

# SECRETARY-GENERAL'S PEACEBUILDING FUND

## STRATEGIC PEACEBUILDING REVIEW

PBF portfolio in  
Kyrgyzstan  
2018-2020



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Peacebuilding

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## PBF PORTFOLIO IN KYRGYZSTAN

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# I. PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

Kyrgyzstan's eligibility to receive funding from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) expired at the end of 2019. The Kyrgyz government has expressed its strong interest in a new round of eligibility structured around new needs and priorities in the country. In line with this request, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the Resident Coordinator's Office in Kyrgyzstan have planned a strategic review exercise to assess the peacebuilding related needs and challenges in Kyrgyzstan and identify whether the PBF remained well suited to support the response to these challenges.

This strategic review should be seen as an informal and limited exercise rather than a comprehensive portfolio evaluation. It builds on the comprehensive portfolio evaluation of the previous Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP) which was finalised in 2017, a number of project evaluations that have been conducted since then, and inputs from a strategic review workshop conducted in March 2020 in Bishkek.<sup>1</sup> Its first objective is to understand whether the current portfolio – consisting of the projects under the PPP as well as the projects that received funding from the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative since 2017 and the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan cross-border project - responds to key peacebuilding issues, challenges and needs in Kyrgyzstan. The second objective is to analyse whether the Peacebuilding Fund - as a rapid, strategic and flexible fund - is the best suited donor to respond to the peacebuilding priorities in Kyrgyzstan and beyond, and whether the Fund has been able to catalyse further donor attention and support to these priorities. Third, the exercise aims to draw practical and concrete lessons learned and good practices from past activities supported by the Fund, and particularly to reflect on the successes and challenges of the strategy, design and implementation of the portfolio.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the review is expected to support a common understanding about key elements of effective and relevant peacebuilding programming in Kyrgyzstan identify strategic peacebuilding priority areas for potential future PBF investment in Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluations from GPI project: „Women and Girls as Drivers of Peace and the Prevention of Radicalisation“ and „Addressing social disparity and gender inequality to prevent conflicts in new settlements in Bishkek“, and YPI projects: #Jashstan2: Youth as Agents of Peace and Stability in Kyrgyzstan and „Cameras in the Hands of Children“.

<sup>2</sup> See ToRs in annex for more details about the guiding questions of the review.

## II. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PBF ENGAGEMENT IN KYRGYZSTAN

The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) started supporting the Kyrgyz Republic in the wake of the violent inter-ethnic clashes, known as Osh events, of June 2010. Since then, PBF has gradually invested a total of around USD 49 million in peacebuilding projects. The first projects in 2010 were funded through the short-term Immediate Response Facility (IRF) window, to build peace and trust in the country's regions affected by the conflict. An initial support package of USD 10 million for the duration of 18 months focused on empowerment and reconciliation of communities in the Southern regions, with a specific focus on youth and women, social cohesion, and administration of justice. These three areas were identified based on immediate needs after the interethnic conflict to restore damaged social fabric, help build trust towards the government through enforcing justice mechanisms and prevent relapse of conflict through engaging youth and women.

In 2013, the UN Secretary-General declared Kyrgyzstan eligible for additional funds through the longer-term Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility (PRF) window, with a view to supporting a structured peacebuilding process in Kyrgyzstan, driven by national actors. A Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP) – a joint strategic document of the Government and the United Nations and a requirement of the PBF at the time for PRF funds – was developed, focusing on three main peacebuilding outcomes for the years 2013-2016: (1) Human Rights and Rule of Law, (2) Support to local self-government bodies, and (3) Multilingual education and respect for diversity and minority rights. Within this timeframe, a total of USD 15.1 million was allocated for the implementation of 10 projects. Two additional projects were approved through the Gender Promotion Initiative in 2014, and a third, cross-border project with Tajikistan, in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The cross-border project was renewed after a successful first phase and the second phase ended at the end of 2019.

<sup>4</sup> 2017 PBF Program Evaluation, at: [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/kyrgyzstan\\_august\\_2017\\_-\\_evaluation\\_of\\_priority\\_pla n.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/kyrgyzstan_august_2017_-_evaluation_of_priority_pla n.pdf)

A portfolio evaluation conducted in 2017 found that the issues and challenges identified by the first PPP were and remained relevant, and produced high quality results that were strategic and seized emerging opportunities for building peace.<sup>4</sup> Conflict drivers such as youth exclusion, border tensions, the potential for violent extremism and governance related issues were identified as potential future priority areas. The need for conflict sensitivity and a 'do no harm' approach were identified as particular priorities for potential projects that would focus on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE).

In December 2017, based on a country context analysis report, stakeholder capacity assessment, multiple workshops and consultations with the government, the PBF approved another round of allocations for Kyrgyzstan totaling USD 8 million over a period of three years. This time, the Peacebuilding Priority Plan focused on a single priority area: the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). Under the overall PVE umbrella, the 2018-2020 PPP outlined three main outcome areas for the PBF's engagement and designated six UN agencies working on these projects:



**Enhancing institutional capacity** of national and local institutions to have technical and policy expertise to implement measures preventing radicalisation to violent extremism (UNDP, UNICEF, UN OHCHR, UN Women);



**Support to the Prison Service** (penitentiary staff), probation and police officers and forensic service to enhance their institutional capacity and expertise in dealing with radicalisation (UNODC, UNDP);



**Developing resilience in target communities** against radicalisation (UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women).

The implementation of these projects started in 2018, with a duration of 36 months, through 2020. In this time period, four additional projects were funded through the Gender and Youth Promotion

Promotion Initiatives of the PBF. Also, the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan cross-border project was extended until 2019. Those projects have a shorter timeline of only 18 months and smaller budgets compared to the projects covering outcomes 1-3. The total funding of all projects under the current strategic review of the PBF portfolio amount to USD 18.423,967.

The three core challenges the broader portfolio covers – PVE, the empowerment of women and young people, and mitigating cross-border tensions – have responded to the peacebuilding needs that have been consistently identified in Kyrgyzstan since 2010, not only through UN conflict analysis on Kyrgyzstan and peacebuilding evaluations, but also through independent reports. But the bigger question is whether the right balance has been struck in responding to these priorities, whether the Peacebuilding Fund was the right donor to do so, and whether the desired peacebuilding results have been achieved.<sup>5</sup>

5. For example the report on „Women and Violent Extremism in Europe and Central Asia“ (2017), see: [https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/women-and-violent-extremism-in-europe-and-central-asia\\_or-Crisisgroup-report-on-„Syria-Calling:Radicalisation-in-Central-Asia“-\(2015\),\\_at:https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan-state-fragility-and-radicalisation\\_file:///Users/gizmous/Downloads/saferworld-in-kyrgyzstan-spreads.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/women-and-violent-extremism-in-europe-and-central-asia_or-Crisisgroup-report-on-„Syria-Calling:Radicalisation-in-Central-Asia“-(2015),_at:https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan-state-fragility-and-radicalisation_file:///Users/gizmous/Downloads/saferworld-in-kyrgyzstan-spreads.pdf)

### III. SCOPE, LIMITATIONS, AND METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

The review has utilised a combination of desk research, interviews in the field with key stakeholders selected by the PBF Secretariat based on consultations with UN agencies, INGOs and sub-contracted implementing partners, and a two day workshop to enrich the findings and ensure inclusive consultation with the government, implementing partners and major stakeholders.<sup>6</sup>

The desk research was conducted on the basis of strategic documents (notably, the Peacebuilding Priority Plan 2017 and related Conflict Analysis, and the 2017 portfolio evaluation, and included an analysis of all project documents, progress and annual reports, and project evaluations). In line with the ToRs that defined the exercise not as an evaluation but a strategic review, the interview questions were formulated as a combination of OECD DAC evaluation criteria (with a particular focus on categories of relevance and impact), the PBF guidelines and the new PBF Strategy, as well as a number of individual project-based questions developed in consultation with the PBF Secretariat.<sup>7</sup>

The in-country mission took place between February 25 and March 14, 2020. It included two days of meetings with the Resident Coordinator (RC), project managers of UN agencies and international NGOs, and one day of focus group meetings with representatives of state agencies in Bishkek. A four-day field visit to Osh, Kyzyl-Kiya, and Batken was spent with in-person interviews and meetings with project implementers, beneficiaries, and local government representatives.<sup>8</sup>

During the last week of the mission two two-day workshops were organised; the workshop discussions have further enriched the findings of this review. The first workshop took place within the framework of the 2020 UN Peacebuilding

Architecture Review and brought together government, UN and civil society actors from the Central Asian region. The second workshop was part of the strategic review exercise and brought together participants from Kyrgyz state agencies, civil society, academia, local authorities, and other development partners. The overall aim of this workshop was to reflect on the ongoing implementation of the PBF portfolio with the view of Kyrgyzstan's application for re-eligibility for PBF funding. Participants discussed the preliminary observations and findings of this review, highlighted challenges and lessons learned and identified strategic priority areas for future peacebuilding interventions in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>9</sup>

The strategic review exercise was a first for the Peacebuilding Fund, going beyond traditional portfolio and project evaluations. While the innovative nature of this exercise seemed well suited for the objective at hand – assessing Kyrgyzstan's re-eligibility to the Fund, it must be noted that there were no past examples or similar strategic review experiences for the project to rely on. This was an advantage, insofar as it enabled tailoring the content of the strategic review to the objectives at hand, but the lack of previous good practices and lessons learned from similar experiences led to many adjustments along the way.

While the report was initially intended to be much shorter, the broad span of projects and timelines (with references to the previous portfolio) required a more thorough analysis. The unfolding of the Covid-19 crisis during the field mission led to additional challenges and delays.

<sup>6</sup>. This review was conducted by the international consultant. During the field research she was accompanied by the M&E officer of the PBF Secretariat in Bishkek.

<sup>7</sup>. See criteria in: OECD (2012), *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results*.

<sup>8</sup>. Full list of interviews in Annex 1.

<sup>9</sup>. See section V and workshop report in Annex 2.

### 1. CONTEXT AND CONFLICT ANALYSES

From the perspective of the PPP, the new single-priority approach adopted in 2017 presented a shift from the original multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach to respond to root causes of conflict and peacebuilding needs in Kyrgyzstan. In other words, this was a shift from the prevention of the recurrence of the 2010 violence through addressing its root causes, to preventing threats that were thought to have the potential to de-stabilise the country in the future. The following section explores the context analyses on which the 2018-2020 PPP is based and the degree of their overlap with the 2013-2016 PPP. It ends with a discussion of the evolving context in 2019/20.



#### A) REPORT: “RELIGIOUS RADICALISATION LEADING TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN KYRGYZSTAN” (2016)

Addressing terrorism related threats became an international priority for Central Asia as a result of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. An estimated 2,000 to 5,000 foreign terrorist fighters that left from Central Asia to Iraq and Syria, and high-profile attacks carried out by people of Central Asian origin globally, as well as the perceived risks of “Islamic radicalisation” by the population fed into the fears of violent extremism.<sup>10</sup> Partially in response to international and domestic pressure, the government prioritised PVE as the most pressing peacebuilding issue in 2017.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10.</sup> According to interviews, the perceived islamisation of the population was nourished by certain visible changes in public life (e.g. construction of hundreds of prayer halls all over the country mostly financed by foreign countries, young women starting to wear headscarves also in urban areas, peer pressure among young men to attend Friday prayers, etc.). Interview partners referred to the 2013 Boston bombing, a prison outbreak of 9 convicts on extremist charges from a prison near Bishkek in 2015, an attack on the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek in 2016 as well as the increasing phenomenon of Kyrgyz citizens leaving as foreign fighters to war zones in Iraq and Syria which, according to data from the Ministry of Interior, amounted to around 800 people.

<sup>11.</sup> For the purpose of implementation of the Concept of National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic, endorsed by the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic No 120 (dated June 9, 2012) the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted the State Program on countering extremism and terrorism for 2017 – 2022 (June 21, 2017).

This was supported by the then Resident Coordinator.<sup>12</sup> In 2016, towards the end of the implementation of the first PPP, an international consultant was contracted by the UNCT to undertake an analysis of the situation relating to religious radicalisation leading to violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>13</sup> The resulting report used available data, mostly from the Ministry of Interior, existing research papers and interviews in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>14</sup> It also relied on existing research on radicalisation in European countries and sought to link them to Central Asia.

That report’s main weakness was its inability to differentiate between religious and non-religious extremism and between violent extremism and radicalisation. The report also fell short in clearly identifying root causes and conflict drivers leading to violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan. Importantly, while the report discussed the role that ethnicity plays and the grievances that exist, it did not sufficiently highlight the risks of stigmatisation, further alienation and ultimately exclusion of religious people or groups by merely “appearing religious”. This is particularly relevant for more conservative populations in the South of the country.

<sup>12.</sup> In 2016, UNDP strengthened its work on PVE: in June 2016, the first regional workshop on PVE in the Europe and Central Asia region was organised by UNDP in Tajikistan and in July 2016 a new position of „Global Programme Manager and Special Advisor on Prevention of Violent Extremism” in BPPS/ New York was created. See: <https://www.undp.org/content/oslo-governance-centre/en/home/library/undp-s-preventing-violent-extremism-news-update.html>

<sup>13.</sup> Multiple interviewees from RUNOs mentioned that this report was supposed to serve as underlying conflict analysis for the new PPP even though this report only uses a narrow lense of radicalisation and does not provide a broader peacebuilding context. Anna Matveeva: Religious radicalisation leading to violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan, Report on situation analysis and country context including stakeholder capacity assessment for the UN Peacebuilding Fund in Kyrgyzstan, June 2016.

<sup>14.</sup> 38 individual respondents were interviewed and 7 discussion groups were held. A four-day trip to the South was carried out, in the course of which Osh city, Kara-Suu and Aravan districts were visited, as well as Jalalabat. Visit to a male prison no. 47 was conducted in a suburb of Bishkek and a new settlement outside the capital (novostroika) was visited to research a community group in the north of the country. Efforts were made to have a balanced ethnic, age and gender representation, but a male young adult group remained underrepresented. Field stage concluded with presentation of the preliminary findings to the UN Country Team, followed by a discussion.



## B) 2013-2016 PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

An independent evaluation of the 2013-2016 PBF project portfolio, undertaken in spring/summer 2017, included recommendations on future peacebuilding programming, including on the plans to focus on PVE as the next PRF priority area. In general, the evaluation team supported the “shift in focus towards other peacebuilding priorities such as preventing violent extremism.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time, it stressed that the progress on inter-ethnic relations – the focus of the previous PPP – still needed further attention in future programming. The report identified **youth unemployment, corruption, radicalisation, and non-demarcated borders** as important **conflict drivers** and sources of inter-ethnic tensions. “Nearly all interviewed provincial, district and local level stakeholders,” the report pointed out, viewed these drivers as threats to peace. Most respondents additionally cited social fracture due to **migration**, a lack of basic **infrastructure**, and deficiencies in **education and social services**.<sup>16</sup> Based on the strong stakeholder interest in **youth employment**, the evaluation recommended supporting research on the potential of education and job creation as entry points for PVE.

This review notes that the recommendations of the portfolio evaluation were only partially taken on board by the 2017-2020 PPP. The recommendations on youth unemployment and exclusion were put in focus only through future GYPI projects. Only the latest GPI project, which had just started its implementation in early 2020, has a specific focus on migration. As the PBF does not fund investments in infrastructure projects in line with its comparative advantage, this area was also not integrated as a separate area of focus for the Fund (except for certain components in the cross-border project).



## C) PEACEBUILDING PRIORITY PLANS: 2013-2016 AND 2018-2020

In line with the above-mentioned report on religious radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan, the analysis included in the 2018-2020 PPP focused exclusively on the phenomenon of growing religious radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan. Based on the proposition that violent extremism has the potential “to reverse the development gains made under the past years under the previous Plan” (p. 3), the PPP declares its aim as to safeguard the relatively peaceful environment, and to support the government in dealing with the threat of extremism.

A deeper dive into the 2018-2020 PPP reveals that many of the issues identified as “drivers of violent extremism”, which include “persistent and growing inequality across the country across multiple layers, perceptions of injustice, human rights violations, social-political exclusion, widespread corruption or sustained mistreatment of certain groups, are in line with the issues identified in previous analyses as peacebuilding challenges. The **root causes** and long-term challenges for these drivers are identified as (1) **weak governance and rule of law, and risks of human rights violations**, (2) **marginalisation and isolation of certain populations**, and (3) **understanding of religious diversity**.

From this perspective, in spite of its shift in focus, the 2018-2020 PPP shows a good deal of overlap with the 2013-2016 PPP. The PPP 2013-2016, which was based on a Peacebuilding Priority Needs Assessment (PBNA), selected the following areas as main peacebuilding interventions for the PBF:

**1. Human Rights and Rule of Law:** “The implementation of critical laws, policies, reforms and recommendations, of human rights mechanisms (incl. UPR) to uphold the rule of law, improve access to justice and respect, protect and fulfill human rights.”;

15. Terrence Jantzi: *Evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund Project Portfolio In Kyrgyzstan* (31 August 2017), p.44.

16. Jantzi: *Evaluation of PBF portfolio 2013-2016* (2017), p. 40.

**2. Strengthening of Local Self-Government bodies:** “to enable them to address local tensions of different nature through inclusive dialogue and community peacebuilding initiatives.”;

**3. Support to the further development of a common civic identity, multilingual education and respect for diversity and minority rights.**

These areas were built into joint projects and implemented by RUNOs.<sup>17</sup>

Under the previous portfolio, the human rights and rule of law components were more directly and broadly supported than under the current plan. This included support to the judicial reform process and drafting of large pieces of legislation, including the criminal and criminal procedural codes. The current 3rd Outcome also shows similarities with the previous plan as the chosen approach for developing resilience in communities works through i.a. support for multilingual education, civic identity and respect for diversity.

The main distinction between the two PPPs is that the current portfolio's overall objective is to prevent violent extremism. In fact, this approach was in line with international PVE trends at the time. Many key stakeholders, including the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union have backed security-based counter-terrorism measures and built up national intelligence and security sectors in an effort to address existing threats, an approach called “countering violent extremism” (CVE). These measures were sometimes supplemented by strengthening the justice sector and prison systems, addressing the grievances of young people, and delivering development aid in order to prevent recruitment into terrorist groups – an approach called “preventing violent extremism” (PVE).

In developing its current portfolio, the PBF tried to direct peacebuilding support toward activities that help address root causes of violent extremism but also violence more generally, by providing funding in support of the rule of law, human rights, and social cohesion and focusing on laws, policies and law enforcement actors that are related to violent extremism (**Outcome 1**) and prisons (**Outcome 2**).

Geographically, the projects under the second PPP expanded its interventions to northern parts of Kyrgyzstan. The 10 projects under the first PPP targeted 14 priority districts (Rayons) and cities, covering 107 priority municipalities. The 3 projects under the new PPP targeted 11 districts (rayons) and cities, covering 31 municipalities. There has been overlap in 3 cities (Bishkek, Osh and Jalal-Abad) and 2 districts (Suzak and Kara-Suu).

The fact that the priority areas of the previous plan show overlap with the ones under the current portfolio is neither surprising nor negative from a longer-term peacebuilding perspective as the contextual issues have not drastically changed over the past three years. What has changed is the importance attached to the political priorities of certain issues over others which will be discussed in the following section.

## 2. EVOLVING CONTEXT AND NEW CHALLENGES

The political situation in Kyrgyzstan has been very dynamic. Many interview partners highlighted that while the threat of violent extremism had decreased over the last years, the overall political climate, the socio-economic conditions and grievances have worsened. This section provides an overview of the evolving context, specifically the challenges and conflict factors, as identified in recent reports as well as in interviews with stakeholders. A final section on new threats posed by the Covid-19 pandemic is added, as the health crisis began to unfold during the review process.

<sup>17</sup> The PPP outlined a few project ideas but didn't assign UN agencies to already drafted projects as the current PPP.



## A) POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN 2019-2020

This part intends to look at the current conflict drivers in Kyrgyzstan, using the Conflict and Peace Analysis, the Strategic Review Workshop and the perceptions of interviewees as entry points, to define the peacebuilding challenges the country currently faces.

A conflict and peace analysis commissioned by UNCT and finalised in April 2019 by the PeaceNexus Foundation has found that while Kyrgyzstan does not suffer from open conflict, many structural factors that led to the violence in 2005 and 2010 are still present, with additional stressors added on top. The analysis identifies challenges related to creating a shared civic identity in a multi-ethnic country, weak dialogue mechanisms between the government and the population, weak governance capacity, the persistence of gender-based violence and the exclusion of women and young people, weak local capacities for conflict prevention, risks linked to labor migration, support to multi-cultural and multi-lingual education, the regulation of the extractive industry and the sustainable maintenance of natural resources as the core peacebuilding issues in the country. These points were reinforced by interviews conducted by the consultant on the challenges the country is facing, as well as during the strategic review workshop held in Bishkek on 10-11 March 2020.

While the order of issues varied, the following items were consistently mentioned: the decline of the **overall political climate**; **corruption and weak governance**; high levels of **intolerance and exclusion** (inter-ethnic, religious, inter-religious, intra-generational); the negative impact of **migration** on families and society; **secular - religious divides and tensions** (the political influence of religious authorities, freedom of religion and belief, the role of women, etc.); the lack or low quality of **education** (incl. encroachments on critical thinking); **unemployment** (in particular for

youth); the **media** as an actor and tool for the dissemination of hate speech and false information; **horizontal inequalities**. The **lack of a shared identity**, manifested by the various divides across religious – secular, inter-ethnic, North-South, and inter-generational lines, continues to underscore the **lack of social cohesion**. According to the peace and conflict analysis, whether such tensions lead to violent conflict in the future is hard to predict, and depends on the innate strength of the country, its people and its institutions to mitigate these tensions in a constructive manner.

**Weak governance, corruption, and the low effectiveness of state institutions** is a persistent problem in Kyrgyzstan, linked to the country's relatively recent experimentation with democratic institutions, and the legacy of the former Soviet-style bureaucratic culture. While the government enjoys a relatively high degree of popularity with the population, the political scene in the past two years have been characterised by rising tensions and an increased polarisation within and between political parties<sup>18</sup>, fueling anxiety about **political instability**.<sup>19</sup> In November 2019, two media outlets published an investigation which reported that 700 million dollars were allegedly laundered through Kyrgyz Customs in a complex **corruption** pattern. Nearly one thousand people protested in front of the Bishkek White House demanding an investigation into the matter.

When asked specifically about **violent extremism**, opinions about its relevance varied greatly among interviewees. Many mentioned that religious extremism still existed in Kyrgyzstan but that the degree of

<sup>18</sup>. A confrontation between President Jeenbekov and his predecessor Almazbek Atambaev in August 2019 led to a violent attack by police special forces on Atambaev's house and his arrest on multiple charges. Prior to this, Jeenbekov had appointed his close political circle to key positions, alienating large parts of the political elite.

<sup>19</sup>. Based on „PBF Annual Strategic Country Report on Peacebuilding and PBF Support“, Kyrgyzstan (2019).

threat had decreased. They pointed out that the numbers of people leaving for Syria and Iraq had drastically gone down. Others pointed that while radical religious views exist, these cannot be necessarily linked to violence. Some state agencies and security services underscored that extremists had gone into hiding and were not as visible anymore but could be mobilised at any moment, pointing out to the dormant risks. Others highlighted that the integration of former foreign terrorist fighters from war zones, including women and children, was the bigger issue at this time.<sup>20</sup> There seems to be growing acceptance of the “do no harm” principle; namely the need to prevent the stigmatisation of religious communities in the context of efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism. **The role of religion in public life** is a trickier issue, leading to deliberations on how to address religious – secular divides and the state’s role in regulating religious life.

**Inter-ethnic tensions** continue to persist, with the Uzbek community continuing to suffer from exclusion from political and economic life, social and cultural isolation, and grievances linked to the 2010 violence. A series of recent violent inter-ethnic incidents in the Northern Chuy region also became a matter of serious concern in 2019. One occurred between Kyrgyz and Turkish ethnic groups in the village of Orok, and another one between Kyrgyz and Dungan ethnic groups in the village of Vostochnoe. Kyrgyzstan was also affected by an inter-ethnic violent incident that took place in neighboring Kazakhstan in early February 2020, when violence between Kazakhs and ethnic Dungans left 10 people dead, dozens injured, and thousands of Dungans fleeing across the border into Kyrgyzstan.<sup>21</sup>

The unresolved issue of border delimitation and demarcation with Tajikistan continued to

**violent border incidents** and spark hostilities between the two countries in 2019. Dozens of clashes have since then been registered between citizens of both countries, including an armed incident in September 2019 that left several people killed and approximately 20 wounded. While the situation along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border looks better, with 85% of the 1378 km long border having been agreed on, the demarcation processes drew protests in September 2019, highlighting the need to sensitise residents of the affected areas about border agreements. Additionally, a few conflicts related to natural resources, pasture and water, occurred in May 2020 on the border with the Uzbek enclave of Sokh.

**Intolerance around women’s issues** is on the rise, often accompanied with verbal abuse and hate speech around the role of women in society. These developments became visible in March 2019 when the parade on International Women’s Day was disrupted. Death threats against the director of the feminist exhibition, “Feminnale,” in Bishkek led to her resignation and the removal of several artworks.<sup>22</sup> This year, the festivities on International Women’s Day once more came under attack as masked men interrupted the peaceful demonstration. Police proceeded to arrest organisers and demonstrators, „for their own security,” eliciting strong criticism by civil society actors.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The overall relevance of the PVE portfolio will be discussed in the next section.  
<sup>21</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/dungan-incident-just-kazakhstan-s-latest-internal-ethnic-violence/30427037.html>  
<sup>22</sup> The exhibition was dedicated to the memory of 17 women migrant workers (14 from Kyrgyzstan) who burned alive in a fire at a printing warehouse in Moscow in August 2016. Artists called attention to women’s labour, issues of workplace discrimination, harassment, and pay inequality. „One of the performances was a play on women doing laundry while the government is laundering money: the artist washed 20 Kyrgyz som notes and then sewed them together and painted a Kyrgyz flag on top of them - a metaphor for the back-breaking work done by migrant women to provide livelihoods for their families, while the elite siphons off money into offshore havens amid speeches about patriotism and development.” See: *Fateful Feminnale: an insider’s view of a “controversial” feminist art exhibition in Kyrgyzstan* (9 January 2020) at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/fateful-feminnale-an-insiders-view-of-a-controversial-feminist-art-exhibition-in-kyrgyzstan>  
<sup>23</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/masked-men-attack-women-s-day-rally-in-bishkek/30476050.html>

threat had decreased. They pointed out that the numbers of people leaving for Syria and Iraq had drastically gone down. Others pointed that while radical religious views exist, these cannot be necessarily linked to violence. Some state agencies and security services underscored that extremists had gone into hiding and were not as visible anymore but could be mobilised at any moment, pointing out to the dormant risks. Others highlighted that the integration of former foreign terrorist fighters from war zones, including women and children, was the bigger issue at this time.<sup>20</sup> There seems to be growing acceptance of the “do no harm” principle; namely the need to prevent the stigmatisation of religious communities in the context of efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism. **The role of religion in public life** is a trickier issue, leading to deliberations on how to address religious – secular divides and the state’s role in regulating religious life.

**Inter-ethnic tensions** continue to persist, with the Uzbek community continuing to suffer from exclusion from political and economic life, social and cultural isolation, and grievances linked to the 2010 violence. A series of recent violent inter-ethnic incidents in the Northern Chuy region also became a matter of serious concern in 2019. One occurred between Kyrgyz and Turkish ethnic groups in the village of Orok, and another one between Kyrgyz and Dungan ethnic groups in the village of Vostochnoe. Kyrgyzstan was also affected by an inter-ethnic violent incident that took place in neighboring Kazakhstan in early February 2020, when violence between Kazakhs and ethnic Dungans left 10 people dead, dozens injured, and thousands of Dungans fleeing across the border into Kyrgyzstan.<sup>21</sup>

The unresolved issue of border delimitation and demarcation with Tajikistan continued to

**violent border incidents** and spark hostilities between the two countries in 2019. Dozens of clashes have since then been registered between citizens of both countries, including an armed incident in September 2019 that left several people killed and approximately 20 wounded. While the situation along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border looks better, with 85% of the 1378 km long border having been agreed on, the demarcation processes drew protests in September 2019, highlighting the need to sensitise residents of the affected areas about border agreements. Additionally, a few conflicts related to natural resources, pasture and water, occurred in May 2020 on the border with the Uzbek enclave of Sokh.

**Intolerance around women’s issues** is on the rise, often accompanied with verbal abuse and hate speech around the role of women in society. These developments became visible in March 2019 when the parade on International Women’s Day was disrupted. Death threats against the director of the feminist exhibition, “Feminnale,” in Bishkek led to her resignation and the removal of several artworks.<sup>22</sup> This year, the festivities on International Women’s Day once more came under attack as masked men interrupted the peaceful demonstration. Police proceeded to arrest organisers and demonstrators, „for their own security,” eliciting strong criticism by civil society actors.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The overall relevance of the PVE portfolio will be discussed in the next section.  
<sup>21</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/dungan-incident-just-kazakhstan-s-latest-internal-ethnic-violence/30427037.html>  
<sup>22</sup> The exhibition was dedicated to the memory of 17 women migrant workers (14 from Kyrgyzstan) who burned alive in a fire at a printing warehouse in Moscow in August 2016. Artists called attention to women’s labour, issues of workplace discrimination, harassment, and pay inequality. „One of the performances was a play on women doing laundry while the government is laundering money: the artist washed 20 Kyrgyz som notes and then sewed them together and painted a Kyrgyz flag on top of them - a metaphor for the back-breaking work done by migrant women to provide livelihoods for their families, while the elite siphons off money into offshore havens amid speeches about patriotism and development.” See: *Fateful Feminnale: an insider’s view of a “controversial” feminist art exhibition in Kyrgyzstan* (9 January 2020) at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/fateful-feminnale-an-insiders-view-of-a-controversial-feminist-art-exhibition-in-kyrgyzstan>  
<sup>23</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/masked-men-attack-women-s-day-rally-in-bishkek/30476050.html>

Kyrgyzstan is strongly impacted by **regional developments**. The recent reforms in **Uzbekistan** have led to the opening of the border to Kyrgyzstan, which is likely to provide economic opportunities and give room to other cross-border initiatives. The PBF is supporting the UNCT in undertaking an assessment along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border in order to identify needs and entry points for cross-border engagement. The strengthening of neighborly relations with Uzbekistan also bears risks as the levels of development and capacity of local communities in the Ferghana Valley straddling the borders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan vary greatly.

**Economic vulnerability and poverty** remain a factor. Although labour migration serves as a conflict-mitigating factor easing financial pressure, the overall high economic reliance on labour migration is putting Kyrgyzstan in an economically and socially vulnerable position. Conflicts around foreign investment, notably in the extractive industry, continue to prevail. Resentment against the state is growing, as it doesn't seem to be able – or willing – to properly regulate the industry or place any meaningful conditions on the companies that invest. Furthermore, the **mining sector** was shaken by scandals, causing rallies and road blockages, and leading to the suspension of a gold mining license for a Chinese company. In February 2020, protests against a planned USD 275 million Chinese investment for a logistics centre in Naryn region resulted in its cancellation and exposed the growing **anti-Chinese sentiments** in the country, along with **environmental concerns** of the population.

## B) IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON KYRGYZSTAN

Recent analyses anticipate that the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to contain it will add significant layers of stress to governance systems that are already

under pressure from existing development challenges as well as conflicts, violent extremism, migration, organised crime, and climate-related security risks. The most important factor that will determine how people are likely to respond to the measures introduced by governments to contain the virus is the degree of trust that citizens have towards their state.<sup>24</sup>

For Kyrgyzstan, reports about the effects of the Covid crisis unfortunately confirm these early predictions.<sup>25</sup> The imposed state of emergency in Bishkek Osh, Jalal-Abad cities, Nookat and Kara-Suu districts of Osh region and Suzak district of Jalal-Abad region led to the closure of non-essential businesses. Available macroeconomic indicators point to severe consequences for the country's economy: the rapid depreciation of the Kyrgyz Som by more than 10% is leading to reduced purchasing power. Closure of borders in Russia and Kazakhstan, together with worsening of the economic situation there, has seriously affected Kyrgyz migrant workers and forced migrants to return, which adds to already high unemployment. The volume of money transfers to Kyrgyzstan has decreased during the first quarter of 2020, which adversely affects livelihoods in remote rural and border areas. The expected decrease of remittances will disproportionately affect the southern part of the country, particularly Osh and Batken regions where without remittances the poverty level would increase by 21.3% and 20.8%, respectively.

The socioeconomic impact of the COVID-crisis risks exacerbating social exclusion of marginalised population groups. In addition, the COVID crisis disproportionately affects single women-headed households as their family situations are aggravated by quarantined kindergartens, closure of small businesses, sewing industries and bazaars where they traditionally earn their living. Finally, the

<sup>24</sup>. See recent report by the South African Think Tank Accord on global impact of Covid-19 at: <https://www.accord.org.za/covid-19/>

<sup>25</sup>. According to UN internal note on early effects of Covid-19 in Kyrgyzstan

association of the pandemic with religious pilgrims – the first cases were detected among citizens returning from pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia - has generated an escalation of wide scale hate speech narratives towards Islamic believers and minority groups in the south of the country.

### 3. RELEVANCE AND IMPACT OF THE CURRENT PBF PORTFOLIO

This section assesses the overall relevance of the PBF portfolio by analysing the strategic vision, the Theories of Change (ToC), and strategic outcomes of the projects under the portfolio. It also identifies potential for impact of the projects based on early results.



#### A) GENERAL STRATEGIC VISION

The main goal of the three projects under the 2018-2020 PPP is to improve the state's institutional capacity to address the most pressing drivers of violent extremism and strengthen the resilience of target communities against radicalisation. In order to achieve this, the three projects outlined within the PPP focus on three different areas.

Outcome 1 works at the national level in support of the establishment and review of the relevant legislative framework and policies in line with international human rights standards. It also strengthens capacities of law enforcement, judiciary and civil society with regards to the legal framework related to PVE. Outcome 2 focuses on prisons as hot spots for radicalisation as well as the probation system and forensic expertise as pathways to mitigation. As a result of a more humane and individualised approach, convicts on extremist charges are expected to deradicalise or be prevented from becoming further radicalised. The goal of Outcome 3 is to strengthen communities' resilience that are vulnerable to radicalisation.

The portfolio was nourished through seven Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI) projects, as well as a cross-border project between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – the Fund's first ever cross-border project.



#### B) STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND THEORIES OF CHANGE

##### OUTCOME 1

The first project under the PVE portfolio aimed to balance the security-driven response by law enforcement agencies in dealing with radicalisation and violent extremism by introducing the concept of "prevention" instead. The idea is to stop the "sharp increase in repressive activities" by security forces, which was identified as one of the potential push factors and implement a preventative approach by increasing the level of knowledge and expertise of state agencies. The short context analysis in the project document does not delve into the harmful consequences of this "counter terrorism" approach nor does it discuss its conceptual differences (random arrests primarily citizens of ethnic minorities for "likes" in social media postings, the spiral of further stigmatisation, etc.).

The **theory of change** of this project states that " IF state institutions, justice and security agencies are equipped with inclusive methodologies and expertise on PVE, and IF they are able to effectively implement participatory decision-making and legislative reforms in line with Human Rights and Rule of Law norms with the support of civil society representatives, THEN they will be able to engage in a more positive engagement with citizens leading to the reduction of potential drivers to violent extremism."

The ToC implies that the government had adopted a securitised approach due to a lack of expertise and available other tools. The context analysis does not specifically

discuss this assumption nor does it consider the (potential or actual) harmful consequences of this approach or reflect on the need of building up resilience factors. The intended change lies in supporting efforts to entrench the rule of law and equal access to justice as a foundation and to change of attitude and motivation of law enforcement officers in their approach to PVE as well as institutional working methods, which is a very ambitious goal. It is particularly challenging as the beneficiaries include different stakeholders with different roles/interests with regards to PVE (police, prosecutors, judges, civil society, and experts).

In the first phase of project implementing RUNOs struggled with low participation of government agencies in PVE coordination meetings. The prevailing perception was that the Ministry of Interior/GKNB was in charge of dealing with extremism which reveals that there was no sufficient understanding about the preventative aspects of the PBF supported PVE programme. In addition, a resistance to change institutional working methods and a fear of a higher workload led to a certain resistance. RUNOs had to spend a lot of time advocating for the preventative approach, which included the integration and coordination of different policies with respect to PVE. "Once we told them that it wouldn't require more work, they started showing up." (Project Manager) It can only be assumed that there was no sufficient common understanding of the concept of PVE due to the absence of a participatory conflict analysis, lack of evidence-based research for the specific PVE situation in Kyrgyzstan, and insufficient consultations with the target beneficiaries in the design stage of the project. It is also an indication of the perceived poisoned language using "extremism" and "terrorism" that may have an intimidating effect on beneficiaries who fear to be associated with those terms. In addition, sharp differences of UN agencies' positions with regards to PVE concepts and approaches led to implementation and coordination challenges in the start-up phase.

## OUTCOME 2

This project builds on an assessment that was done under a previous project funded by Japan. It also benefits from a longer-term engagement of UNODC (and other international organisations) in the Kyrgyz prison system. The comprehensive context analysis in the ProDoc provides detailed data on the prison infrastructure, the numbers of prisoners on extremist charges, including their ethnicity, the concrete issues that the prison, forensic services and probation systems are facing, and the support they need.

The level of specificity laid out in the context analysis enabled the ToC to also be more focused on the different groups that would be targeted through the activities: „IF sound forensic expertise is used to adjudicate extremism and terrorism related crimes, IF adequate measures for the prevention of radicalisation to violence are applied in prisons and probation settings, violent extremist offenders are adequately assessed, confined and/or supervised according to the risk they present, and IF disengagement and social reintegration services are provided, THEN the forensic service, the prison and probation system, as well as the police and community services can effectively contribute to the prevention of radicalisation to violence in Kyrgyzstan.“

While the ToC pursues an ambitious goal it includes an appropriate level of realistic caution („can effectively contribute“), indicating that even higher levels of expertise, new tools and mechanisms can be ineffective if they are not used in the right way. This also applies to the newly introduced probation system that has already produced early positive results and has enormous potential, if properly implemented and maintained.

The project is on a good track to achieve its goals. As in Outcome 1, a lot of work was needed to convince government partners to move away from a punitive toward a

preventative approach. Both the RUNO and the prison administration (GSIN) involved in the project highlighted very positive results with its vocational training and employment activities (fruit drying, car repair, and a bakery). Convicts who were able to support their families through earned income had become less aggressive and were more open to participate in de-radicalisation activities. The risk assessment and classification tool is an essential step for an individualised approach to the rehabilitation of prisoners and probation clients. This tool is introduced for the first time in Central Asia has the potential of being replicated in other countries experiencing the same issues. The tool was praised for allowing an individual approach in dealing with prisoners based on the level of their radicalisation. The high turnover among prison staff, a longstanding issue, was reduced through higher wages from the government.

Key progress facilitated by this project includes the establishment of a new national probation service to support social rehabilitation of offenders through implementation of alternatives to incarceration. It reduces the risk of offenders being exposed to violent extremist ideologies in prison settings. In the future, once it's fully established, the probation institute should become paramount in the prevention of crime, misconduct and relapse of crime subsequently decreasing the number of prison population, which is now fairly high in Kyrgyzstan. While there is a lot of enthusiasm around the introduction of the new probation system, capacity issues, such as the lack of sufficient psychologists, theologians and social workers could undermine its impact and sustainability. Corruption is another major threat that needs to be taken into account during the implementation in order to avoid harm to people who are supposed to be benefitting from it. Any new system is vulnerable to misuse, and there already have been reports about bribes for judges in return for probation sentences.

Finally, legal issues are still hampering the consistent handling of "extremism"-related cases. For example, the majority of convicts on extremism charges have been sentenced on grounds of "possession of extremist material."<sup>26</sup> Changes in criminal code that took effect in 2019 now penalise individuals for "the possession of extremist material with the goal to distribute." In practice, however, the interpretation of this law differs from judge to judge. The recent UNDP/OHCHR study on the implementation of the PVE legal framework in Kyrgyzstan, supported under Outcome 1, will likely shed more light on the work that is still needed in this area.<sup>27</sup>

### OUTCOME 3

The overall goal of the third project under the PVE PPP is to enable target communities to take a more critical stance on ideologies instigating violence through strengthening their sense of community and participation in local development and dialogues on PVE. The project context analysis highlights conflict drivers, such as perception of injustice and grievances about corruption, youth unemployment and exclusion, with ethnic minority groups being particularly vulnerable.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, this project is the only one of the PVE outcomes that mentions "extremist ideologies framed on nationalist or religious grounds." According to public opinion in Kyrgyzstan "extremist" is understood as being religious extremist. Unfortunately, the project document does not provide further analysis of the issue of nationalist extremism in the country.

Accordingly, the **Theory of Change** also takes a wider approach: "IF women and men, boys and girls in the communities

<sup>26.</sup> According to organisations providing legal aid, most of these people are poorly educated and have not been aware of the content of these materials.

<sup>27.</sup> The study was not published yet during the time of the field visit.

<sup>28.</sup> These findings are based on a 2015 study by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) that highlighted injustice and corruption as factors that most likely lead to violent extremism.

have critical thinking skills AND are able to positively claim and exercise their rights through civic engagement, THEN they will become resilient to violent and manipulative ideologies, BECAUSE they will have a sense of belonging to their communities and confidence in the State.”

This project proceeds from the assumption that violent extremism grows in the context of high grievance about corruption, youth unemployment and a sense of exclusion, and focuses on youth and women as beneficiaries. It is based on research that shows how ethnic minorities become susceptible to violent ideologies when they feel excluded, discriminated against, and unable to “fulfill themselves in Kyrgyzstan’s current social context.”

Working through civic and multilingual education, promotion of diversity and developing leadership of youth and women through community projects, this project aims at strengthening the horizontal social cohesion of communities. By focusing on resilience to “violent and manipulative ideologies”, the project broadens the spectrum of activities and target communities from the narrow focus on religious radicalisation and addresses conflict drivers of grievances, sense of exclusion, and discrimination along ethnic and gender lines. Integration of civic education and social skill training into a curriculum of vocational schools and madrasahs is a unique endeavor as it attempts to combine the concepts of citizenship and human rights with Islamic teaching in the Kyrgyz context.

The project supports efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science in developing and introducing a non-discrimination and gender expertise methodology, which embeds values of human rights and respect for diversity. One of the successes of this project is the introduction of a new policy that determines that every newly produced text book shall be subject to a mandatory review based on clear criteria. This step

advances the Government’s gender and non-discrimination policy commitments in education and builds peoples’ resilience to discriminatory and violent attitudes from an early age. A first review of 40 textbooks showed that all of them contained discriminatory and gender-biased language and/or pictures.

The activities under this project have an inter-ethnic component and are primarily being implemented in the South of Kyrgyzstan. They also present a continuation of one of the peacebuilding priority areas of the previous PPP 2013-2016 that focused on common civic identity, multilingual education and respect for diversity and minority rights. As inter-ethnic issues and grievances through discrimination and exclusion continue to be identified as conflict drivers, incl. for radicalisation, it makes sense to keep addressing them through conflict-sensitive approaches.

### CROSS-BORDER

The cross-border project was initiated under the previous PPP. The first phase of the project (2015-2017) was conceived in response to the escalation of tensions and violence that erupted in 2014 between Tajik and Kyrgyz villagers and border guards. It aimed at short-term stabilisation in preparation for longer-term sustainable peace and was implemented by 5 RUNOs in each country. Rather than prioritising joint activities, the project utilised a „mirroring approach“ in both countries. The aim was to place conflict sensitivity at the heart of the project by ensuring that interventions on one side of the border were mirrored on the other. This was to ensure that differences in interventions did not cause grievances between the communities or perceptions of unfairness or bias.<sup>29</sup>

The rationale for the project was two-fold:

29. Iris Wielders: *Final evaluation of the UN Peace Building Fund project 'Tajikistan/Kyrgyzstan Cross-border Cooperation for Sustainable Peace and Development' (2020)*.

to reduce the immediate risk of renewed violence, and to pilot risk-taking and catalytic interventions with PBF support. The project objective of the second phase (2018-2019) was “to build sustainable mechanisms to reduce the risks of violent conflict and to create a more conducive environment for the promotion of sustainable peace and development in cross-border areas. Peacebuilding and conflict prevention interventions are designed to contribute to short-term stabilisation, while preparing the ground for the promotion of longer-term sustainable peace.”<sup>30</sup>

The project focused on six clusters of villages on both sides of the border between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with a population of 64.000 in the Kyrgyz villages and 158.000 in the Tajik villages. Activities included so-called hard and soft components. Hard components comprised the rehabilitation of community and water-related infrastructure with the aim of strengthening ties and cooperation between communities. Soft components included interventions aiming to strengthen linkages between authorities, communities and border security providers; youth-focused trainings and associated activities aiming to increase tolerance; small income generation and business support to enhance economic cooperation and specific support for women to participate more actively in cross-border activities.

According to the final evaluation of the cross-border project, the first phase of the project produced broadly positive results.<sup>31</sup> Due to the continued relevance of the project and given the continuing state of fragility in the cross-border areas, a follow-up phase was approved for 18 months from April 2018 to October 2019. During its second phase, the project came to face major challenges. Perceived risks from the

Kyrgyz authorities around infrastructure-related interventions led to delays in the approval of the workplan implementation. The project was further challenged by renewed border conflicts starting in early 2019.

Overall, the Theory of Change was closely aligned to the drivers of conflict prioritised by the project in accordance with the underlying conflict analysis. For future border projects, the evaluation recommended to „further clarify the logic of pathways with regard to changes in attitudes/behaviours and linkages/cooperation/trust building“.

## GENDER PROJECTS

The three gender related projects have been approved independently under the PBF's Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI) window in addition to the projects supported under the PPP. Only one of them has the prevention of radicalisation of women as its main focus, whereas the other two address conflict drivers that have also been attributed to radicalisation but are not the main focus. The review of these projects shows that precise terminology and conflict-sensitive use of language, the combination of political support/ownership combined with personal interests of beneficiaries contributed to the projects' successes.

The first project, **“Women and Girls as Drivers of Peace and the Prevention of Radicalisation,”** is almost entirely based on the report on radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan that this review discussed in the beginning.

The ultimate goal of the project was to increase women's and girls' resilience to violent extremism and radicalisation through increased knowledge, skills, and sensitivity among women religious leaders and various government duty bearers, with the idea that this would increase trust, community connection, and therefore resilience to extremist ideologies.

<sup>30</sup>From the project document

<sup>31</sup>Frauke de Weijer: *Review of PBF Cross-border Cooperation for Sustainable Peace and Development in the border area of Kyrgyzstan & Tajikistan*, PeaceNexus Foundation (2017).

While working with relevant and vulnerable target groups, the highly sensitive and potentially stigmatising language around “extremism” complicated the implementation of certain activities. For example, religious women leaders, not knowing their rights regarding freedom of religion or belief, were scared to engage in trainings as they feared being associated with radical ideas. In addition, the project evaluation stated: “Trainings for women religious leaders on core topics such as radicalisation and marginalisation were misunderstood by project participants (...) . These misunderstandings led in some cases to over-determined definitions of what it means for someone to be ‘radicalised’.”

Another project, **“Adressing Social Disparity and Gender Inequality to Prevent Conflicts in New Settlements,”** combined conflict drivers of exclusion of women and youth and the dire need for access to services in the new and partially illegal settlements around Bishkek. The project was based on a request by Bishkek’s mayor whose political support helped the project to succeed in bringing together all necessary stakeholders.

The project rationale is based on the Peacebuilding Needs Assessment that was conducted prior to the 2013-2016 PPP and highlights unaddressed peacebuilding gaps, such as internal migration and urbanisation. The project was explicitly designed to prevent conflict and address issues before they escalate. The main issues were lack of clean water, no streetlights, domestic violence, access to health care, sanitation and education. The ToC is based on the assumption that if marginalised women and girls develop leadership skills and start using their voices and organisational skills, they can contribute to constructive mechanisms to address mounting tensions.

The high interest of beneficiaries in finding solutions for their own, concrete problems is one of the successful components of this project. As the project activities focused on

the establishment of mechanisms for local committees and combined leadership trainings for women and youth with existential needs, there is potential for these mechanisms to remain in place after the end of the project. Whether these experiences of women and girls will translate into greater confidence into the state – another assumption that the ToC proceeds from – remains to be seen. It is an ambitious goal for a project lasting 18 months.

The latest gender project, which only started its implementation in the beginning of 2020, aims at “Empowering women and girls affected by migration for inclusive and peaceful community development”. The project focuses on women and girls vulnerable to forced migration as well as on returning migrant women and girls who may be forced to re-migrate due to stigmatisation. The project addresses violence, exclusion, and forced migration as conflict drivers.

The project is based on a perception study on “Gender in Society,” which was funded by the PBF in 2015-2016 under the Gender Promotion Initiative. It also references the recently undertaken Conflict and Peace Analysis by PeaceNexus that identified a strong correlation between increased migration outflows and the spread of conflicts in communities. The project aims to change the recognition of the role of women and girls in inclusive community development and peacebuilding through strengthening their knowledge about their rights, skills, and economic opportunities.

Changing gender stereotypes and the perception of communities with regard to women is important in Kyrgyzstan today, in particular as women are becoming steadily more marginalised in society. Whether 18 months will be sufficient to achieve this goal will depend on the importance local partners attribute to the agenda. As in other projects, there seems to be a risk that the project goals may be seen as “pre-cooked”

by an international organisation and are not based on the identified needs of the communities. To mitigate this risk, the project includes a special methodology to engage with community members. Unfortunately, while the project rationale highlights the importance of economic opportunities for women, only few of the activities it foresees are actually dedicated to establishing such opportunities.

## YOUTH PROJECTS

The four youth projects have also been approved separately, under the Youth Promotion Initiative of the PBF. They were implemented since 2018, with a timeline of 18 months each. Three of the four youth projects were implemented by INGOs/NUNOs (GPPAC/Foundation for Tolerance International, Saferworld, and Search for Common Ground), while one was a joint project by RUNOs.

As conflict drivers, the projects address the issue of exclusion of youth from participation in decision-making processes, and the marginalisation of youth in their families and society. While one project specifically targeted at risk-youth for radicalisation (e.g. young people whose parents left the country as foreign fighters), another project specifically highlighted their approach to fostering tolerance and understanding as opposed to using PVE terminology.

The projects work through similar mechanisms that begin by helping youth to become aware of and identify their needs, to present them to others in the group, and to develop scenarios for solutions together. As a second step, youth were mentored how to address their needs with local authorities in order to be included in the solution finding process. The projects included the use of social media, a communication technology that enabled new friendships across the country and had a highly motivating effect on participants. The observed results were impressive,

ranging from behavioural change of students through increased confidence (as confirmed by teachers, principals and parents) to changes in the community. The installation of streetlights in villages or the design, construction, and installation of a bike rack in one school (to reduce fighting over bicycle damage and theft in the school) were among the ideas that the youth implemented with the support of local authorities.

As the projects had realistic goals and worked with motivated beneficiaries, ownership was high and the immediate results were very positive. The challenge will be to sustain the youth's engagement and give them opportunities to become active members of society. There has been high demand to continue and replicate those initiatives as more students were interested to participate.

The most recently added youth project works with young people from the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, supporting inter-ethnic cohesion and interaction between the youth of both countries through the development of local cooperation plans. The project's main goal is to strengthen inter-ethnic relations and support the inter-governmental process of closer relations between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.



## C) KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST PBF FUNDED PROJECTS

The PBF investments in Kyrgyzstan have significantly contributed to the country's stability and peacebuilding after the inter-ethnic violence in 2010. This section explores some of the key lessons from the last two PRF investments since 2013<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> This section is based on review findings, the portfolio evaluation, baseline and endline surveys and the workshop discussion on lessons learned in 2020. It has been retroactively added and does not claim to be an exhaustive list of all key issues covering all projects under the past two PPPs.

## HUMAN RIGHTS/RULE OF LAW

Significant changes have been achieved with respect to the **legislative framework**. The PBF and other donors contributed to a substantial legal and judicial reform process, particularly the re-drafting of the criminal code and criminal procedural code in 2019. The current legislative work with regard to PVE builds on this newly adopted criminal code. This criminal code [enabled the law on probation to be passed which is the foundation of one of the currently funded projects by the PBF, the support for the probation system.]

**Access to justice** has improved through the establishment of a range of national response mechanisms, including the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, the Public Reception Centres, and a “Single Window” approach to state services at the local level, legal aid services as well as training local lawyers and lawyer associations. Under the first PPP, the number of cases brought to human rights and justice institutions nearly doubled between 2015 and 2016.

The main challenge lies with the **implementation of new laws and policies** that aim at institutional changes of state bodies. In addition, the judiciary has been suffering from political interference by the current and previous administrations.

There is still a lack of political will on the part of national authorities to **seek truth and justice for victims of the 2010 events**. These events weigh heavily on the human rights record of the country and impede reconciliation and the strengthening of inter-ethnic cohesion.<sup>33</sup>

33. *The most prominent and politically charged example is the case of Azimzhan Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek political activist and human rights defender who was convicted and sentenced to life in prison for his alleged role in the inter-ethnic violence without a fair trial. In 2016, the UN Human Rights Committee found that Askarov was arbitrarily detained, held in inhumane conditions, tortured, and mistreated. The Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan just rejected the final appeal of his lawyers on May 12, 2020 and upheld the life-sentence which led to wide-ranging international criticism.*

Little change was recorded with respect to minority or under-represented groups in key institutions. For example, police officers are required to serve in the military first, which excludes citizens from minority groups who cannot serve in the military.

Law enforcement agencies as project partners/beneficiaries are an important but difficult target group to work with in order to enable change. For example, the police force has a very high turnover among its officers, which is one of the challenges that impact on the sustainability of e.g. capacity building trainings. Online training modules, as recently developed by UNODC, are useful to mitigate this issue. Long-term engagement with the prison system has shown that gradual change can be achieved, see Outcome 2.

## GENDER PROJECTS

While the 2017 evaluation noted positive growth in the area of inter-ethnic relations it also highlighted that many respondents expressed concern about the state of inter-ethnic relations. Conceivably, the data points were driven by ethnic minorities' fear of response more so than by actual systemic changes in ethnic integration. The evaluation recommended not to ignore, and to further research, the dynamic of inter-ethnic relations in polyethnic populations. Yet this recommendation did not make its way into the new PPP 2017-2020. This seems to be a missed opportunity to further collect relevant data, in particular as inter-ethnic tensions are on the rise again. Furthermore, multiple respondents mentioned that inter-ethnic issues remain too sensitive a topic for the government to be openly addressed. Some respondents even mentioned that the shift in focus towards PVE was a welcome deflection from the previous focus on human rights, rule of law, and inter-ethnic relations.

## PVE

The fact that PVE interventions have been new to the UN has created a number of challenges, not only in Kyrgyzstan. Chuck Thiessen's study on PVE in Kyrgyzstan highlights that PVE projects "often coexist with 'hard' counterterrorism initiatives, which have tended to prioritise the interests of national governments and the security of donor nations over the concerns of local communities and individuals." The study also notes that even softer PVE approaches can be harmful if they exacerbate preexisting social tensions and divisions or legitimise government crackdowns and oppression that involve human rights abuses.<sup>34</sup> This can create a dilemma for the UN when supporting the government in implementing its approach while at the same time having the mandate to uphold and promote international human rights standards.

Thiessen, who conducted interviews with UN staff in NY and Kyrgyzstan as well as Kyrgyz government officials and civil society in 2017/2018, furthermore states that "UN staff and their governmental and nongovernmental implementing partners define and understand fundamental terminology and strategies of PVE interventions in different ways. Respondents struggled to settle on common understandings of terms related to PVE work, notably "radicalisation" and the meaning of, and difference between, "extremism," "violent extremism," and "terrorism."

Thiessen's conclusions find confirmation in the present review. Multiple respondents in February/March 2020 highlighted concerns about the legitimisation of human rights abuses through the heightened focus on PVE. For example, many convicts on extremist charges went to prison for "liking" a post on social media or for possessing literature that was considered of "extremist" nature without knowing it.

Also, the lack of clarity and different understandings of concepts and approaches in preventing/countering violent extremism as well as conflict drivers leading to extremism varied greatly. The PBF Secretariat reported that terminology around violent extremism and PVE has been a topic of many discussions in the UNCT. Many of those discussion circled around the stark differences between preventative approaches as opposed to counter-terrorism efforts or deradicalisation initiatives at the individual level. Until today, a consensus and shared understanding have not been fully reached. Part of the problem is that there is no internationally agreed definition of 'violent extremism,' let alone 'extremism' or 'radicalisation'.

These challenges translate into serious issues during the implementation of projects. For example, the hesitation of government representatives in charge of social policies to participate in coordination meetings for PVE indicates a lack of understanding of their role. Or consider the reluctance of female religious leaders to attend trainings relating to PVE because they were afraid to be labeled as extremists. One important issue to consider is that while UN officials may be able to differentiate between their counterterrorism and PVE initiatives, local populations often cannot.

## CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Due to the challenges described above a particular effort had to be made to ensure that the PVE projects were conflict-sensitive. In February 2018, a workshop on „Conflict Sensitivity and Effectiveness of PVE Programming,“ was held in Bishkek which led to an agreement to develop a „Learning and Adaptation Strategy“ as an integral component of the programme implementation. Regular learning and adaptation sessions were held throughout the implementation of the programme.<sup>35</sup>

34. Chuck Thiessen: *Preventing Violent Extremism While Promoting Human Rights: Toward a Clarified UN Approach*, International Peace Institute (2019). See also Anita Ernstorfer: *Conflict Sensitivity in Approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism: Good intentions are not enough*, UNDP Reflection Paper (October 2019).

35. See MoU with PeaceNexus Foundation

The **Learning and Adaptation** workshops that were facilitated by the PeaceNexus Foundation helped to identify risks, to develop mitigation strategies, and to share expertise and strengthen coordination. It needs to be pointed out, though, that while the workshops were attended by most RUNOs follow-up actions were undertaken with sporadic success and consistency. L&A strategies only make sense when implementing partners have the possibility to make adhoc changes during the implementation. And yet, many agencies' internal procedures do not allow for adaptations after the projects have been logged into their internal systems. If L&A strategies are only partially applied, agencies are missing important opportunities for joint learning, conflict sensitive reality checks, and inter-agency cooperation. This also shows that once PBF projects have been approved and the money has been transferred to RUNOs, the PBF has limited influence on the implementation process.

## CROSS-BORDER

The cross-border project on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border has been the highest risk-taking project in the PBF portfolio as both of its phases were implemented in a politically high sensitive environment. The project evaluations document the challenges in working with the communities on both sides of the border which included coordination issues among and within RUNOs in both countries. Another critical challenge, which was consistently highlighted by respondents, was to work in the absence of a political agreement with regards to the delimitation/demarcation lines.

The cross-border project, which was the first ever cross-border project financed by the PBF, had two phases which produced different results. While the midterm evaluation of the first phase (2015-2017) found evidence that the project contributed to increased „cooperation and trust between communities to mitigate risks

of renewed violence,“ the preliminary findings of the evaluation of the second phase (2018-2019) reveal significant challenges.

Even though the project adopted conflict-sensitive mechanisms and employed community level conflict monitors, a dispute around an intervention at the Kaerma canal escalated and cast a shadow on the project as a whole.

Nonetheless, the project succeeded in reducing water-related conflict across both phases. But because this mostly concerned the strengthening of independent rather than interdependent infrastructure, it is unclear to what extent this contributed to a restoration of cross-border linkages and trust. Interestingly, the way communities proposed to address contentious issues was not through better resource sharing and improvement in ethnic relations, as was the project's intention, but through separation.

The evaluation also found evidence that income generation and small business support interventions have helped beneficiaries increase their income and that such results are likely to be sustainable. It was not clear, though, to what extent this led to the strengthening of cross-border trade, or how cross-border trade contributed to peace building.

Lessons learned from the strategic review workshop include the need to apply participatory and bottom-up approaches when it comes to selecting projects with border communities. Interviews pointed out that prioritising the local context had been a positive experience in both phases. Future projects should be designed to ensure an adequate balance between shorter term activities aimed at conflict reduction and longer term activities that focus on trust building. Interviews also pointed to the need to be flexible on the mirroring principle in order to take local and national nuances better into consideration. Also, coordination with relevant government agencies and communities of both

during the implementation needed to be improved. Likewise, coordination between implementing partners within the countries and across the borders toward strategic objectives is key.

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT/GENDER ISSUES

In both PPPs, women's issues were mainstreamed into the principal peacebuilding areas. Projects specifically focusing on women's issues were only supported through the GYPIs that have shorter timelines, smaller budgets, and often specific targeted areas of concern.

The 2017 evaluation found **“insufficient structural support and technical capacity”** to adequately support gender mainstreaming across all of the projects.<sup>36</sup> A future comprehensive programme evaluation of the PVE portfolio may want to look into the question whether any changes have been made compared to the previous PPP to enable more effective gender mainstreaming. One of the questions to consider would be: Who provides the expertise of gender mainstreaming of the PBF projects? It would also be important to analyse the PBF's support to women's empowerment and gender issues and the reasons for the current trend trying to undermine women's roles in politics and society.

As the 2017 portfolio evaluation highlighted, there is a wide **gap between legislation and implementation of laws and policies**, which includes legislation to support women's rights and equal opportunities. Other issues include the gap between rural and urban women, discrimination against women and girls, vulnerabilities of migrant women, and the strengthening of gender-based programming and budgeting at the local level.

Neither of the PPPs has been subjected to a comprehensive gender analysis, even though the PBF guidelines stipulate this as a

requirement.<sup>36</sup> Using the additional information that a gender analysis can provide helps to better understand the dynamics of certain issues and to inform programming decisions. For example, the gender analyses undertaken by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2009 and in 2019 focusing on socio-economic areas in the Kyrgyz Republic, provide valuable information on the legal framework, gender equality issues and gender dimensions in development areas. They also review progress since the independence of Kyrgyzstan from the Soviet Union and identify gaps in gender mainstreaming. Regarding gender stereotypes, a topic that has been raised by many respondents of this strategic review, the ADB report of 2019 highlights that “Stereotypes promoted by the state, media, and other actors portray women as primarily mothers and wives, and research indicates that these ideas have influenced thinking among Kyrgyz women and men. Women's presence in public sector roles has also diminished, largely due to the erosion of subsidised childcare facilities.”<sup>37</sup> Combining a gender analysis with a thematic analysis provides a more nuanced picture and may lead to valuable entry points for projects.

### YOUTH

The youth projects have been very successful over the years as they managed to e.g. increasingly integrate youth and women's agendas into the **LSG development plans** and to empower youth to take up issues in their communities with local authorities. In many instances, local authorities allocated funding to resolve the issues identified by youth and women.

The major challenges are to establish **mechanisms** that can recreate the

<sup>36</sup>. Under the 2013-2016 PPP, a Gender in Society Perceptions Study was supported by the PBF which provided the basis for one of the current GYPI projects.

<sup>37</sup>. See the Asian Development Bank Kyrgyz Republic: Gender Assessment (2019) at: <https://www.adb.org/documents/kyrgyz-republic-country-gender-assessment-2019>.

the interaction between youth and local authorities, and to build real partnerships between them after the project has ended. High staff turnover in local administrations, no dedicated staff for youth issues, no organised dialogue or cooperation between CSOs and state bodies, and capacity issues within the youth organisations are the main hurdles. Youth beneficiaries were often highly motivated, they embraced change and showed interest in continued participation in future projects.

Finally, **quality education and youth employment** continue to represent the biggest needs among youth. The enormous rates of young people being forced into migration after finishing their secondary education have been mentioned as a concern by many respondents.

### PROMOTION OF MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY

The importance of education for sustainable peacebuilding has been demonstrated in multiple studies, including from the Peacebuilding Support Office and UNICEF. For example, one study highlights that “education is not only a result of peace, but also an entry point and condition for it. Communities [...] described the potential for education to lay the foundation for respect, <sup>38</sup>tolerance and social/national cohesion.”

In Kyrgyzstan, the support for multilingual and multicultural education as well as the promotion of tolerance and diversity has been one of the three main projects under both PPPs and have achieved great results. According to the 2017 evaluation of the first portfolio, project indicators showed a large increase in schools implementing multi-lingual education models and a

significant increase in the percentage of parents who support multi-lingual education. It also showed a very high level of interest from Government representatives for sustaining the multilingual and multicultural components and scaling up the multilingual program across the nation. Implementation challenges mostly occurred in mono-ethnic regions due to combination of lack of sufficient teachers with multi-language capacity and lower interest from parents and school officials.

Under the current PPP, the activities dealing with multilingual/multicultural education and promotion of diversity are being implemented under Outcome 3. As outlined in the previous section, early results include the introduction of a new anti-discriminatory policy for textbooks as well as a competition for child-safe cities. Education officials also highlighted the effects of the programme in changing the student-teacher relationships which in many places are still based on a Soviet teaching style. By empowering young students, e.g. through small grant projects by UNICEF, students became more appreciated by the teachers.

Education was also highlighted as one of the main strategic priorities for future peacebuilding and prevention work in the country by respondents and participants of the strategic review workshop. Critical thinking, civic identity and ordinary “life skills” were cited by many as lacking among young people. Finally, the Conflict and Peace Analysis, which was done by PeaceNexus Foundation in 2019, also pointed to the lack of education as conflict factors in the social sphere. Expanding multilingual and multicultural education as well as supporting a reform of the education system is of high importance in order to build a solid foundation for sustainable peace in the country.

### NATIONAL OWNERSHIP

A Joint Steering Committee (JSC) has been serving as coordination mechanism with a

38. Erin McCandless: *Peace Dividends and Beyond: Contributions of Administrative and Social Services to Peacebuilding*, United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (2012), p. 30. See also: *Evaluation Report of UNICEF's Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme*, UNICEF (2015).

broad membership from Government, UN and civil society stakeholders. This openness allowed for greater PPP ownership, inclusion and transparency. During the previous PPP implementation, there were concerns regarding the broad membership and its ability for agile management. Due to its large size and formal structures, the JSC became a space for ratification of decisions related to the PPP rather than a forum for discussion and debate. This led to the emergence of smaller outcome level groups in order to be able to respond to implementation challenges. These informal spaces provided opportunities for more detailed project progress reports than able to be shared in the JSC. An Oversight Group (OG) was also formed to do periodic field visits for project monitoring and to better familiarise the JSC with the realities of field implementation. The OG consisted of 12-15 members representing a mix of UN, Government of Kyrgyzstan and Civil Society representatives.<sup>39</sup>

The positive practice of outcome level working groups was continued during the implementation of the current PPP. The collection of different entities within the PPP management and coordination portfolio provided important collaborative spaces for networking, joint problem solving, and building networks and platforms for future engagement.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, there were challenges related to the lack of shared understanding of the PVE issues, lack of national ownership and low participation of state partners due to high turnover in the administration.

According to the PBF Secretariat, the JSC has been continuing to perform its functions of providing strategic oversight to PBF funded projects. Two changes in the position of the Co-Chairs from the Government side led to less frequent meetings of the JSC over the last year.

The revision of the ToRs of the JSC which was initiated under the previous Co-Chair specified the rules for decision-making and convening of meetings. For example, the JSC members cannot transfer their participating role to third parties, which enhances their personal responsibility and maintains overall consistency. Another change is that members are required to disclose any potential conflict of interest when a project proposal is considered. The new Co-Chair Mr. Bazarbaev who started his tenure in the beginning of 2020 is enthusiastic and very supportive of a strengthened cooperation between the UN and the Kyrgyz Government.

Nevertheless, cooperation and political will at the national level does not necessarily trickle down to local municipalities. The need for closer coordination and more effective communication between local and national levels was highlighted during the strategic review workshop. A close partnership with government and civil society is becoming even more important as the reputation of international organisations has been decreasing in recent years and resistance from government partners and communities is rising.

At project level, the lack of national ownership has impacted the implementation of a number of projects over the years. For example, the 2017 evaluation highlights that "the interventions seeking to increase minority representation in institutions/civil service largely overestimated the political will of national authorities to effectively address this issue or seek truth and justice for victims of the 2010 events and minorities' willingness to confront the state (and expose themselves further) on this issue." Projects targeting the increase of minority representation experienced the lack of political will as one factor of low achievement pointing to the need of rethinking some of the underlying assumptions and entry points on more sensitive topics. Or, as described under

39. See 2017 portfolio evaluation.

40. *Ibid.*

Outcome 1 in this report, the initial resistance of government representatives to participate in PVE coordination meetings is an indicator for little knowledge and interest in the preventative approach promoted by the UN. Or, as reported by one RUNO, the little effect that trainings of the traffic police had on their behaviour.

Other projects with strong political support have produced good results. For example, the project in the new settlements was initiated by the Mayor of Bishkek and enabled the women's and youth groups to successfully address their needs through connecting with local authorities.

It should be mentioned though that national ownership covers more than the buy-in from government and elites'. The inclusion of civil society is an essential part of restoring the national capacity to build peace and prevent conflict.<sup>41</sup> As the governments' interest are not always matching the interests of civil society, the UN needs to ensure that all stakeholders are equally included in the peacebuilding process.

### PEACEBUILDING GAPS

The PBNPA (2013), the portfolio evaluation (2017), the Conflict and Peace Analysis (2018) and the IRI poll (2019) refer to the high levels of youth unemployment as one of the "most corrosive" conflict drivers and the next big threat to peace. Nevertheless, the PBF has not made this a priority issue.<sup>42</sup> As a joint study by ILO, PBSO, UNDP and the WB makes clear, the challenge is to design programmes that create sustainable mechanisms and do more than just

touching on select individual lives.<sup>43</sup>

The same can be said for **corruption/weak** governance. For example, while there has been support for LSG capacity building (under PPP 2013-16) and currently for the prison and probation staff as well as law enforcement on the implementation of new laws and policies, transparency and accountability measures for government representatives have not been part of these projects. The **high turnover** of 50-80% in LSG representatives (as reported in the 2017 evaluation) is an additional challenge.

### PROJECT APPROACHES AND TIMEFRAMES

Projects that employed a combination of hard (infrastructure, access to services, etc.) and soft (trainings, capacity building) approaches were most consistently affirmed by stakeholders as producing greater impact than those implemented through one type of instrument. This has been observed in the 2017 evaluation which remarks that the project in the new settlements managed to combine empowerment of women and youth with access to services (health, water, security).

Many challenges in project implementation can be traced back to **insufficient involvement** of local authorities in the design/planning stage of the projects. As there is often limited communication between national and local level government even within the same state agencies, it is not sufficient to consult at the national level.

Under both PPPs, RUNOs have worked in "joint projects." Yet in fact there has been very **limited cooperation** between RUNOs and other implementing partners as the project activities were separately implemented. Coordination and communication among agencies are often lacking, while silo approaches persist. In the

41. Academic literature on national ownership highlights the need to clarify the meanings of ownership and the identity of the relevant owners that go beyond government stakeholders. See, for example, Timothy Donais: *National Ownership and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding. From Principle to Practice. Centre for International Governance Innovation, Policy Brief No.43 (June 2014)*, pp. 1-13.

42. CPA (2018): „Among the conflict drivers that were identified some are particularly corrosive. These include pervasive levels of corruption, weak rule of law and political interference in the judiciary, low trust in the state and low effectiveness of the state, and high levels of youth unemployment.“

43. See joint PBSO/ILO/UNDP/WB study at: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_35663/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_35663/lang--en/index.htm)

case of the cross-border project this approach had an adverse impact on the project outcomes.

RUNOs have criticised the **short timeframe** of 18 months for women and youth projects under the GYPIs. Excellent project ideas that would have deserved longer-term funding had to be „burned“ for a short-term project. It seems that as opposed to prioritising women and youth issues under the main projects implementing the PPP, they are being „saved up“ for the special GYP initiatives of the PBF even though they require a separate application and review process and the funding has a shorter timeline.

## V. STRATEGIC REVIEW WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

On 11-12 March 2020, a two-day workshop on a strategic review of the peacebuilding priorities in Kyrgyzstan was organised, co-led by the Presidential Administration and the UN PBF Secretariat with PBF support. Participants included government representatives, UN agencies, implementing civil society partners, and international donors.<sup>44</sup>

The PBF explained the SG's reform agenda as well as the Fund's new Strategy for 2021-2025, underlining the new focus on **promoting inclusive national ownership**, the **shift from response to prevention, cross-pillar strategies and integrated approaches**, the reconfigured role of the RC, and the strategic role of the PBF in galvanising support of the UN system. The PBF drew attention to the new directions and priority windows of the PBF, which include support to **cross-border and regional approaches**, the facilitation of **transitions**, as well as a special focus on fostering inclusion through the **empowerment of women and youth**.

On the basis of the presentation of initial findings of the review, a Conflict and Peace Analysis that had been undertaken in 2018 by PeaceNexus, and a discussion of lessons learned and challenges that remain, workshop participants agreed on the following strategic priority areas for Kyrgyzstan: **Cross-border issues**, Promotion of a **Culture of Tolerance and Diversity**, Education, Empowerment of **Women and Youth**, Inclusive **Governance**, and **Water/Natural Resource Management**.

Finally, donors highlighted the need to move away from a project-based approach and instead join forces under a joint peacebuilding strategy in Kyrgyzstan that also includes regional aspects. They highlighted the UN's unique position to address conflict sensitive areas with the government and its singular ability to build platforms and safe spaces on sensitive issues. The PBF, donors advised, should function as a coordination platform to help shape the debate.

## VI. PEACEBUILDING ACTOR MAPPING

The number of peacebuilding donors in Kyrgyzstan has been shrinking considerably over the last years. Those who remained, as mentioned earlier, focused their work on preventing violent extremism. According to a UN Matrix mapping, PVE actors and activities up to 46 Mio USD were allocated into PVE labelled programmes between 2017 and 2020.

Moving forward, this trend may change. A review of new funding commitments shows<sup>8</sup> that the major donors are moving toward a sustainable development agenda. In particular, the recent commitment of the WB to allocate USD 50 million towards Education in Kyrgyzstan over the next five years may have a big impact. The following list does not claim to be exhaustive and only focuses on those efforts that show overlap. The number of peacebuilding donors in Kyrgyzstan has been shrinking considerably over the last years. Those

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**ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)** - In May 2020,

44. For the full workshop report, see „Report on the Strategic Review Workshop of the PBF Portfolio in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2017-2019 Bishkek 12-13 March 2020“

45. See joint PBSO/ILO/UNDP/WB study at: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_35663/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_35663/lang--en/index.htm)

the ADB approved a new regional project on **water management** with an emphasis on economic aspects and sustainable financing of water resources management (Budget USD 225,000). This project is in line with ADB's Strategy 2030 to tackle climate change, build climate and disaster resilience, enhance environmental sustainability and foster regional cooperation and integration. In Kyrgyzstan, a recently approved project supports preparations for the "**School Education Reform Sector Development Program**" (Budget: USD 700,000). Other projects deal with rural water supply and sanitation development in Naryn, sustainable energy, risk management, and economic diversification.

**UK DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (DFID)** - In Central Asia, Dfid mainly works on **governance and development** issues. Working through the UK cross-governmental Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, Dfid has supported many peacebuilding projects in Central Asia over the last 10 years, including on PVE. Most recently Dfid invested in three **cross-border** projects on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and the Tajik-Afghan border. The Kyrgyz-Tajik border project was stopped due to border incidents. Dfid is currently reassessing its programming in Kyrgyzstan and is interested in working with the PBF on strategic peacebuilding priorities.

**DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT (GIZ)** - Since 2014, GIZ has been leading a consortium that implements a large-scale project for the promotion of the **rule of law** in Kyrgyzstan funded by the EU. During the first phase until April 2018, the strengthening of court organisation and the introduction of e-justice and legislation have been supported with a budget of EUR 9.5 million. The objectives of the second phase (2018-2022) are to reinforce a justice and court system governed by the rule of law and support legislation procedures. Another focus is on strengthening prosecutors' offices in order to implement the reform efforts introduced by the Kyrgyz state institutions. Their overall goal is to increase the effectiveness of judicial administration, creating transparency and credibility within judicial and court structures and fighting corruption. GIZ also supports projects on **youth employment, professional education and**

**vocational training** and support of **regional economic cooperation** in Central Asia, sustainable use of **natural resources, transboundary water management**, adaptation to **climate change** in mountainous regions, forest and pasture management, strengthening biosecurity as well as a drug action programme in Central Asia.

**EUROPEAN UNION** - The EU's 2019 Central Asia Strategy seeks to build new momentum in regional cooperation in order to boost resilience and prosperity in the region. Beyond the post-Soviet Central Asian countries, the EU also looks to establish synergies with Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the EU is engaged in three sectors related to security and peace: **Border Management**, including a new component addressing drug trafficking (EUR 22 million for the next 5 years); Organised Crime, and **Prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation** with a focus on the Ferghana valley through grants for regional projects focusing on the **effects of migration on radicalisation**.

**OSCE** - The OSCE works on a yearly budget and project cycle, and its peacebuilding activities for 2020 include:

- ⚠ **Early warning capacity building of LSGs** (USD 130,000)
- ⚠ Support for implementation of **service-oriented** law enforcement system (USD 262,000);
- ⚠ Development of **youth** for peace and security community resilience (partner: Mol, Youth Ministry USD 120,000);
- ⚠ **Business promotion** of small and medium size enterprises to address unemployment of youth (USD 335,000);
- ⚠ **Gender equality, prevention of gender-based violence, implementation of UNSC 1325** (partner: Office of Prime Minister, Women Initiative Groups, USD 155,000).

**SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE (2020-2022)** - This multi-year partnership between the European Union and the

the United Nations to eliminate all forms of **violence against women** and girls supports five RUNOs over 36 months. The initiative which started in the beginning of 2020 addresses the issue of violence against women and girls through six outcome areas (policies and legislation, institutions, prevention, services, data, and women's movement and civil society). Out of the total USD 7.8 million estimated costs, USD 4.7 million have already been approved.

**Switzerland** - Switzerland engages with 5-10 years funding windows and is currently active in the areas of **water management, local governance** (incl. financial accountability of local authorities) and supports **regional cultural programmes**.

**USAID** - USAID currently supports five projects in the area of democracy, human rights and governance with similarities to the projects funded by the PBF.<sup>46</sup>

- ⚠️ **“Active Communities Project”** (2019-2024) aims at improving people's lives by helping communities, local governments, NGOs, and the private sector to solve problems of local concern. (Budget: USD 14 million)
- ⚠️ **“Enhancing Employability and Civic Engagement of Youth”** (2017-2022) promotes more active and positive engagement of youth in civic, social, and economic life. (Budget: USD 5 million)
- ⚠️ The **“Community and Municipal Governance Initiative”** (2016-2021) works with 50 rural and urban municipalities to improve the quality of services to citizens. (Budget: USD 9.5 million).
- ⚠️ The **“Cultivating Media Independence Initiative”** (2017-2020) helps to strengthen the professionalism and independence of media. (Budget: USD 6.5 million).
- ⚠️ The **“Dignity and Rights” (2015-2020)** project helps to protect migrants and potential migrants from human trafficking

and other grave human rights violations as well as support to returning victims. (Budget: USD 1.8 million; implementing partner: IOM).

**Worldbank** – The WB has ongoing projects in the areas of water resources management, forest management, agriculture, urban development, health care, tax administration, and livelihoods for youth. According to its website, the WB recently approved a number of new multi-year projects.<sup>47</sup>

- ⚠️ **Education:** USD 50 million project “Learning for the Future” to be implemented over 5-years until 2025.
- ⚠️ A “Kyrgyz Republic Regional **Economic Development Project**” (USD 60 million) to be implemented until Dec 2026.
- ⚠️ “Sustainable Rural **Water Supply and Sanitation** Development Project” (USD 43.2 million).

46. See USAID website at: <https://www.usaid.gov/kyrgyz-republic/democracy-human-rights-and-governance>

47. See Worldbank website at: [https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/projects-list?countrycode\\_exact=KG](https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/projects-list?countrycode_exact=KG)

## VII. CONCLUSION

The programmes supported by the PBF in Kyrgyzstan since 2010 have been very successful. The peacebuilding work on site has helped to prevent Kyrgyzstan from falling back into violence after the Osh events. It has enabled civil society to become an important player in communities and a partner for the government in providing oversight, accountability, and expertise. Kyrgyzstan's rankings in global peace indices also demonstrate progress towards more stability. The Global Peace Index ranks Kyrgyzstan on 95th place out of 163 countries in 2019. This represents an upward trend compared to its 108th place in 2018 and 131st in 2012. The PBF's investments have contributed to stability and the development of democratic processes in the functioning of the government. This October, the people of Kyrgyzstan will elect their Parliament for the third time in a democratic election.

At the same time, Kyrgyzstan is facing increasing political, social, and economic challenges. While there is no open conflict in the country, Kyrgyzstan is experiencing heightened internal repressions, along with external political and economic pressures from Russia and China. Strong grievances from unaddressed past injustices persist, and horizontal inequalities are on the rise, with a potential to escalate. High levels of corruption have led to protests in the capital. Intolerance (inter-gender, inter-regional, inter-generational, and among religious groups) is increasing. Ethnic violence has been erupting over the past two years in multiple locations, and fatal border incidents on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border.

The COVID-19 related crisis in Kyrgyzstan, as early reports show, is amplifying those tensions. The health crisis is putting added stress on an already weak social cohesion at the vertical and horizontal levels. According to December 2019 data, the level of dissatisfaction of citizens reached all-time highs since 2014, with a decrease of trust in the authorities of 13% in a single year. The North and the South of the country register diverging trends, the former being heavily dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. At the same time, youth, women, minorities and other vulnerable groups are increasingly raising concerns about their lack of social and political

space, with vocal demands for urgent action over unemployment and corruption.

While these tensions are rising, the potential for the country to continue its path toward sustainable peace holds promise. As a highly fragile country, Kyrgyzstan must continue working to sustain its peace through serious prevention work. The country is located at the centre of an entire region that is experiencing a tectonic political shift with the potential to open economic opportunities, enable interregional connectivity, and improve bilateral relations.

For this transformation to be successful, it is important that it be supported in a conflict-sensitive way. The UN, and the RC in his new capacity following the reform process, are uniquely positioned to take the lead here. As its neighboring countries Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are not eligible for PRF funding, Kyrgyzstan is the only entry point for the UN to support peacebuilding work in the region as a whole.

As international donors have either reduced their engagement or left entirely, the PBF is one of few remaining peacebuilding funding sources in Kyrgyzstan. This alters the Fund's position in the country, giving it more leverage with the government in tackling „sensitive issues.“ The government is interested in continuing the cooperation with the PBF. Specifically, the newly appointed co-Chair of the Joint Steering Committee has championed the idea of increased national ownership in the formulation of a sustainable peacebuilding strategy for the country.

Lastly, the interest of other donors to join forces with the UN and the government in developing a joint sustainable peace plan presents a unique opportunity to align donors around common goals in Kyrgyzstan. A common peacebuilding strategy would in turn raise the chances of generating additional funding from donors in the longer run.

Based on the international debate and with the support of donors, including the PBF, the peacebuilding agenda in Kyrgyzstan had shifted

from a framework of improving inter-ethnic relations towards PVE as overarching conceptual framework for peacebuilding. This created a number of challenges for RUNOs and implementing partners, including the ambiguity of terminology around “extremism”, the legal basis and different understandings of the concepts around CVE/PVE. While some had to drastically shift their focus to be able to further access peacebuilding funding, others managed to combine their agency’s priorities with the new direction.

The questions remains whether the PBF was the right donor to fund a PVE portfolio. The PBF has generated important results in Kyrgyzstan during the last PPP on PVE. The Fund’s continued dedication of attention to rule-of-law and human rights-based approaches to PVE could continue to be of value, It could also continue to support efforts to integrate returning foreign terrorist fighters. But these efforts could have been framed as part of broader peacebuilding objectives in Kyrgyzstan. Tying PBF funding solely to PVE might divert attention from deep-rooted challenges such as corruption, poor human development, cross-border tensions, ethnic friction, societal divisions, and the systematic exclusion of women and youth. In any case, a comprehensive „do no harm“ approach is and should be an essential part of any PVE related project.

The Gender and Youth portfolio has generated a lot of enthusiasm and good results within their 18 months timeframe. The open question remains how sustainable the achieved changes will be and whether they will have the potential to e.g. prevent youth from migrating and instead create opportunities for them to applying their skills in their communities. For future programming, it will be important to better understand the reasons for the disturbing trend of a shrinking space for women in society. For sustaining peace efforts in the future, a patchy approach to address women’s issues seems insufficient. Mechanisms need to be put in place to amplify localised successes and bring them to the national level.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS (INCL. FOR A NEW PORTFOLIO)

1. **(To PBF)** Continue to support Kyrgyzstan and the region in developing resilience through strengthening social cohesion at national level and developing mechanisms to prevent outbreaks of violence at national and regional levels.
2. **(To PBF)** Support the UNCT, implementing partners, and civil society to work in the most conflict-sensitive areas with at-risk populations, and support other donors in applying conflict-sensitive approaches to their programming.
3. **(To PBF)** Instead of the current narrow focus on PVE, adopt a broader peacebuilding lens and move towards a sustaining peace agenda for the years to come. This will allow the UN and its partners to work on broader pillars of peace and shift toward positive elements, the peace engines.
4. **(To Resident Coordinator and GoK)** Establish a peacebuilding platform to enable dialogue between the Kyrgyz government, international donors, and civil society, and to develop a „sustaining peace plan“ that other donors could join. This will enable the PBF's investment to attract additional donor support and become catalytic.
5. **(To Resident Coordinator)** Building on the conclusions of the peacebuilding workshop conducted in the context of the 2020 review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture, include a regional dimension for cooperation and knowledge transfer on peacebuilding among Central Asian countries. For example, workshop participants discussed the need to build international and regional cooperation for cyber security, migration, private-public sector partnerships and mitigating cross-border tensions.
6. **(To the Resident Coordinator and the PBF)** In terms of substance, prioritise the areas identified in the strategic review workshop and place particular emphasis on inter-ethnic and cross-border relations, the dynamics of migration and women's empowerment.
7. **(To Resident Coordinator and UNCT)** At the same time, given the UN's mandate, the PBF priorities and the agencies' comparative advantage, safeguard space for the UN to address grievances and provide support for the implementation of international human rights standards with a particular emphasis on the protection of minority rights and human rights defenders.
8. **(To the Resident Coordinator and UNCT)** Move away from a project-based approach to peacebuilding toward a more strategic plan that champions consolidation of peacebuilding impact, focuses on the implementation of laws and policies and their respective financial implications, and adds good governance and anti-corruption as cross-cutting priorities.
9. **(To Resident Coordinator and UNCT):** Ensure that the context analysis included in the project documents clarifies the concepts, propositions and approaches to be employed throughout the project clearly and unambiguously and provide satisfactory evidence. Ensure a shared understanding among implementing agencies and government counterparts on the scope of project concepts like PVE, social cohesion, cross-border cooperation, women's empowerment, etc.
10. **(To Resident Coordinator, UNCT, GoK and PBF):** As the legislative and conceptual frameworks surrounding the core peacebuilding issues (gender, social cohesion, human rights, etc.) are mostly

- 11. **(To the Resident Coordinator)** Prioritise projects that focus on women's empowerment or adequately mainstream gender in the main PBF portfolio, instead of addressing gender issues through short term IRFs. Ensure a comprehensive gender analysis in the context of the re-eligibility process, as this has not been done before despite the pressing needs.
- 12. **(To the Resident Coordinator)** Ensure conflict sensitivity mechanisms are embedded throughout PBF portfolio, particularly in the high-risk projects. Begin implementation of any PBF funded project with a comprehensive conflict-sensitivity workshop involving all project stakeholders.
- 13. **(To PBF)** Develop a short guidance for PVE projects, to ensure a "do no harm" approach and prevent stigmatization of relevant communities and groups. Ensure the "do no harm" approach is embedded in PVE and other projects through the risk mitigation mechanisms.
- 14. **(To UNCT and PBF)** Review the functioning and effectiveness of the human rights and gender mainstreaming approaches in the current portfolio.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS (INCL. FOR A NEW PORTFOLIO)**

- 15. **(To UNCT):** Ensure innovative and effective approaches to capacity building of national partners.
- 16. **(To the Resident Coordinator and UNCT):** Apply participatory and bottom-up approaches when it comes to selecting projects, in particular with border communities.
- 17. **(To the RC and UNCT):** In cross-border and other projects, ensure improved coordination with relevant government

agencies and communities of both countries during the implementation.

- 18. **(To PBF):** Through the PBF Secretariat and through New York, help facilitate consistent communication with major donors and actors in Kyrgyzstan throughout the programming cycle, in order to prevent duplication, share experience and make full use of the Fund's catalytic potential.

**NATIONAL OWNERSHIP**

- 19. **(To Resident Coordinator, UNCT and GoK)** Make national ownership and close cooperation with the government a priority in order to ensure sustainability of PBF investments.
- 20. **(To Resident Coordinator and UNCT)** Maintain the practice followed during the Strategic Review workshop of involving government partners and civil society in the analysis and planning discussions related to the portfolio and development of new projects.
- 21. **(To the Resident Coordinator, UNCT and GoK)** Ensure a conversation and mutual understanding with government agencies and implementing partners on core objectives, concepts and theories of change used in projects from early stages of project development.

- 22. **(To the Resident Coordinator, UNCT and GoK)** Ensure the participation of the government and civil society in steering board meetings, and ensure their inputs relevant to the projects. Ensure constant communication with the government focal points throughout the project cycle.

**COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT**

- 23. **(To UNCT)** Ensure constant communication with the government(s) particularly in

politically sensitive projects like the cross-border, and ensure that appropriate risk mitigation mechanisms are in place. Ensure constant communication with the PBF to monitor and adjust the project's activities as needed, as a risk mitigation measure.

- 24. (To UNCT):** Ensure constant communication and coordination between different implementing agencies and other project stakeholders involved in a project, to ensure the project activities collectively contribute to the strategic outcome. Lead agencies must play a more proactive role.
- 25. (To PBF, Resident Coordinator and UNCT)** Include a Learning and Adaption Strategy for all RUNOs and implementing partners throughout the PBF portfolio and ensure institutional preparedness to accommodate potential adaptations. The Learning and Adaptation strategy focuses on changes in the context, risk mitigation strategies and verifying relevance of ToCs.
- 26. (To UNCT, GoK)** Ensure that M&E plans are developed within 3 months after the inception of the project, M&E framework is agreed with all project stakeholders. In the monitoring and reporting of results, ensure that data is disaggregated by age and gender. Ensure that the report is developed jointly, including all project stakeholders: implementing partners, state partners, consultants, experts, project staff, beneficiaries, etc.
- 27. (To PBF)** Provide feedback on reports submitted by RUNOs and implementing partners.
- 28. (To PBF)** Simplify the reporting templates.
- 29. (To UNCT, GoK):** Ensure participation of all UN Agencies and national partners in joint capacity-building and reflection exercises and follow-up actions.

- 30. (To UNCT, GoK):** Strengthen monitoring work of all projects, develop mechanisms for data collection and processing, learning, data reporting and feedback.



# United Nations Peacebuilding

## SECRETARY-GENERAL'S PEACEBUILDING FUND



### STRATEGIC PEACEBUILDING REVIEW

PBF portfolio in  
Kyrgyzstan  
2018-2020

#### DISCLAIMER

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