

Saferworld Kyrgyzstan

Jash Araket (Youth Action):

Strengthening Capacity of Young Women and Men to Promote Peace and Security in Kyrgyzstan

External Outcome Harvesting Evaluation

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Executive Summary

Jash Araket, “Youth Action” in Kyrgyz language, was the name given by partners and participants to the “Strengthening Capacity of Young Women and Men to Promote Peace and Security in Kyrgyzstan” project, funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) and implemented by Saferworld and local partners Interbilim, International Debate Education Association Central Asia (IDEA CA), and Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) in ten selected communities in Batken, Chuy, Jalalabad, and Osh provinces from December 2018 through April 2020. The project focused on empowering youth to recognize themselves, and be recognized by local and provincial authorities and other decision makers, as key contributors to addressing peace and security issues in their communities, through a program of training, mentorship, experience planning and implementing initiatives related to community security, and the creation of spaces in which to explore issues, advocate and collaborate with government officials.

Among the unique features of the Jash Araket program was its focus on youth aged 14-17, who despite their young age planned and implemented a number of local initiatives through the workings of Initiative Groups (IGs) in all ten locations, with mentorship and capacity building support from Saferworld and local partners. The program built on many of the successes of Saferworld’s ongoing community security work, including incorporating lessons learned to further develop and expand activities implemented under the Youth Delegates of Tolerance and Democracy (YDTD) program, which was funded by the European Commission from 2017 to 2020 and focused on a slightly older youth demographic. Notably, both programs reflect Saferworld’s commitment to effective collaboration of civil society with local authorities to address community security issues, based on shared spaces and building trust relationships. Also of key importance, both projects shared Saferworld’s commitment to gender sensitivity and promoting gender equality, made possible by an effective team of women and men among all members of the implementing team who could model and foster these attitudes and behaviours among participants. Lastly in terms of overall approach, the Jash Araket program also focused on identifying and developing key government partners, through training activities geared toward their preparation for engagement with the project’s youth IGs, in order to facilitate the creation of spaces and activities for young participants to effectively advocate and collaborate with government actors. As a result of the relationships formed, local government bodies in several project communities instituted youth committees or advisory bodies, offered space for youth to develop initiatives, and funded and adopted activities from both the project activity cycle and the small projects of IGs into their budgets and agendas.

The project opened with a six-day camp that brought together over 1,100 young women and men from a diverse spectrum of ethnic, social, and family backgrounds, to encounter other youth from outside their “in” group and learn together about democracy, tolerance, civic engagement and decision-making mechanisms, as well as effective communication and media literacy. Participants from these camps were selected to form IGs, who then underwent further training and capacity building in community security assessment, participatory research, action planning, advocacy, and initiative implementation over the next few months, in order to

develop and implement their own local initiatives. Capstone activities provided new spaces for youth advocacy, including a workshop to produce the SDG16+ progress report, the first-ever youth-led report in Kyrgyzstan on youth perceptions of the Government's progress on the commitments made to the Agenda 2030 global goals related to youth, gender, peace and security; and Round Table discussions in which IGs presented findings and recommendations from their own research alongside policy discussions with provincial level officials responsible for their chosen peace and security topics. In order to make activities more inclusive for young peacebuilders unable to travel for workshop activities, including those in remote areas, a parallel track of activities piloted an innovative Participatory Peacebuilding Course via WhatsApp to foster development of community security initiatives among a further cohort of over 150 remote participants.

Introduction

This report provides an independent external evaluation of the project “Strengthening Capacity of Young Women and Men to Promote Peace and Security in Kyrgyzstan” (hereafter referred to by its local title, *Jash Araket*, or “Youth Action” in Kyrgyz language), implemented in Batken, Chuy, Jalalabad, and Osh provinces from December 2018 through April 2020. Using evidence from secondary sources provided by Saferworld and its local civil society organization (CSO) partners, Interbilim, International Debate Education Association Central Asia (IDEA CA), and Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), and primary data from interviews and focus groups (conducted remotely under the state of emergency declared in response to the Covid-19 pandemic) in April and May 2020, the report seeks to: monitor and evaluate activities conducted under the project; assess intended and unintended outcomes; and identify lessons from the project’s contribution to empower young people to engage in dialogue and decision-making around peace and security issues. The report follows a thematic structure, seeking to establish clusters of related outcomes – observable and measurable changes in behaviour, relationships, structures, policies, approaches, or statements by relevant actors – that emerged from project implementation.

Project Overview

The Jash Araket project was designed to empower young women and men of Kyrgyzstan to act as positive agents of changes within and beyond their communities. Project activities facilitated safe dialogue spaces for young women and young men in Kyrgyzstan to collectively identify and articulate their peace and security concerns, empower youth to advocate for action and accountability from their authorities, and create opportunities for meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes around peace and security.

Project goals

The project elaborated three overarching goals:

- **Result 1:** Young women and men from different geographic, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds are empowered within their communities, and pro-actively and collectively contribute to peacebuilding solutions addressing youth concerns at local, sub-national, and national levels.
- **Result 2:** Youth Leaders (YLS) (comprising 80 IG members and 20 semi-formal Youth Committee representatives) facilitate inclusive peacebuilding processes at local, sub-national and national levels, advocate for youth peace and security needs to be addressed by authorities, and ensure meaningful participation of youth in relevant policy processes.
- **Result 3:** Local and national authorities recognise young women and young men as key actors, participate in youth-led activities, include them in dialogue and decision-making processes around peace and security, and take steps, including through the provision of funding, to address their specific concerns and needs.

Activities overview

Project activities took place in three primary phases for 10 target districts in four provinces: Batken (Kotormo, Kizil-Kiya), Osh (Osh, Uzgen), Jalalabad (Aktash, Taigaraeva, Bazar Korgon), and Chuy (Kant, Belovodskoye, Tokmok).

1) Youth Camps and WhatsApp Peacebuilding Courses

In total, 1131 young women and men (423 male and 708 female) aged 14-28 from 10 target municipalities received training in tolerance and democracy camps. The Jash Araket project also piloted an innovative WhatsApp participatory peacebuilding course to bring project activities to 164 youth in communities that typically lack access to civil society resources and conflict resolution training.

2) Initiative Groups (IGs), Participatory Research, Project Design

Eighty-one persons including 50 girls (61%) from among camp participants united into youth IGs. These groups conducted participatory research on youth peace and security concerns, design and delivery of advocacy campaigns and communication/negotiation with community leaders and authorities. In order to support and facilitate the work of the IGs, project partner organizations held a training workshop for LSG employees and Youth Committee members in the 10 districts where IGs would be partnering with those bodies, and also held community discussions with LSG officials to facilitate relationships of trust with local government and give youth a platform in which they could communicate.

3) Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report and Round Table Discussions

Finally, the third phase involved activities offering young participants opportunities to present findings, advocate, and collaborate with local and provincial government authorities. The project brought together 111 young women and men from Batken, Chui, Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces of Kyrgyzstan (64 female) to contribute to the SDG16+ progress report, the first-ever youth-led report in Kyrgyzstan on youth perceptions of the Government's progress on the commitments made to the Agenda 2030 global goals related to youth, gender, peace and security. As IGs advanced with their participatory research, Jash Araket partner organizations succeeded in organizing roundtable discussions for youth to present their ideas and engage in discussions with officials at higher levels as well, including a discussion of issues facing migrant laborers with the governor of Jalalabad oblast.

Methodology

The evaluation research and this report follow the Outcome Harvesting method in accordance with Saferworld's request and best practices. Outcome Harvesting is a set of principles and guidelines for the evaluation of programs in complex social change contexts, where there are a number of complex and potentially overlapping conditions, such as fluid and changing environments, lack of consensus between stakeholders on identifying problems, differences in views of how objectives relate to goals or how they can be best achieved, challenges in obtaining empirical measurements of program impact (as opposed to outputs), etc. Outcome Harvesting reduces complexity by separating program outputs from social change outcomes, and focuses on establishing three key evaluation criteria: *what* has changed, *who* has

contributed to the change and how, and *why* the change is significant. Outcome Harvesting is by its nature flexible and able to factor for complexity, making it well suited to topics around peace and security.

Data for this report is based primarily on a set of 8 focus group discussions and 16 key informant interviews, conducted remotely in the second half of May 2020, involving a total of 55 individuals from all four provinces (and one NGO director in Bishkek). Outcomes uncovered in data collection were grouped thematically into four outcome clusters showing similar patterns of change. Outcomes were verified through triangulation in interviews and focus group discussions with other project participants, who witnessed and could attest to the changes reported in response to neutral prompt questions asking what they observed.

Table of Respondents by gender

	Batken		Chuy		Jalalabad		Osh		Bishkek		Total		Combined
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	
Youth participants	9	3	7	3	8	2	5	4			29	12	41
Govt. participants		2	1		3						4	2	6
Local NGO partners	1		2	1	1		1	1	1		6	2	8
TOTAL	10	5	10	4	12	2	6	5	1		39	16	55

Table of respondents by ethnic identity

	Batken	Chuy	Jalalabad	Osh	Bishkek	Total
Kyrgyz	13	11	12	8		44
Uzbek	1		2	2		5
Tajik, Tatar	1	1				2
Unknown		2		1	1	4
TOTAL	15	14	14	11	1	55

The evaluation team comprised three Kyrgyzstani women, Ainuska Asanova, Guliza Suvanova, and Shahribonum Igamberdieva, as research assistants, each experienced in conflict-related research and reporting in all four program provinces (and a number of specific program locations) and together fluent in Russian, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek; and two men from the United States, Noah Tucker, a noted international expert on conflict and security research and programming throughout Central Asia, professionally proficient in Russian and Uzbek, and Alex Zito, a specialist in research and evaluation in conflict-affected contexts. Interviews and focus group discussions, conducted in Russian and Kyrgyz, included project staff from Saferworld, IDEA-CA, Interbilim, trainers involved in activities, project participants and beneficiaries, and local government officials. Access to secondary documents for review, including project output materials, activity reports, digital evidence from activity implementation, and internal Outcome Harvest data collected through participatory evaluation with partners and participants, provided evaluators with a framework for initial understanding, as well as a point of comparison for findings from primary data collection. The evaluation team finalized interview

guides together with the Saferworld project team, following an initial review of documentation and a group discussion with the project team.

Sampling methods were intended to provide a balance of voices from across the spectrum of stakeholder groups and participant backgrounds, reflecting balance in gender, age groups, ethnicity, social class status, and across geographic and thematic areas of program activities, as well as a balance of youth participants, women leaders and other civil society participants, government participants and partners, local implementing partners and project team staff.

Limitations

Restrictions on travel and group gatherings in response to the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic required significant adaptations to the methodology and sampling plan. Most importantly, whereas all primary data was originally intended to be collected via face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions, it was instead necessary to conduct all interviews remotely, through a combination of videoconferencing and telephone voice calls. Issues related to telecommunications access, such as network connection, availability and cost of mobile data, led to complications in data collection and limited the availability and participation of some respondents. These issues led to delays in the expected timeline of data collection, and the efforts of the Saferworld project team to assist in coordinating remote interviews were greatly appreciated.

The limitations on data collection described above proved to have a significant impact on the results of the evaluation exercise. Many potential respondents could not be reached, or declined to participate in the evaluation; in Osh province, nearly half of identified individuals remained unreachable. The time of data collection coincided not only with restrictions due to Covid-19, but also with the final days of Ramadan, during which potential respondents or their families may have fasted through daylight hours, and the Eid al-Fitr holiday, usually a time of family and community gathering and celebration. The limited time window for data collection precluded further adaptation to expand the volume of data collected through the evaluation exercise. In addition, the remote nature of the interviews and focus groups, conducted via phone and videoconference, added challenges to building rapport and trust with participants; eye contact and nonverbal communication, which are usually keys to successful rapport building and interview probing, were either limited or unavailable entirely. Without the ability to form a connection in person, it is likely that many respondents were less forthcoming and open in their answers, particularly regarding any potentially difficult or sensitive topics. As with any data collection, the depth and quality of the resulting interview data was varied; nevertheless, it can be noted participants who were less likely to be familiar and comfortable with interviews, including youth participants and some government officials, tended to be less open and willing to share.

As a result of these limitations, we recognize that many activities and outcomes identified in the project's secondary documents and internal Outcome Harvest evaluation do not feature in our dataset for the external evaluation exercise, as the information found in secondary sources could not be substantiated by primary data. Wherever activities and outcomes were mentioned

by interviewees and focus group participants, we have referred to data from the secondary documents in order to further our descriptions and analysis. However, for activities where participants could not be reached for the external evaluation exercise, or which were not mentioned by our respondents, we have not provided analysis, hoping instead that value will be gained from that which can be gleaned from the external evaluation dataset. Due to these constraints, this report should be considered in conjunction with the wider evidence base generated through the project's MEL components, such as its own internal Outcome Harvest evaluation.

Context and Challenges

Building on the gains and lessons learned from the EC YDTD project

The Jash Araket project overlapped with the last cycle of the three year project "Promotion of dialogue and collaboration among youth on democracy, tolerance, and religion," funded by the European Commission, which shared a similar emphasis on empowering young Kyrgyzstani women and men to collaborate with other stakeholders in their communities, and with local government bodies in particular, to address issues of peace and security impacting their lives. Saferworld and local partners benefited from this overlap to build on lessons learned during the EC project cycles, as well as the relationships established with local government offices and communities in several locations chosen for both projects (including Osh city, Uzgen, Bazar-Korgon district, Kadamjay district, and Suzak district). One key difference in the Jash Araket project was a specific focus on younger teens, age 14-17, identified as a critical moment in the formation of self-concept and worldview, including attitudes about society and social norms. This early targeting allowed youth participants to see themselves, and be seen by other actors, as autonomous agents of change at the earliest possible phase of life, prior to their emergence as legal adults when their attitudes could begin crystalizing around experiences of insecurity or violence more likely to be witnessed by themselves or their peers (such as through labour migration, early marriage, corruption, and discrimination).

- Identifying and engaging government actors

One of the most important lessons learned regarded the identification of appropriate local government actors to engage, who would support the implementation of training activities, local youth-led initiatives, and greater collaboration and inclusion of youth in decision-making. A key group of local initiatives supported by the EC project involved research, advocacy and initiatives to assess and improve the effectiveness of Youth Committees (see the Change Story regarding EC project participant and initiative leader Adilet Salimbay uluu of Batken in the external evaluation report for the YDTD project for more information). In many cases, these bodies were mandated on paper, but not operating or failing to engage local young women and men. In response to these findings, the Jash Araket project targeted Youth Committees as a key space for youth initiatives in project communities where these bodies were functioning, and worked to include youth committee members more fully in training activities and the local initiative design and implementation process. As a result, 29 Youth Committee representatives from all four program provinces attended a two-day training especially for them on democracy, peace and security, inclusion and tolerance, after which 10 went on to attend results

workshops presenting the data from Community Security Assessments conducted by Jash Araket Initiative Groups (IGs). In a further success, the IG in Bazar-Korgon ayil okmotu (the third-order administrative division for rural communities, below the district or *raion* level), worked with the local government to establish a Youth Committee where one had not previously existed.

Local Self Government (LSG) bodies formed another key government actor group targeted by the Jash Araket project. LSG members from all ten project communities attended training on youth policy frameworks and mechanisms for including youth in dialogue and decision-making on peace and security issues, as well as advocacy training. LSGs subsequently became key partners in the project cycle: the team was able to successfully implement democracy and tolerance camps for over 1,100 young women and men aged 14-17 from all ten locations by working through LSGs, after a delay of three to four months seeking to work through the local schools and the Ministry of Education. As the democracy and tolerance camps formed the foundation of the project cycle, LSGs remained key partners in the implementation of local youth-led initiatives designed by the IGs; in several cases, LSGs came to better understand and trust the work of IGs over the course of the project, and offered space in mayor's offices and district administration offices in which to work and carry out events.

As Gulgaki Mamasalieva, Director of Interbilim-Osh, summarized:

You have to find the right partner, one who is interested in peacebuilding. As I understand it, the school is not very interested in peacebuilding. Local Self-Government were more interested, because they are there to ensure that there are no conflicts, that children are peaceable.

Gulgaki Mamasalieva, Director of Interbilim-Osh, May 2020

Additionally, the Jash Araket project carried out a number of activities to open spaces for dialogue and collaboration between government actors, IG youth participants, and community members. A key project goal was to provide spaces and avenues for IGs and other young people to advocate with local and provincial authorities for changes they would like to see regarding peace and security issues impacting their lives. This process was rooted in Community Security Assessments, which IGs used to identify, analyse, and select the community security issues they wanted to address. IGs then developed and implemented community-level peace-building initiatives and advocacy plans, either presented before local government, or in some cases, developed with more active collaboration between IG members and local government. These events culminated in Round-Table discussions in which IGs presented their research findings alongside presentations by relevant government officials.

- *Improving on activities and making them more inclusive*

Building on the success of three-day democracy and tolerance camps implemented under the EC project, the Saferworld team implemented six-day camps under the Jash Araket project, expanding the curriculum to include modules on effective communication, media literacy, civic engagement, and participation in decision-making processes. Training sessions on mobilizing

young people, and on facilitating communication between stakeholders, offered specific preparation for the work that IG members would begin shortly thereafter. This additional focus on youth capacity building for engagement with government actors during the camps was coupled with the strategic engagement of identified local government bodies in project activities.

Critically, the team took intentional steps to identify and recruit camp participants from a pool of diverse backgrounds, representing a spectrum of ethnic identities, as well as household and family circumstances, including children of migrants, children with absent parents, and children otherwise identified as more vulnerable. This was reflected in the camp cohorts, as confirmed in interviews both with a government partner (Damir Saybaldiev, representative for youth in Kotormo, Kadamjay district) and a camp trainer in Bazar-Korgon district.

An additional barrier to inclusivity, previously identified by the Saferworld team as a lesson learned from the EC project, had been the location of training events in Osh city and other provincial capitals. Travel to these locations was inconvenient for some potential participants, especially residents of remote rural areas. In other cases, parents had too many reservations about letting their children travel and stay in cities to allow them to attend; this was especially true for girls from minority Uzbek families. The team addressed this in several ways. For camp participants, the camps were programmed as a daytime activity in all ten project locations, allowing participants to travel back and forth from home, and camp staff facilitated communication with parents of participants including a parents' WhatsApp group, notifications regarding all activities, and thank you letters. Additionally, as an innovative approach to reaching, and bringing together, young women and men from remote areas as well as urban centres, the Saferworld team adapted and implemented a distance learning course on participatory peacebuilding via WhatsApp.

The Participatory Peacebuilding Course (PPC) was originally developed by Saferworld in Yemen in 2017 and intended as a two-month training in concepts of conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity, gender sensitivity, risk assessment, action planning, and accountability, for a cohort with previous experience in peace building and community activism. The course uses poster graphics to visualize concepts, aides (examples and templates) to guide exercises that illustrate concepts, and a trainer guide with script and prompts to facilitate exercises and discussion. The Saferworld Kyrgyzstan team sought to adapt the course to the local context, including translation into Russian and Kyrgyz; potential participants did not express interest in having the course presented in Uzbek (discussed further below). The course was piloted among 12 young people in July and August 2019, then implemented in two streams: the first stream comprised four groups of 14 from November to December 2019, the second comprised four groups of 27 from February to March 2020, both with three groups in Kyrgyz and the fourth in Russian. Course moderators comprised two men and two women, who together were fluent in Russian, Uzbek, and a range of local dialects of Kyrgyz language.

As with any innovation, there were multiple hurdles and lessons learned in this first experience of delivering remote learning content regarding peace and security topics. Interviews and

secondary documents detailed that motivating participants through the entire course was a primary challenge, as most had other professional, educational, and civil society commitments. During the first stream, non-completion of assignments and students leaving the course early was a common issue; in response, the team stressed the time commitment in screening and recruiting participants for the second stream of courses. The complexity of concepts introduced in the course – including gender, context, collective memory, conflict analysis, actor power mapping, and risk assessment – formed a second challenge, as familiarity with these concepts was varied across participants but low overall; although moderators offered individual communication to explain these concepts and tools, comprehension difficulties ultimately affected motivation and completion of assignments to progress through the course. When describing the program, interviews with moderators and participants stressed the learning components related to technical aspects of initiative planning, such as proposal forms and budgets, suggesting that retention and application was stronger for these elements, rather than the conceptual elements of context, conflict, and stakeholder analysis. Ultimately, the course sought to strike a balance between building capacity for peacebuilding work in communities where it remains low, facilitating learning both for situational analysis and for initiative planning and implementation, introducing a number of concepts related to peace and security in environments of low familiarity and notable social and cultural barriers to discussion and efforts to address security issues, and motivating and incentivizing participants with busy schedules to coordinate regularly via a text-based messaging platform.

Aliaskar Adylov, a moderator for both streams, explained the benefits resulting from course's expansion of capacity building opportunities to learners in remote communities, and to create connections between people in different locations, across provinces in the north and south of the country as well as across remote rural areas and urban areas:

The best thing about the WhatsApp course was that many young people participated from the most remote areas, far away from regional centres. For example, there were participants from Bazar-Korgon, from far away parts of Talas, and they were thrilled to have the opportunity to participate on an equal footing with people from the cities.

Aliaskar Adylov, WhatsApp Peacebuilding course moderator, May 2020

The Jash Araket project continued to support activities with demonstrated success in motivating young women and men to engage in public and civic life in order to address peace and security issues. Notably, activities related to debate clubs, including debate training and debate tournament events, have already been shown to be avenues for transformation of the self-perception of young people in this context, offering them tools for critical and analytical thinking and verbal communication, which in turn build confidence to express their own voices and opinions before others, including formal and informal authority figures, who often tend to continue to minimize their agency and potential. Similarly, participatory research activities undertaken as part of the Community Security Assessments empowered young people to see themselves as agents who can explore security issues affecting themselves and their communities in order to design solutions to them. Participants in participatory research

activities under the Jash Araket project attested that they were excited by the experience of taking on these active roles.

The bigger the issue, the harder to name: sensitivities around discussing conflict and security in Kyrgyzstan

Baseline research for the project identified that youth across all the targeted communities find it very difficult to speak to others about fears or conflict that they face, and most of the time have no one outside their immediate family with whom they feel they can share issues that concern them. Respondents indicated they were afraid of being judged by their peers or becoming the subject of gossip, and many were discouraged from engaging with authorities in particular because of the perception that corruption was potentially an insurmountable obstacle to achieving a fair outcome. This perception is not unique to youth or without evidence from lived experience: in the outcome interviews conducted for this project, some local government officials who eagerly partnered on Jash Araket initiatives themselves complained that nepotism and corruption are very real obstacles for them also, as they try to advance the project's goals working within local governments. Similarly, LSG officials interviewed in the target community assessments for the EC project themselves identified corruption and nepotism as systemic root causes for youth unemployment and lack of opportunities for advancement, which they believed were primary underlying factors driving migration and even mobilization to violent groups.

Yet, for many of the same reasons identified in the EC evaluation report as constraining open discussion of violent extremism, systemic issues like corruption are very difficult to raise, particularly for youth in dialogue with LSG officials. In Kyzyl Kiya, for example, the IG took on the problem of lack of trust in LSG as their research project and completed a survey that provided evidence that this was indeed a problem to be addressed. But when they presented the results to the mayor's office, the reaction they received was "aggressive" and dismissive. Similar reactions were also reported in Belovodskoye, where the LSG had initially closed the Youth Centre before shifting their opinion and inviting youth participation, as well as in Uzgen, where the IG's decision to work on issues related to rights for girls (early marriage, access to education, freedom of movement) were unacknowledged or rejected by local government. Local partner IDEA CA made continued efforts in these cases to mediate communication between IGs, Youth Committees, and LSGs so that collaboration and local initiatives could move forward.

Systemic issues and institutional problems are very difficult to raise in this context, and are considered a field in which only government-approved specialists – who will remain within approved narratives – are allowed to operate. This is especially true not only of sensitive issues like mobilization to violent groups, as addressed in the EC report, but even more so of any discussion of inter-ethnic tensions and conflict. The 2010 conflict and the trauma that affects the southern region and many of the target communities for the Jash Araket project is a constant background to all activities and discussions, which means they require extreme sensitivity. Like with corruption or mobilization to violent groups, this also means that ethnic conflict and structural issues like discrimination are very difficult to address in partnership with

government officials, without accepting the rigid framework that they insist on placing on these discussions. Saferworld staff indicated that in the past even producing materials in the Uzbek language or holding events in Uzbek raised objections from local government officials, and creates additional obstacles for even doing outreach to minority communities at all and ensuring they feel fully welcomed and included. While many of the IGs identified ethnic tensions and inter-ethnic conflict as the one of the most important community security issues that affects their lives, only one southern district attempted to take on that issue for their participatory research, and were effectively told by LSG partners that they had to choose a different topic.

As both Saferworld staff and the implementing partners noted in their own interviews, meeting the goals for ensuring representation of non-Kyrgyz minorities and religious communities proved to be a difficult task as well, due at least in part to lack of trust in minority-majority relations and sensitivities for minorities surrounding their participation in peacebuilding activities, particularly in the ethnic Uzbek community. For example, parents were hesitant to allow their children to participate in activities, especially when travel was involved. In another example, when the Saferworld team made an important step in innovation and adaptation by preparing a local Participatory Peacebuilding Course for remote learning via WhatsApp, they planned to translate and offer the course in Russian, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek languages; however, the project team found that even first-language Uzbek speakers did not elect for a course in Uzbek, although it was freely offered. If NGO workers have experienced difficulties from government officials regarding use of Uzbek language in civil society spaces and been encouraged to use Kyrgyz instead as a language of national unity, then it is quite possible that the same experience may extend to Uzbek-speaking citizens, and that they may be reticent to choose the option to learn about and discuss potentially sensitive peace and security topics in their own first language even when it is offered. These types of experiences speak to the steep challenges Saferworld has to navigate in order to fully engage on these issues where they are needed most.

The issues surrounding inclusion of minority communities, structural inequality and discrimination, and trauma related to memory of conflict and violence are daunting challenges for peacebuilding work in any social context. Within Kyrgyzstan, the last decade alone has witnessed the violence of 2010, followed by the securitized response of government to the departure of several hundred young people, mostly from ethnic Uzbek communities in the south, to mobilize to conflict in Syria. These conflicts in turn can be viewed in a context informed not only by internal factors, such as patriarchal norms and normalization of violence, and regional structural factors, such as the vulnerability resulting from labour migration, but also by intergenerational trauma and the memory of further historical conflicts and violence, experienced in the region during the fall of the Soviet Union, and further back in time, in the forced migrations and resettlements, forced labour, and political repression of the soviet security state (including its instrumentalization into local conflict dynamics). As all these factors are inter-related, wherever minority status makes a difference, it tends to be reinforced holistically by all of them at once – internally within households and communities, structurally through experiences of differential treatment by institutions and in wider systems, and in the

framing and telling of past and present through the reproduction of social narratives. Like the proverbial elephant in the room, the pervasiveness of the issue makes it harder to name and address. Within the United States, where two of the report's authors hail from, unrest and division regarding unaddressed issues related to the history of institutionalized racism, structural inequality, intergenerational trauma and normalization of everyday violence are on display for the world in May and June 2020 – hopefully as negative lessons.

Differences found in space to address inter-ethnic conflict between northern and southern communities

Interestingly, interviews for the evaluation and project documents both show that during participatory research many of the youth from Chuy communities, including Belovodskoye and Tokmok in particular, identified inter-ethnic and inter-neighbourhood conflict (with an ethnic component) as important community security issues. The area had recently seen clashes between ethnic Kazakhs and Dungans, the latter an ethnic minority residing in both communities and represented within the IGs. In these cases, IGs were able to both do research and complete a small initiative for preventing conflict with the participation of LSG officials. The interview respondents were able to discuss inter-ethnic tensions and conflict much more openly, suggesting there are potentially valuable lessons that can be learned from this experience and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning that are already visible in the project results. In contrast, in project communities in the south, these issues were chosen to be addressed by only one IG, which was then refused by the LSG (as described above). Among respondents from these communities, the issue was often conspicuous by its absence, especially in focus group discussions, where participants did not appear comfortable raising these issues among their peers.

Identified Outcome Clusters

The following sections detail “macro level” outcome clusters, which share commonalities and themes across the outcomes identified by individual interviewees. Presentation of each cluster begins with excerpts from participant interviewees speaking in their own words, followed by discussion and documentation of what changed, why the change is significant, and who contributed to the change. We have identified the following four outcome clusters, which included both intended and unintended outcomes:

- Youth participants gain skills, confidence, and space for self-expression and engagement in public space
- Local governments adopt project activities and initiatives
- Local government level bodies enact institutional changes to include youth in decision-making and respond to their needs
 - Creation of youth spaces
 - Greater engagement and functioning of youth committees
 - Capacity building for social pedagogy (*social teachers*)
- Young women advocate for gender equality

Youth participants gain skills, confidence, and space for self-expression and engagement in public space

Before participating in this project I was a very reserved, not sociable, shy girl. But after the first project, the mentors strongly supported me and I became more open. I can say after Jash Araket I began to love myself and began to get to know others more often. Because here I was interesting to people, everyone came up, introduced themselves, they were interested in my opinion, and I began to think, "Wow, hey, I am cool!" You can say they raised my self-esteem.
Guliza, Uzgen Initiative Group member, May 2020

The teachers said that the children participating in our camps began to actively participate in the public life of the school, they were not afraid to express their opinion in front of the teachers. Because in the camp we often told them that their opinions were important, whatever they might be.

Samara Osmonova, Bazar-Korgon camp trainer, May 2020

My parents wouldn't let up about the trainings. They said 'this is a cult, it's better to go to school.' I kept going, and they kept making fun of me, calling us 'gosrobotnikami' [state employees], saying 'City Hall is your second home.' Every time we went my parents would say, 'is she going to City Hall again?' ... You have to expand your horizons. If you remain a hidden person who cannot express your opinion, then you will remain all your life under the guidance of others. But if you can fend for yourself, then that's good. In the future, you'll be grateful for it.

Azat, Osh Initiative Group member, May 2020

[We sought] to explain and transmit the idea to young people, that peace is not just the physical absence of conflict, it's also when you feel emotionally secure, and that means that your voice matters in your family or your community.

Elvira Kalmurzaeva, Director of IDEA CA, May 2020

Saferworld Kyrgyzstan locates its youth peacebuilding work decidedly within a context of seeking to shift cultural norms that marginalize and exclude youth from decision-making, by first giving them tools to find and express their own voices about peace and security. This challenging context is affirmed by multiple research sources, including Saferworld's own baseline perceptions study, undertaken in the first phase of the project, in which a young woman summed things up succinctly: "Mentality and culture of Kyrgyzstani people do not allow young people to speak up."¹ The Saferworld team made clear in interviews with evaluators that they understand empowering young women and men to express their views, and to view themselves as agents of change, as required preconditions for their effective engagement in

¹ Also recently, see Elnura Omurkulova-Ozierska and Chinara Esengul, "Youth, Peace and Security in Kyrgyzstan," study conducted by PeaceNexus Foundation, Youth of Osh, and IDEA CA, October 2017.

peacebuilding and other social change work; reframed in the language of project's overall goals, local and national authorities (as well as other authorities) will not recognize young women and young men as key actors until they first recognize and assert themselves as such.

To that end, outcomes identifying positive changes at the individual level among project participants form an important cluster of changes fostered by this project. From these individual changes, fostered in the democracy camp, trainings in debates, advocacy, and community security assessment, and other activities of the IGs, other outcomes grew in which individuals and groups engaged with authorities to advocate and collaborate for change, both through the design and implementation of action plans by IGs and elsewhere.

Elvira Kalmurzaeva, director of IDEA CA, affirmed that youth participants began to engage in dialogue to express their needs while training was ongoing, and that the IDEA CA team adapted their programming in response to emerging needs. The need for mentorship support to empower IGs emerged as the IGs began working, and was added as a formal element of IDEA CA's support to offer guidance in initiative design and implementation, as well as facilitating communication and relations to LSGs and local civil society actors. Particularly as IGs were forced to adapt their initiative plans to the situation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on meeting and mobility, IDEA mentors and IGs began to discuss the emerging need for social media communication and remote organization strategies, including the need for IGs to use social media communication campaigns to educate their own peers and communities in prevention and protection against Covid-19, and adjusted their approaches accordingly to offer new mentoring to develop these skills. These in turn were learning experiences for IDEA CA in ongoing monitoring and adaptation of activities, and "served as a good indicator to the participants that we considered them on an equal footing."

In a related outcome, participants also began to engage in decision-making processes at their schools, as alluded to in the quote above. In a more concrete example, one participant in Osh, Daniel, wrote an appeal to his school administration to change the school uniform to a new design the students had found. After the school initially refused, Daniel and other students began to advocate with their parents, who agreed and in turn began to advocate with the school. As a result, students were allowed to vote on the new uniform. In this case, young people learned to engage parents as a set of boundary actors in order to influence the key actors of the school's administration.

Another set of related outcomes identified in interviews involves the expansion of debate clubs beyond the IGs to their peers in neighbouring schools in order to create a network for events and tournaments. This provided an opportunity for IG members to gain experiencing in transferring knowledge to others, focused around a structured activity. Notably, debates focused on topics related to peace and security, energizing participants with the opportunity to speak on issues that might otherwise be considered "off limits" for young people within public spaces, or a structured outlet for approaching contentious security issues (such as gender policies) while mitigating against incitement or escalation. These activities allowed youth engagement on security issues to fan out beyond the hundreds of IG participants to reach

hundreds more; in the case of Bazar-Korgon district, district council employee Odina Mamadalieva reported that debate clubs were extended from 9th to 11th grade students at 10 of the 13 schools within the ayil okmotu (the third-order administrative division for rural communities, below the district or *raion* level), involving a total of 300 young people.

- **Outcome:** Jash Araket youth participants gained, and applied, skills and self-confidence for self-expression regarding peace and security issues, first at the individual level, then among peers and project mentors, and then among authority figures such as parents, teachers and school officials, and finally public officials in government.
- **Significance:** The development of a sense of agency and skills in verbal self-expression related to peace and security issues, and their application through discussion in public spaces, are foundational preconditions for young women and men to engage in all three overarching project goals: to pro-actively contribute to peacebuilding solutions addressing youth concerns (Result 1); to facilitate inclusive peacebuilding processes, advocate for youth peace and security needs to be addressed by authorities, and ensure meaningful participation of youth in relevant policy and decision-making processes (Result 2); and to be recognized and included in dialogue and decision-making processes around peace and security (Result 3).
- **Contribution:** Saferworld designed and oversaw the project cycle of training, initiative planning, and implementation activities, and provided financial support and technical expertise; local implementing partners implemented curricula (and adapted where relevant) and provided ongoing mentorship to IGs; local (ayil okmotu and district level) government bodies provide authorization, space, and financial support; other partners, including parents and private sector, provided additional financial support for democracy camps.

Local government level bodies adopt project activities and fund them

The ayil okmotu of Uzgen, Bazar-Korgon, Kadamjay, and Turan have already allocated funds from their local budgets for holding democracy camps in the summer. They will look for co-sponsors. We said if they can just find sponsors for the food, then we as Interbilim are ready to provide the trainers for free. They promised to make at least one stream this year, because for us it was very prestigious, and they received a lot of thanks from our parents. They said it's a super project.

Gulgaki Mamasalieva, Director of Interbilim-Osh, May 2020

In Tokmok, before the coronavirus, the mayor's office mobilized all 13 schools and asked us to organize debate trainings for them all. Because the young people from the Initiative Group have changed, and the mayor's office wants the same skills for all students in the city.

Elvira Kalmurzaeva, Director of IDEA-CA, May 2020

Since the goal of the Jash Araket project was to improve the relationship of young people with the LSG, we held an initiative to call patriotic young people to improve the city of Kyzyl-Kiya.

Young people from every school were invited to write a project and present it to the mayor's office. There were many ideas for the development of the city: build a park, improve lighting, improve roads, and others. Some of the short-term projects were taken up by the mayor's office. The best projects received prizes.

Zuura, Kyzyl-Kiya Initiative Group member, May 2020

As described in the first quote above, the democracy camps implemented under the Jash Araket project during Summer 2019 were taken up by local government bodies in all three southern provinces, allocated funds from local budgets, and written into their plans for Summer 2020. In addition, according to Gulgaki Mamasalieva, Director of Interbilim-Osh, mayor's offices in a further seven ayil okmotu will also consider whether to allocate funds to host their own democracy camps. As Ms. Mamasalieva explained, the local government bodies appreciate the positive attention the democracy camps bring, not only from local parents but also as a source of prestige for the community within the surrounding region. In Tokmok, on the other hand, the local government wishes to adopt debate trainings and debate clubs throughout the school system. The adoption of these activities by local government bodies will ensure their continuity and sustainability, expanding and reinforcing the experiences and skills of self-expression, public engagement, and interaction of youth from diverse backgrounds fostered by their first implementation.

In another outcome, rather than adopting an activity designed and implemented directly by Saferworld and local partners, the mayor's office in Kyzyl Kiya collaborated with the IG to adopt small projects resulting from one of its initiatives: both partnered to conduct a competition eliciting young people for ideas of city improvement projects, and several of the proposed ideas were accepted and budgeted for implementation. In this way the IG expanded its civic engagement beyond direct interaction with the LSG, to instead empower other young people to engage and also see themselves as agents of change. Interestingly, members of the Kyzyl-Kiya IG explained how their relationship with the LSG had been fostered by implementation of a scavenger hunt for locations and objects related to peace and security issues in the town. The event brought together local government actors and young people to solve the scavenger hunt's puzzles in friendly competition and collaboration: one team comprised local council members together with university students, while the other combined members of the mayor's office with school students. The event's overall success contributed to building a relationship of trust between the IG and the LSG.

- **Outcome:** Local government bodies in four ayil okmotu adopted activities implemented under Jash Araket into their budgets and agendas; the local government body in a fifth ayil okmotu adopted and funded projects proposed as a result of a youth-led initiative.
- **Significance:** For local authorities to adopt these two activities – both of which have demonstrated their effectiveness in empowering young people toward engaging in public space, advocating for their peace and security needs to be met (Result 2), and inclusion in dialogue and decision-making processes around peace and security (Result 3) – is a testament to trust relationships built between these local authorities and Jash Araket partners (Saferworld, IDEA CA, Interbilim, and FTI), as well as the alignment of

these activities with local government needs and policies. This effectively ensures the continuity and sustainability of Jash Araket programming in these communities beyond the duration of UNPBF funding.

- **Contribution:** Saferworld and local partners designed and implemented the democracy camps and debate trainings; IDEA CA provided mentorship to the IG in Kyzyl Kiya; Saferworld provided financial support and technical expertise.

Local government level bodies enact institutional changes to include youth in decision-making and respond to their needs

What has changed is that the young people have become active. They started to propose initiatives themselves, they even succeeded in getting an office designated for them in the district government centre because they said they needed a place to meet and plan their events. They developed a schedule of events for the year on their own. They [succeeded in] forming a youth committee. All of this is thanks to the Jash Araket program. To be honest, there was money [in the district budget] before that was allocated for youth, but that money wasn't spent the way it was allocated. Because young people have started to demand it, to speak out about their needs, we have begun using that budget for the needs of youth.

Gulipa Sagynbaeva, Bazar Korgon district executive secretary, May 2020

In the Bazar-Korgon district council there wasn't a youth committee, but we created one in January 2020. Before participating in this project we also thought about a youth committee, but we didn't know who to ask about it, what we have a right to and what we don't. Thanks to this project, we learned about our rights and our opportunities. Young people started to trust the local government — even I didn't used to trust it, I thought that if I tried to get something done they wouldn't pay attention to me. But it turns out that's not how it is.

Odina Mamadalieva, Bazar Korgon Initiative Group member and district council employee, May 2020

Before the project with the LSG, young people were used as a prop. For example, young people were always invited to attend mass events in town on Saturdays, or they would make a parade for sporting events. But they were never taken into account, or it can be said that young people were not involved in the decision-making process for initiatives intended for them. The Jash Araket project gave young people a good opportunity to be heard and engage with local self-government.

Talant Abdulkasymov, teacher, IDEA CA mentor, and head of the Kyzyl-Kiya Jashtary organization within the mayor's office, May 2020

In addition to the outcomes above, in which LSGs adopted and will fund program elements to continue after UNPBF's Jash Araket funding has finished, another significant cluster of outcomes that emerged from the evaluation exercise involve institutional changes. Many of the respondents stressed that LSG employees were initially dismissive of them and their ideas, but community dialogues and round tables, as well as the training events for local government

officials themselves helped build working relationships. In several cases, these relationships resulted in institutional changes that will extend not only beyond the duration of the UNPBF project, but can extend these changes to the next group of youth to come of age.

Creation of youth spaces

IGs in several locations followed the program goals to create safe spaces for youth by identifying the need for a permanent physical space where they can meet to develop ideas or hold events. The IGs in Bazar Korgon and Tokmok articulated the need to their local government and were granted a designated office space for their activities.

Greater engagement and functioning of youth committees

As already mentioned above, following the success of the EC project in identifying the “on paper only” nature (or sometimes total absence) of youth committees in many districts, the IG in Bazar Korgon succeeded in forming a permanent youth committee in their district, which was included in the training event and launched a year-long action plan. (See Odina Mamadalieva’s change story below). In Tokmok, the mayor’s office created a permanent youth civic advisory committee that institutionalized the role of the IG.

Capacity building for sotspedagogy

In a number of locations, IGs identified problems like vulnerability of the children of migrants to abuse or neglect in Kotormo, or early marriage in Uzgen; they also identified that *sotspedagogy* (social instructors, a new position in Kyrgyzstani schools that combine some of the functions of a guidance counsellor and social worker) were well positioned actors to have an influence on these problems since they have a responsibility for the home lives of students and have direct, regular access to students and their families. In the case of Kotormo and the needs of migrant children, the IG members met with *sotspedagogy* to discuss an action plan, and found that the teachers were not equipped with the skills they needed and in some cases were not aware that this would fall under their responsibility. The Kotormo group developed and implemented a training workshop for the teachers, led by child psychologists who helped the *sotspedagogy* build their professional capacity so they could expand their outreach and make it more effective for the community’s specific needs. In Uzgen, the IG worked with *sotspedagogy* to create an original video about early marriage, and reinforced the need for *sotspedagogy* to engage whole families and make home visits rather than just engaging with students at school – particularly because early marriages are often decided by parents, and young people need allies to intervene, amplify their voices and explain the law.

Change Story: Stronger ties between schools and the IDN (Juvenile Inspectors) resulting in safer schools and less racketeering in Taigaraeva

During our survey we determined that the biggest problem that needed to be fixed was improving cooperation and building trust between students and the Ministry of Internal Affairs Juvenile Inspection officer [Inspektsiya po Delam Nosovershennoletnikh: IDN], responsible for addressing and preventing juvenile offenses and delinquencies. Because at the

time we did the survey, kids said that they were threatened by racketeering, but were afraid to turn to the IDN or the police because they didn't believe they would be protected, that because they had complained the same racketeers might retaliate against them. Yes, there was even a case when one of the older boys couldn't come up with 800 som [around 10 GBP] and took his own life, he committed suicide because of the racketeers. These kinds of things really happened. Now the situation has improved, the police are working in all three schools... now the racketeering has decreased, because they are probably afraid that the students will call the police.

Bubusara Zhenishbek Kyzy, Taigaraeva district Initiative Group member, May 2020

In Taigaraeva, the IG identified racketeering in schools in Taigaraeva and Suzak district and lack of trust between schoolchildren and police as a critical problem. By building a close working relationship with the IDN officer responsible for the schools, as identified in the extended quote from the participant above the initiative succeeded in building trust between students and the authorities.

The intervention worked on multiple levels, planning sports events and other positive social interactions between students at the rival schools that included participation from IDN to build trust, and community “teahouse” events that brought students, parents, school officials and child psychologists together with the IDN office to discuss youth violence and racketeering and what they could do to stop it.

The IDN officer for Taigaraeva district, Urkiya Usualieva, spoke very highly of the initiative:

The students from Taigaraeva district school asked Interbilim themselves to organize events that would include students from the neighbouring district. For my part, the IDN fully supported this initiative. We were able to create a relationship of trust between students and law enforcement, with the police. I had never participated before in these kinds of activities, where the students themselves are the initiators. This was a first... we need to have meetings like this because they help us – every IDN officer is responsible for 3000 children, in the cities it's 4000 that we have to watch over, and the reality is that each officer is actually responsible for 6-7000 children, they can't do it all. When the parents, LSG, and school administrations all understand that we have to work in the same direction together, that really helps, and we need that badly.

Urkiya Usualieva, Juvenile Inspection Officer for Taigaraeva district, May 2020

- **Outcome:** Jash Araket IGs built strong relationships with local government actors that produced institutional changes in local government structure, creating dedicated safe spaces for youth activities, new lasting institutions in some local governments like the civic advisory committee in Tokmok, built lasting capacity for local government employees to better serve their communities, and created relationships of trust with institutions like the IDN office in Taigaraeva district that created closer working relationships with schools and students and resulted in a decrease in racketeering in schools.

- **Significance:** Bazar Korgon district had no youth representation in local government before the Jash Araket project, and now has a permanent committee. In Taigaraeva, IG participatory research found that the racketeering problem in schools was so serious that at least one student was driven to suicide, while the new relationship with police has significantly decreased racketeering incidents according to the local IDN office, and also decreased conflict between schools in neighbouring districts.
- **Contribution:** Participants credit IDEA and Interbilim for helping them build relationships with local government offices and hold events; Saferworld provided training and infrastructure for all aspects of the project; local government partners provided space and cooperation on all these initiatives.

Young women advocate for gender equality

In my family I am the oldest [child], so according to the stereotypes for Asian girls we are supposed to stay home and listen to our elders, brothers, or husbands. Before the project I was afraid, or I guess you could say I was too shy, with my father – I couldn't express my thoughts. But in the trainings with our mentors, I learned the right way to express my thoughts and to communicate to the point that my parents would listen to me – it worked out so that my parents began to support me.

Madinakhon, Kyzyl Kiya Initiative Group member, May 2020

All of this [content in the WhatsApp peacebuilding course] introduces necessary, important topics that young people need to know about. Because left on their own, not even their parents talk to young people about these things. Take gender – the parents themselves don't know the difference between gender and biological sex. So how will that parent support the development of their child [on this issue?] The problems related to gender inequality, a lot of the adults themselves don't believe they exist, they have a false understanding and they aren't going to discuss this with young people. Maybe in big cities like Bishkek, Osh, Talas, or Karakol some organizations will come there and talk about it. But in far-off regions young people don't know much [about this], they don't even have a basic understanding that these concepts exist. Even to search for it on the internet you have to at least first know that there is such a word.

Aliaskar Adylov, WhatsApp Peacebuilding course trainer, May 2020

As with the EC YDTD project, one of the clearest strengths of the Jash Araket project is its systematic and deliberate effort to support young women and men in understanding gender inequality and providing training and opportunities for young women to speak out and take action on these issues and for young men to consider how their gender stereotypes about masculinity and femininity affect their lives, their opportunities and their behaviour.

Respondents frequently mention that all project activities specifically created opportunities for young women to become more involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives, and young women participants more frequently articulate a personal change resulting from

their participation in the project that helped them find their voice and advocate for their own interests and the things they care about in their families, communities and local government.

Participants in the southern IGs chose early marriage as one of the most frequent topics for their participatory research and interventions. The video advocacy project planned and implemented by the Uzgen group mentioned above, for example, both young men and women participants portrayed the roles of adults in their community from their own perspectives, showing how their elders of both genders were complicit in perpetuating inequality toward their daughters and young women.

Change Story: Odina develops her leadership skills, empowers others as leaders, and advocates before the provincial government

Odina Mamadalieva is a 20 year old Uzbek woman who had wanted to participate in social projects from a young age, already at 11 and 12 years old when she heard about UNICEF programs in Osh. Her parents, though, wouldn't allow it – “they argued that I'm a girl, and I was little.” Now as a young adult working in accounting in the water department in Bazar Korgon region, she eagerly took the opportunity to engage in the Jash Araket project as a representative of local government. Like many participants, she was first inspired by the debate program and the way it empowered her to express herself and gave her skills to argue for her needs and interests. She joined the IG for Bazar Korgon and quickly emerged as both a leader and a key facilitator for the group building on her connections within the district government. But even though she worked in the government office, before the project she didn't expect to be heard:

After the project I began to have faith in the LSG, because before I thought that if I say something, they will just pretend to listen or won't listen at all. And I have faith in other young people now. When I went to the camp in Osh for the first time, I didn't know any of the other members of our group [in Bazar Korgon], I thought there were no other young people like this at all.

Odina and her fellow IG members not only succeeded in getting a youth committee formed in Bazar Korgon and a permanent office to work in, they were able to secure 400,000 som [around 4,400 GBP] in funding to support a full activity plan that included sports and cultural events, activities and contests that brought youth together across ethnic lines in one of the communities directly affected by the 2010 violence and where ethnic tensions remain high. They had begun the process to open a youth centre in the city and start a summer film festival when the Covid-19 state of emergency was declared, and hope to continue to implement their plans when it is lifted.

As part of her IG, Odina chose to research the labour migration, the dangers facing migrants and the underlying causes driving so many from her community to leave to work on construction sites in Russia sometimes without even finishing school. They found that in some of these cases, because of poor healthcare and crowded conditions the young migrants –

including her classmates – had even contracted TB, suffered permanent injuries in workplace accidents or worked long hours in dangerous conditions only to be cheated out of their pay “because they didn’t know their rights.”

In March of this year we raised this question on the regional level. We took part in a roundtable, and it included the governor, the deputy head for migration for the region, and specialists and sotspedagogy from each district travelled to participate. There was a big discussion, and we learned that this problem isn’t just in Bazar Korgon district, but in the whole region. There were cases when young people became victims of human trafficking... as a result of the roundtable, counsellors for migrants were funded to work at least on the regional level – this had existed before but had been removed in budget cuts. It’s important that before they leave people can receive effective consultation about their rights and responsibilities, about who they can turn to if they find themselves in a difficult situation. We know that we can’t influence the outflow of migration, because that’s a complex economic issue, but at least we have to make it a little bit safer.

Odina’s story of progressing from a junior employee in the accounting division of the district water department, to get to bring her concerns to the governor of the region and work as a key young leader in her newly-formed youth committee, is a remarkable example of the way the Jash Araket project was able to empower and equip young people to be leaders even in a post-conflict situation in a rural community.

- **Outcome:** Respondents note that Jash Araket workshops, camps and all events consistently involved women of all ages and gave them opportunities to consider, express and act on the issues that concern them despite serious obstacles and cultural stereotypes. Trainers and respondents noted that Jash Araket events and workshops were for many participants the first time they had the opportunity to talk about gender inequality, and for many the first time they learned the word “gender.” Multiple IGs chose early marriage as the community security issue they most wanted to address, and successfully implemented forum theatre and video advocacy campaigns.
- **Significance:** Interview respondents frequently identified gender inequality and discrimination as a persistent and difficult obstacle for youth empowerment and conflict prevention in all spheres.
- **Contribution:** As in the EC project, these successful outcomes likely would have been impossible without careful planning and conflict awareness on the part of the Saferworld and partner staff. Saferworld project staff deliberately built a program to improve gender equality outcomes and clearly made this a successful priority for the project. The skilful and thoroughly competent female staff in all partner organizations were highly praised by participants of both genders for modelling and mentoring these values. Evidence from the interviews show that modelling gender equality and positive professional women role models is a real strength of both organizations.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

1. The Participatory Peacebuilding Course delivered via WhatsApp provided an innovative introduction to community security and peacebuilding work, balancing challenges of remote delivery, complex concepts, and participant availability.

- The Participatory Peacebuilding Course delivered via WhatsApp sought to deliver a considerable amount of material, including a number of complex concepts and tools, such as context (as in the ABC conflict analysis triangle – Attitudes, Behaviours, Context), collective memory, gender and gender sensitivity, conflict sensitivity, actor power mapping, and project risk. The curriculum reflects Saferworld’s approach anchored in the community security cycle, empowering community members to move from analysis of community security issues and their causes, to seeking solutions for them through action planning and implementation; while these complementary elements are most empowering when presented together as a whole, the volume of material can present a challenge for introductory learners, especially if they are unfamiliar with the conceptual elements, and have difficulty absorbing and applying them to their own contexts and experiences. Course moderators experienced a further challenge in seeking to present all this material in a timeframe that matched with the availability of participants to complete the course amidst their additional commitments, and to maintain their motivation through issues of availability and comprehension.
- External evaluation data confirmed the types of challenges in comprehension detailed in activity reports, and course participants and moderators in their recollection focused less on conceptual elements such as conflict analysis, actor mapping, and risk assessment, and more on skills and exercises related to development of initiative plans.
- The interview with course moderator Aliaskar Adylov also confirmed the challenges reported in activity reports regarding different levels of knowledge and experience between participants. While the Saferworld team identified this issue even in the initial pilot phase, and sought to separate students into groups by skill level, it was difficult to assess the familiarity and comprehension of concepts, and levels of skills and knowledge in action planning and initiative development, during the recruitment and screening of potential participants. Mr. Adylov affirmed that course participants with prior experience still faced difficulties with certain concepts and exercises.

Recommendations:

1. *Offer further learning opportunities for those who are interested to deepen their skills and knowledge in community security concepts, such as context, gender and gender sensitivity, conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity, and actor mapping. Possibilities include opportunities for further exploration and discussion of concepts, as well as further practice in applying these concepts to analysis through illustrative examples and within their own community contexts. This would require efforts both to further adapt existing materials and methods to the local context, and to create new materials based on the experiences,*

successes, challenges, and lessons learned by project alumni and others engaged in peacebuilding work in Kyrgyzstan and the wider region.

- 2. A possible suggestion for assessing participant levels of knowledge, in order to separate them into groups, is to keep all students together through an introductory module, which can provide teachers and coordinators with enough information to make decisions on how to sort participants. As already understood by the team, separating participants into groups would involve its own sensitivities and require consideration in how it is approached.*

2. Youth participants demonstrated limited comprehension and application of core concepts of Community Security Assessment, as well as reticence to discuss some of the hardest impacting peace and security issues affecting their lives. While realistic expectations must be appropriate to the participant age group, and take into account the understanding of other actors and social barriers to challenging established narratives and structures, the ability to understand and apply these concepts and address existing issues ultimately affects the ability to plan and implement effective responses.

- Interviews demonstrated similar difficulties in comprehension, retention, and application of the concepts of context/conflict analysis, gender and conflict sensitivity, and actor mapping, which are keys to community security assessment, across IG members attending training and WhatsApp Participatory Peacebuilding Course participants. In discussing lessons learned from these activities, respondents tended to focus on the technical elements related to designing and executing action plans. Because the Community Security Assessment forms the foundation for action plans, ability to understand and apply these concepts impacts the resulting initiatives.
- Interviews and secondary documents also demonstrated that difficult issues including gender-based violence, inter-ethnic violence, inter-ethnic intolerance, prejudice and stereotypes are often raised in the initial brainstorm to identify security issues, but they are seldom followed up on in analysis or action plans. Clearly there are many external barriers to addressing these issues, including those imposed by government authorities, informal authorities, and social norms, but internalized psychosocial trauma may contribute to this silence as well and inhibit the development of understanding between people of different backgrounds.

Recommendations:

- 1. Consider efforts to strengthen the capacity of Saferworld country team staff and their local partners to recognize and identify trauma, to understand concepts and processes around the occurrence and experience of living with trauma, impacts of trauma on individuals and communities, risks associated with working with traumatized individuals and populations, and knowledge of available services and ways to refer individuals to those services. In accordance with Saferworld's approach to safeguarding people and mitigating against risk, any work related to trauma awareness must be recognized as carrying considerable risks – of retraumatization, of resistance from community and government stakeholders, of escalation of conflict, among others – and consequently such work must be led by experts with appropriate training and experience, and approached with careful consideration to the*

*local context. A critical element of such efforts is the delineation of what staff and local partners can safely and appropriately do, such as identifying trauma, recognizing its impacts, and being able to refer people to available services, in contrast to what is outside their capacity, including introducing these concepts to project participants or designing and implementing trauma aware programming themselves. In spite of these challenges, we believe such efforts might empower project team staff and local partners to facilitate participant comprehension of the concepts around conflict analysis, as they may help participants to personalize concepts that might otherwise be abstract and difficult to grasp, and help them to contextualize, reframe, and connect their own experiences to these concepts. Unprocessed primary or secondary trauma stemming from experience or witness of forms of violence or abuse may be a significant contributing factor to the barriers to discussing some of the most difficult peace and security issues, such as gender-based violence and inter-ethnic violence. Some potential initial resources for identifying and understanding effects of trauma include: the website peaceaftertrauma.com, founded by Carolyn Yoder, author of *The Little Book of Trauma Healing* (revised and updated 2020); the *Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR)* training program at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia; and the *Trauma Informed Peace Building and Development Assistance (TIPDA)* program offered by the organization *Mediators Without Borders* in Arlington, Virginia.*

2. *Consider adapting workshops for organizational awareness of and approaches to diversity and inclusion to the local context in order to respond to acknowledged challenges in achieving ethnic diversity and representation within project participation and outcomes. This would require collaboration between the Saferworld Kyrgyzstan team, others engaged in peacebuilding work in Kyrgyzstan, and trained professionals who have developed and facilitated curricula for helping organizations align their approaches to respond to these realities in other contexts. The country team could serve as a pilot for the process, and provide evaluative input on how it can be extended to project-level teams, including implementing partners, IGs, civil society actors, and possibly government.*
 - Upholding and fostering awareness of gender sensitivity, building gender equality into program design, and empowering both male and female participants to explore and discuss the ways in which both masculine and feminine gender stereotypes and institutional discrimination affect their lives, are among the strongest aspects of the program at all levels, as can be seen frequently in interviews. This is a credit to the whole SW team and their partners, and speaks to the fact that the program teams themselves reflect gender diversity, and are led by outstanding young women leaders from diverse regional backgrounds, who can contribute their own unique experiences and perspectives and understand well how to connect to others in their own communities. The points below offer considerations for fostering similar successes with regard to ethnic diversity.
 - The structural diversity of the team from a gender perspective, which facilitates its remarkable success designing programs that engage so well and with so much sensitivity on gender issues, has not yet been mirrored by similar success with issues of ethnic diversity, sensitivity, and participation. Saferworld staff were

transparent and open about the difficulties they have had attracting enduring minority engagement in both the EC and Jash Araket programs. The respondent sample reflects this, both in the proportions represented and the difficulty that local staff stress they had in attracting and retaining minority participation, especially from young Uzbek women.

- One of the most striking examples illustrative of this gap found in interviews is that repeatedly, young ethnic Kyrgyz participants related that one of the primary stereotypes they were able to overcome was that “all Uzbeks are bad.” Some respondents specifically cited being told by parents and community members that all Uzbeks are dangerous and should not be trusted. Accordingly, these respondents spoke in glowing terms about making friends across ethnic lines for the first time and their changing attitudes, often using phrases like “I found out they are just like us.” This is a strong positive achievement and means important goals of the program are being fulfilled. Interviews with ethnic minority participants, however, do not include stories illustrating these kinds of transformative experiences, whether in terms of seeing members of other groups differently (e.g., “I learned that not all Kyrgyz people think alike”) or feeling seen by members of other groups (e.g., the converse of the experience described by Kyrgyz participants above, “They found out that I am just like them”). This is in many ways understandable, since first of all interacting with the majority is always a less novel experience for minority communities, and also because it is a far steeper task to overcome the fear or sense of vulnerability experienced by a minority of any kind (by gender, ethnicity, or physical ability) when they are drawn into group interaction with the majority or dominant group. At the same time, this imbalance in the respondent interviews also indicates to the research team that majority and minority participants are experiencing the program in different ways, and that the challenges for program improvement may go beyond just engaging minority communities but also include making changes to the design and implementation of the programs so that minority participants are not just engaged, but engaged at the same level and able to experience the same benefits as those from the majority community.
- One step that could help address this challenge is the same one that has helped make the approach to gender issues so remarkably successful: ensuring that the inclusion of diverse representation is structurally built in to all stages of the project, that is, including the perspectives of the minority communities the program wants to reach from the development and design phases. The Saferworld staff is already aware of issues and well trained in sensitivity, but in the same way that a gender-sensitive man should not be expected to credibly speak for the voices of women, and conflict-sensitive White people cannot replace or be assumed to credibly represent the voices of Black and Brown people in the US or UK, the same applies in any majority-minority situation – even more critically in the near aftermath of serious conflict. Important steps have already been taken since this project was first designed to add ethnic Uzbek staff and native Uzbek speaking trainers, so this is not a recommendation to

change directions, only to go continue further with the positive progress already being made in this regard.

3. Participatory research processes were cited by respondents as a transformative empowerment and learning experience.

- Respondents asserted that they were energized and empowered by the experience of seeing themselves, and being seen by others, as researchers in community peace and security issues. This role offered youth participants self-confidence, and an opening, to approach older community members and initiate discussion on peace and security issues, both asserted by respondents as novel and exciting experiences for them.

Recommendation: Continue to employ participatory research techniques for exploring peace and security issues and ways to address them, whenever possible.

4. The Jash Araket project successfully included Local Self Government (LSG) members into the activity cycle, and brought them together with Initiative Group (IG) members, as key stakeholders in working toward the project’s objectives of recognizing the role of youth and peacebuilding and offering space for youth to discuss, advocate, and collaborate toward addressing peace and security issues.

- Including LSG members in training and activities, including the participatory research, and building relationships with them often bridged by youth mentors, seems to have been a key to creating some of the most successful outcomes uncovered in the evaluation. Involving members of exiting youth committees and including them in IGs similarly appears to have had a strong positive effect on facilitating the ability of the IGs to implement their ideas once they were developed. In the case of the change story of Odina Mamadalieva in Bazar Korgon above, including even an employee of the ayil okmotu water department – seemingly unrelated to youth advocacy or conflict resolution – empowered her as an employee of the local government, with connections and social networks within it, to create real outcomes and institutional changes.

Recommendations:

1. *Continue to target LSG members for engagement, including offering opportunities for relevant training and capacity building, as well as structured opportunities for collaborating with youth participants in the planning and implementation of initiatives. Specifically within certain LSGs, the efforts of Jash Araket (and prior EC YDTD project) participants and implementers to collaborate with LSG members established and fostered Youth Committees as an appropriate space for youth inclusion in decision-making processes. Future efforts can use shared capacity building, information sharing, and partnerships between Youth Committees to expand this process across other program locations. Project alumni within both civil society and local government, especially those youth participants who have gone on to enter local government, are key resources as mentors, bridge builders, and role models for fostering such further expansion.*
2. *As recommended in the EC YDTD evaluation report, it is also important that youth project participants continue to receive differentiated programming, mentorship, and ample space*

in which to develop and articulate their own ideas prior to being brought together with LSG members, in order to mitigate against power dynamics and power imbalances between the two groups. In further recognition of gender-based power imbalances between young women and young men IG members, project team staff may consider whether to develop differentiated approaches to capacity building based on gender for some or all of the activities leading toward initiative development, along with guidelines for determining whether or not to create separate spaces within IGs for young women and young men.

5. Gender sensitivity was applied at every stage of the project, allowing young participants of both genders to apply gender considerations in their analysis, planning and implementation of initiatives, and to recognize gender stereotypes and other contributing factors to gender inequality as well as their consequences.

- From their initial participation in democracy camps, youth participants were invited to engage critically with the gender norms and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity that they have been taught and which form part of their worldviews, including recognition of their own roles in reinforcing these norms and stereotypes.
- As detailed above in the fourth outcome cluster, Saferworld and local partner staff were instrumental in modelling approaches of gender sensitivity and constructive intervention to mitigate against furthering of gender inequality, as well as mentoring participants toward internalizing and enacting these approaches and attitudes within themselves.

Recommendation: Continue to build on these successes to provide opportunities for both young women and men to advocate for gender equality, through modelling positive approaches and constructive interventions at the “micro” level of individual and social interactions, and promoting effective advocacy and communication at the broader macro level. Build spaces as appropriate within all activities to introduce and reinforce concepts of gender equality through discussion, participation, and exercises that provide safe space environments for young participants to experiment and learn how to apply these concepts, embody positive approaches, and enact constructive interventions within their own lives and community contexts. Continue to foster awareness in young men of the impacts of masculine gender norms and stereotypes in reinforcing gender inequality, and the resulting impacts of associated behaviours and attitudes on themselves and their communities, in order to reinforce the responsibilities of young men toward creating gender sensitive spaces, and mitigate against discourses that frame gender issues only in terms of women asserting their agency.