for Peacebuilding, 2010), www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/pdf/020711kyrgyzstan.pdf, April 2011.

³⁸ *Ibid* p 8.

focus groups discussions and even individual interviews are unlikely to talk entirely openly. However, some people did talk about drugs and weapons – although it is important to note that most people made claims about other communities, rather than about their own:

“Not long ago there was an incident on the Koktash-Leilek road where people were ready to shoot each other! They had weapons in their hands and if Akims [heads of regional administration] from both sides hadn’t come, they would have shot each other!”

Male, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“The Kyrgyz have lots of weapons and Tajiks don’t have any. In time, the Kyrgyz intend to kill all Tajiks.”

Female, Tojikon, Tajikistan

“Many Tajiks have got rich through drugs. We try not to get involved or to talk about it, but recently our unemployed youths started to get involved. Many Tajiks are armed, so we are afraid of them and we’re afraid for our children.”

Female, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

There are also concerns about religious extremism in Tajikistan following incidents in mid-2010. It appears that nobody – whether government or civil society – is certain of the best way to deal with such radicalisation and people in Kyrgyzstan were also concerned about the risk of such violence spreading across the border:

“We ourselves do not know what to do with our radicals.”

Female, Chorkuh, Tajikistan

“They have leaders and organisers among them, who want to provoke something or blow us up. We have the feeling that they could invade at any moment when we hear them shooting and fighting.”

Male, Tash-Tumshuk, Kyrgyzstan

For the most part, however, it seems that it is more traditional forms of crime, such as theft, damage to property and acts of violence, which affect people more and have a more immediate impact on conflict dynamics. In particular, there were concerns about young people as both victims and perpetrators of crime and violence. Various respondents reported that there has been an increase in fights and stand-offs between groups of Kyrgyz and Tajiks and stone-throwing was also reported as a cause of tension:

“A few months back, there was a fight between a Kyrgyz and a Tajik youth. It started from something small, but people phoned their friends and eventually more than 300 people gathered. There was a stand-off, but they were ready to fight each other. They eventually dispersed when [the head of the local Kyrgyz border post] came and fired shots in the air to scare them.”

Male, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“The Kyrgyz break our car windows when we drive through their village. They throw stones at our cars and try to injure us.”

Male, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan

“The Tajiks throw stones at us when we’re driving.”

Male, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

However, most respondents did not feel that law enforcement agencies on either side of the border were doing very much to deal with such problems:

“The situation has got a lot worse and our police don’t protect us... They can burn our barns, throw stones on our slate roofs and our police do absolutely nothing.”

Male, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan

“If we park our cars on Tajik territory, they can just steal our car parts in the night and there is nothing we can do about it. Neither our police, nor their police do anything about it.”

Male, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

“The police don’t do anything. This is why we have to retaliate ourselves.”

Youth, Tojikon, Tajikistan

“The police do nothing to investigate. They tell us, ‘If you know who stole your cattle, tell us and we’ll deal with it.’ But of course we don’t know, because it happens in the night. We don’t have electricity so we can’t see who’s stealing our cattle, so we blame the neighbouring Tajiks.”

Male, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

Perceptions of relevant interventions

There are a number of major, internationally supported interventions in Central Asia that are directly, or indirectly charged with addressing these serious criminal activities. They include BOMCA (see above), a related intervention, the Central Asia Drugs Action Programme (CADAP) and OSCE support for police reform, particularly in Kyrgyzstan.

The researchers did not ask specific questions about these programmes and few comments were made about them in focus group discussions and interviews. This might suggest that these programmes are not well known locally and their relevance to the Ferghana Valley and to conflict prevention is not well recognised. Indeed, the three programmes all seem to have taken a fairly technical, state-oriented approach and have not found it necessary either to understand the views of local communities, or to consult with them and encourage participation. As a result, they have missed opportunities for more effective programming and may even have supported actions that actually deepen tensions in border areas.³⁹

Another observation is that the level of support given to these programmes by Western donors may say more about their own perceptions of security threats than about local needs and concerns, meaning that there may be an unjustified focus on terrorism and religious extremism in assistance programmes (see also section 2.4). Although it is hard to assess exactly how serious the threats from organised crime, drugs, religious extremism and weapons proliferation really are, it is not unreasonable to suggest that further conflicts are more likely to arise from the escalation of smaller incidents, such as brawls between groups of youths. The question is thus, whether international support is well targeted from a conflict prevention perspective, or whether some of these resources might be better spent on more local-level measures to manage and reduce tensions.

Lessons learnt: A balanced approach to international support

- While there is clearly a need for programmes to address drug trafficking, weapons proliferation, religious extremism and organised crime, international support should be balanced between such programmes and smaller, more flexible programmes that aim to manage and reduce tensions at a local level.
- Even though these issues are highly sensitive, and thus there are difficulties regarding public engagement on such programmes, it is nonetheless essential to ensure that a) more is done to understand the perceptions of local communities who are affected by such problems, to ensure that they do indeed benefit from such programmes; and b) that more is done to consult with and encourage the participation of local communities whenever this is feasible.

³⁹ For BOMCA see; *ibid*; For OSCE see: Lewis D, Reassessing the role of OSCE police assistance programming in Central Asia, (Open Society Foundations, April 2011), www.soros.org/initiatives/cep/articles_publications/publications/occasional-paper-4-20110411/OPS-No-4-04-11-2011.pdf April 2011; For CADAP see: Heathershaw J et al, Chatham House, Discourses of Danger and Western Policy Towards Central Asia in Light of Recent Events, Russia and Eurasia Programme Seminar Summary, September 2010, p 8, www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/17493_130910summary.pdf, April 2011.

4.5 Governance at national and local levels

Although we came across some examples of trust and co-operation between communities and local authorities, in many cases relationships between local communities and local and national authorities are generally fairly poor on both the Kyrgyz and Tajik sides of the border. This is fuelled by a perception that the authorities, including the police (see section 4.4 above), are indifferent to people's basic needs and do little to respond to incidents and/or resolve problems that are causing tension:

“The police on both sides have no effect. Our police don't help, because they're afraid that the government will say to them, ‘Why are you involved in this kind of fighting?’”

Male, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“When there is fighting, we tell our people – the head of the village and aksakals [elders] – because the police cannot do anything. Sometimes, if we complain to the police, they just tell us it's our own fault.”

Youth, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

“Even if we tell the local authorities, there's no reaction, even if we go to the level of oblast authorities. If there is some big incident, the local-level authorities usually come ... but nothing changes.”

Male, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan

“When the authorities come, everyone says ‘OK, OK’. But as soon as they leave, everything returns to normal.”

Youth, Ych-dobo, Kyrgyzstan

This negativity extends to what might be called a ‘grass is greener’ effect, whereby people on either side of the border think that the authorities on the other side are more responsive to their citizens' needs:

“The Tajik Government protects its citizens [from abuses by neighbouring citizens], whereas ours just tells us to protect ourselves. I said to our local authorities that we are all Muslims and we should not fight, but he said that I should just protect myself!”

Male, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“The authorities never support us [against abuses by neighbouring citizens]. The Kyrgyz authorities always support their people and encourage them in every way. Ours don't say anything and are silent... I think our Government doesn't want to spoil relations with the Kyrgyz Government, because they don't want them to close the border – but we are suffering here!”

Male, Khoji-Alo, Tajikistan

These poor relationships between local authorities and communities are a concern in terms of conflict prevention both indirectly – because the lack of productive relationships makes it much harder to design and implement measures to address problems that are underlying or potential causes of conflict – and directly – because these relationships are a potential source of tension in themselves – as expressed by one international practitioner who had been working in the region for some time:

“We only gradually realised that the main conflicts are between government and people and not between ethnic groups.”

Anonymous international practitioner

Perceptions of relevant interventions

Interventions that attempted to address governance issues can be roughly divided into two categories. Firstly, there were many projects that were primarily concerned with something else, such as infrastructure and economic development, but which within the project tried either to mobilise communities to deal with problems themselves and/or to encourage the authorities to be more responsive to community needs and problems. Whether conceived as conflict prevention activities or not, such measures

can have a positive peacebuilding impact if they resolve problems that might otherwise fuel conflicts and lead to better relationships between authorities and communities.

Secondly, there were various projects with a more direct aim of creating, or strengthening, mechanisms for managing and resolving conflicts within and between communities. These interventions were more obviously intended as conflict prevention activities and supported as such by international donors.

Regarding the first category of intervention, many projects included elements of community mobilisation. These were inspired by various (inter-related) theories of change. One is that, in the absence of effective government agencies, communities need to address problems themselves. Another is that by providing local people with the skills to solve local problems, they increase participation from below, which will translate into more sustainable long-term changes, rather than always relying on top-down change.

In many cases, community groups supported as part of such interventions appear to have been successful in addressing some local tensions, at least temporarily. However, it is debatable whether they have been sustainable over the longer term and donors may have had unrealistic expectations about what was possible. The main issue is that resources are rarely available to support such groups once the project is over. The state is unlikely to allocate resources and wealthy businesses that perform acts of charity prefer to give aid directly to people in need or through the mosque. Hence, the most sustainable community mobilisation initiatives appear to have been those that rely mostly on existing local capacity rather than external resources, for example the tradition of *hashar/ashar* (neighbourhood mobilisation).

Nonetheless, there were examples where participants in donor-supported schemes had developed generic skills – choosing priorities, mobilising others, raising money, etc – which they had then put into practice elsewhere. For example, a doctor in Vorukh participated in one initiative group and went on to fundraise on his own initiative. He was able to attract funds from the Government of Japan, which he used to rehabilitate the local hospital, build a maternity ward, hire and train personnel and introduce modern management practices. Another respondent in Vorukh echoed this sentiment:

“The best thing the international projects gave us was tools for analysis, so that a situation reveals its true colours and you can identify entry points into the life of the community.”

Female, Vorukh, Kyrgyzstan

One issue that was raised several times was the need to ensure that community groups are suitably inclusive so that they genuinely represent the community, rather than project representatives always returning to the same community activists, who then act as gatekeepers for others. Women and youth both complained that they were not always consulted:

“The problem is that organisations only ever talk with the ail okmoto [local authorities]. We [women] are not allowed to meetings, because they think we will complain.”

Female, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

“Because organisations just work with the ail okmoto we don’t know what is going on and only see the result. It would be better to involve young people from the start.”

Youth, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

It was also noted that Islamic clergy were often not sufficiently included, despite the fact that they can be very influential within their communities. Some positive examples were quoted, such as a Mercy Corps water project in Sourkh, where the involvement of an imam resulted in a high level of community mobilisation and an ACTED health project where mullahs are involved in raising awareness about public hygiene issues.

It should be recognised that there are often pragmatic reasons why the same people end up playing a leading role in many projects. They are tried and tested and have

shown their willingness to be active. Project representatives often fall back on such people because they find it difficult to motivate others to participate:

“Only about 10 percent of the village is active – I mean, they come to meetings, find out about projects etc... and then the others complain they didn’t know about the project.”

Project participant, Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan

One risk of community mobilisation is that it can deliberately or unintentionally sideline the local authorities, thus potentially driving communities further from those that govern them:

“International projects help us much more than our own government.”

Project participant, Tojikon, Tajikistan

There are various advantages to ensuring that projects engage fully with the relevant authorities. It can help authorities to improve their capacity to govern, recognise problems at an early stage and be more responsive to people’s needs. Projects are more likely to be sustainable because authorities are more likely to maintain whatever the project has started. Authorities can also give projects their official blessing, help to resolve problems and mobilise communities themselves.

However, this must be balanced against the potential for corruption and misuse of power and resources. Various stories were given by both practitioners and community members to illustrate that this issue can be a serious risk (although it depends on the individuals concerned – some administrators do genuinely put the needs of their communities first). For example, one head of a municipality allegedly took a satellite antenna from a community-based organisation (CBO) supported by donors and installed it in his home. Similarly, CBOs are sometimes told by municipal authorities to allocate microcredits for business development to individuals favoured by the authorities, despite having little expectation that the money will be returned.

In practice, it can be challenging for external actors to find an appropriate balance. Although practitioners can be reluctant to work through local authorities, due to fears of corruption and mismanagement, they also have an interest in maintaining a cordial relationship with the local authorities so that they do not become obstructive. These concerns can reduce international agencies’ determination to prevent abuses of power.

Regarding to the second category of intervention, there have been many projects in the Ferghana Valley over the last decade which have sought to establish communication channels (between people horizontally and vertically between communities and decision-makers) in order to help resolve and mediate if/when conflicts arose and to enhance the effectiveness of such forms of local conflict prevention through training sessions on conflict skills and mediation,⁴⁰ joint seminars and roundtables. These sought to address conflicts both within and between communities (including across borders) and to create contacts between both formal and informal leaders. These interventions were often perceived as the soft side to accompany the hard side (infrastructure, socio-economic development) of an intervention. They are far less likely to be remembered by communities than physical buildings or repairs, but they are considered just as important, if not more so, by practitioners.

Several projects set up forums to bring together community members from different sides of the border to resolve conflict issues. These tackled a variety of community level issues, such as infrastructure, social issues, etc.⁴¹ For example, one community member described how their forum worked:

⁴⁰ See, for example, Raya Kadyrova, Women mediating between men, (in: Insider Mediators: Exploring their key role in informal peace processes), (Berghhof Foundation for Peace Support, 2009), www.berghhof-peacesupport.org/publications/MED_Insider_Mediators.pdf, April 2011, for a description of how internationally trained mediators contributed to negotiations between local government and demonstrators in 2005.

⁴¹ For more information on a range of such interventions see ACTED, “Best Practices in Cross Border Conflict Prevention in Southern Kyrgyzstan”, Osh, November 2008 (OSCE).

“We had a problem because the Tajiks came to dump their rubbish in our village, on Kyrgyz land. There was a joint seminar, where we talked about the problem and came up with a solution. Then they stopped doing it.”

Project participant, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

Similarly, there were efforts to facilitate local government contact across the newly created state borders.⁴² For example, regular meetings of heads of parallel regions and districts were organised to discuss common problems. In the early 2000s, these meetings revolved mostly around water, land and pasture use, while ‘creeping migration’ became more of an issue from around 2005. According to practitioners, these meetings succeeded in building relationships between local governments so that when there was a serious problem, local government representatives could call each other and resolve issues without resorting to higher-level bilateral mechanisms. Of course, the success of such initiatives depended on the individuals who attended – the most successful were those who were dynamic and already had some good cross-border relations – but the projects helped to create extra capacity to identify and work on the causes of problems, rather than the symptoms, as well as providing an opportunity and a budget to travel to neighbouring countries. The weakness of such mechanisms is that there are frequent changes to personnel in local government, undermining the sustainability of the collaboration as it depends overly on personal relationships.

Interviews with participants and practitioners suggested that successful cross-border community conflict resolution mechanisms were either led by a few key, committed individuals, or were built on, or became integrated into, existing cross-border ‘connectors’ (such as through imams and *aksakals*):

“When there’s a problem, a few of us [from the Kyrgyz village] go to their mosque [in the neighbouring Tajik village]. We sit down and drink tea together with the Imam and some of their elders. We talk about the problem and then they talk to their people about it.”

Project participant, Maksat, Kyrgyzstan

Lastly, some practitioners noted that donors can be cautious about funding community mobilisation and local-level conflict management mechanisms because they do not show instant results. Community mobilisation is a long-term process which requires time and a continued presence in target communities. It also requires flexible programmes that can respond as communities become more confident in identifying and asserting their needs, rather than providing support according to a pre-set blueprint. This conflicts with many donor programmes that are expected to deliver ‘concrete’, predefined results as quickly as possible. This pressure leads to an over-emphasis on physical infrastructure projects, even though there is a general recognition that such projects have less effect on conflict dynamics over the long term.

Nevertheless, it can be hard to show how such low-level, community projects influence the big picture and thus why it is worth supporting them as conflict prevention measures. For example, upon hearing about the result of a community-led conflict prevention strategy one donor asked: “How can rubbish collection be called conflict prevention? What does the one have to do with the other?” At local level, some interventions have had a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals in tense situations. However, on the whole, the results are often barely tangible differences in the way people from one community approach people in the other community, or the way they approach their authorities to find solutions to issues that cause tensions in and between communities. Each project taken in isolation will appear to have had only a minimal effect, although arguably, many such small interventions may add up to more than a few bigger measures.

⁴² Obviously, there were also efforts to enable national level leaders to resolve regional disputes – most notably regional water issues – but these are not dealt with here, as the research focuses particularly on community perspectives.

Lessons learnt: Long-term steps to improve relationships between different communities and different authorities

- Community engagement and mobilisation measures should seek to be as inclusive as possible; i.e. including women, youth, religious groups and other marginalised groups as equal participants (and in a way that respects local sensitivities). This may require some creative means of communicating and consulting with members of target communities, beyond meetings and publishing project materials.
- Build on existing structures and groups wherever possible, as these are more likely to be sustainable after the project finishes. This might include village or mahalla committees and groups established under the auspices of other/past projects. If these groups are not sufficiently inclusive or participatory, support can be provided to adapt them, or develop better practices.
- It is important to extract lessons from the community level engagement and translate them into policy and advocacy work at higher levels, as well as using them to promote learning horizontally across communities, regions and countries.
- Donors must recognise that community mobilisation is a long-term process and that support is required for longer periods (e.g. four to five years) in order to have an impact (this also applies to monitoring and evaluating the results of such programmes). It may help to run through several mini-project cycles in order to build cohesion and develop the skills of community members.
- Donors must agree to flexible programming that allows implementers to adapt to local circumstances and needs, as the project develops.
- Projects must find an appropriate balance between engaging with communities and working with the relevant authorities (this will depend on the context). Wherever possible, this should include efforts to strengthen relationships between community groups and local authorities. It will often help to ensure that the local authorities have some degree of formal and psychological ownership of projects.

Conclusion

THE VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN IN 2010 once again reminded the world that the Ferghana Valley remains at high risk of violent conflict. Indeed, perhaps the greatest concern is that similar, or worse, violence could flare up again in the near future. The many quotes and observations from local communities on both sides of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border demonstrate that the underlying drivers of conflict are still as potent as ever. In fact, while some issues might best be described as in a stable negative state, overall conflict dynamics may even be deteriorating:

- Ethno-nationalist sentiments appear to be proliferating among all communities and there is an increasing sense that the different communities are growing apart, particularly the younger generations who do not have a shared Soviet heritage to bind them together.
- Issues around resource scarcity and management are as pronounced as ever. While some infrastructure projects have alleviated some of the worst problems, they are insufficient in scale to reverse two decades of post-Soviet degradation. The rising population puts increasing pressure on these resources, although labour migration away from the region relieves some of this pressure.
- The conversion of administrative boundaries into state borders continues to cause numerous problems even two decades after independence. Border management is weak, prone to corruption and divisive.
- The relationships between local communities and those that govern them – local authorities, the police, border agencies, etc – are mostly poor. Formal and informal conflict management and mediation mechanisms go some way towards filling the gap, but there are few constructive relationships which could act as a foundation to encourage local communities to be more proactive in solving problems for themselves.

The degree to which each side's perceptions of the other mirror each other is also striking. The report has deliberately tried to provide views from both Kyrgyz and Tajik respondents wherever possible and it is notable that in many cases, both have exactly the same opinions of the other. Most interesting of all is the 'grass is greener' syndrome whereby both sides perceive that the other side is receiving strong support from their local authorities, while they themselves get no support from their own. On one level, these mirrored responses are reassuring, because they suggest that the underlying problems are often less severe than most local people commonly suppose. Yet they are also deeply worrying, because they suggest that communities have internalised a narrative about 'the other' and all problems are increasingly seen through an ethnic lens and blamed on their neighbours. Moreover, they suggest a vicious cycle of complaint and retaliation that may become increasingly entrenched or lead to more violent serious conflict, as was the case in Osh and Jalalabad in June 2010, where we see some of the same worrying perceptions and sentiments.

Does this mean that the conflict prevention activities of the last 20 years have been in vain?

The first response to this question might be: how should one judge? What is a good result in terms of conflict prevention? It is widely recognised that evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions is a challenging endeavour because of the difficulty of proving a counter-factual (i.e. that something did *not* happen as a result of an intervention). Even if an argument can somehow be made that a project has helped to prevent conflict, how can you directly attribute this to one or another project, when there are so many factors that may influence the situation? And what is a good result anyway? If things are marginally better than they might otherwise have been, is this a success or a disappointment?

These and other questions have been studied by various actors in recent years. One useful approach is the conclusion adopted by the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, that it is more useful to evaluate the impact of peacebuilding interventions at a strategic level than at the level of individual projects, since it is virtually impossible to make a causal link between precise interventions and long-term conflict dynamics.⁴³ Hence, this report has tried to learn lessons more from types of interventions than from specific projects.

Ultimately, this report takes a positive view of the impact of previous conflict prevention interventions. The common perception in focus group discussions and interviews was that the interventions did indeed have an impact and that when they were at their height, in the first half of the 2000s, things were better than they might otherwise have been. Nonetheless, it has to be acknowledged that they clearly have not solved all of the problems that have the potential to cause conflict in the Ferghana Valley. As argued above, this is partly because their impact is likely to be sustainable for only a few years and to reduce over time. Furthermore, it needs to be pointed out that the conflict drivers that have been identified all have deep and complicated roots and it is unrealistic to assume that the relatively small-scale conflict prevention activities that were undertaken could have solved all issues.

Lessons for the future

So, what lessons can be learnt from previous conflict prevention activities in the Ferghana Valley?

There is, in fact, a place for all of the types of intervention described in section 3.3 and measures are needed to address all the conflict drivers that have been identified. The following are some of the most important lessons that have been identified.

Certain types of intervention appear to have been particularly effective:

- **Creating opportunities for interaction in a tolerant atmosphere.** While directly teaching local people about tolerance does not seem to be very effective, tolerance can be promoted relatively cheaply and easily by creating and sustaining opportunities for different communities to interact in a tolerant atmosphere. Joint events, festivals and leisure activities allow people to make contacts and learn more about each other. This is particularly important for young people who live increasingly separate lives. However, such initiatives need to be sustained over a considerable period of time, as one-off events are unlikely to have a lasting impact.
- **Creating and maintaining relationships to manage and resolve tensions.** While they are not a panacea, mechanisms and institutions that allow both formal and informal leaders to discuss problems (within communities and across borders) can help to resolve many local issues and more generally create an atmosphere where relationships are based on dialogue and compromise.

⁴³ Smith D, *Towards a strategic framework for peacebuilding: Getting their act together*, Overview Evaluation of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004), www.regjeringen.no/upload/kilde/ud/rap/2004/0044/ddd/pdfv/210673-rapp104.pdf, April 2011

- **Conflict-sensitive economic development.** There is no doubt that economic development will help to reduce tensions, providing that all sides are perceived to benefit equally. This means that all economic development activities in the region must be conflict-sensitive, regardless of whether their primary purpose is development or conflict prevention. At its simplest, conflict sensitivity is about understanding the context, understanding how the activities will impact upon the context and *vice versa* and then planning the activities in a way that will have the maximum positive impact on peacebuilding.

However, one question arose again and again: are such interventions sustainable? There was considerable evidence to suggest that few projects left a lasting impact after the project had finished. Does this mean that such interventions are not worth doing and what can be done to make them more sustainable?

The honest answer is probably that there is no magic solution. There are no simple remedies that will make programmes more sustainable and it is perhaps unrealistic to assume that every project will continue to have a lasting effect. There is also the issue of scale and time – many programmes were actually relatively small in scope and ran for a limited amount of time. Truly sustainable interventions are likely to require an engagement of at least three to five years and possibly much longer, especially where the focus is on activities such as community mobilisation. Some interventions may never be sustainable once the project is over. The lesson is that if donors are genuine in their commitment to conflict prevention, they must commit over the longer-term and they must also be prepared to accept that certain things are unlikely to be maintained without external funding. This may be frustrating for donors who require quick results and short-term exit strategies, but it is probably still much cheaper and more effective than either dealing with the consequences of war, or spending large amounts of money on conflict prevention over a short period, only to lose interest when they do not have an immediate effect.

Nonetheless, it is definitely possible to improve the sustainability of interventions by following the basic principles of good development practice. In particular, this research has shown the importance of consultation with local communities and authorities, as a way of better understanding their needs and concerns and tailoring programmes accordingly. This also requires flexible funding streams that allow programmes and projects to be adapted to local needs. The research has also demonstrated that many interventions need genuine local ownership – by both local authorities and local communities. Ownership is only partly about formal legal ownership of activities and infrastructure. Psychological ownership of activities is possibly even more important and communities and institutions need much greater support to strengthen their capacity to take ownership and maintain programmes and infrastructure after projects finish.

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Saferworld works to prevent and reduce violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We work with governments, international organisations and civil society to encourage and support effective policies and practices through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of others.

COVER PHOTO: Villagers participate in a mapping exercise during a workshop on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, Tash-Tumshok, Kyrgyzstan, November 2010.



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Registered charity no. 1043843

A company limited by guarantee no. 3015948

ISBN 978-1-904833-65-9