



The project is supported
by the European Union



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



international
alert

PILOT PROJECT

Increasing tolerance in selected
municipalities to promote
social cohesion in Kyrgyzstan

Chynara Biyalieva, Zaure Sydykova
Independent researchers

Bishkek
2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

The pilot project "Increasing tolerance in selected municipalities to promote social cohesion in Kyrgyzstan", funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), is complementary to the 3-year project "Constructive dialogues on religion and democracy" implemented by International Alert in partnership with the Iyman spiritual culture development foundation and with financial support from the European Union from 01.02.2017 to 31.03.2020.

PROJECT GOAL

The goal of the project was to facilitate and promote dialogue between local governments, representatives of various faiths, and civil society to ensure equal opportunities for development, cooperation, and conflict prevention. The pilot project was implemented in 4 municipalities: in Alexandrovsky and Yuryevka aiyl aimaks (AA) of Chui oblast and Gulistan and Zhazy AA of Osh oblast. The project aimed to increase the capacity of representatives of local governments, religious leaders of various faiths, and civil society to analyse conflict, mediate, be more socially tolerant, and jointly identify and resolve social issues at the local level within the framework of the Constitution and legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic (KR).

KEY RESULTS:

Research

- Baseline and endline research was completed in pilot municipalities
- The project increased the research capacity of 3 junior researchers
- Recommendations for various stakeholders were drawn up

Training

- Training modules were developed based on training needs assessment and baseline research

The training process involved a total of

187 participants

4 two-day trainings and 2 two-day workshops in pilot locations:


74
women

73
representatives
of LSG

75
representatives of
civil society


113
men

8
representatives
of state bodies

31
representatives of
religious
organizations

During the trainings, knowledge increased by 37.9%

During the final research, 66.7% of participants confirmed their learning and application of knowledge and skills in practice

- The capacity and knowledge of representatives of 4 LSGs, religious organisations and civil society in mediation, conflict sensitivity and analysis, social tolerance, civic identity increased. Almost half of training participants stated that their knowledge had increased immediately following the training; by the end of the project, over two thirds said that they had applied the knowledge and skills learned in practice
- Knowledge of legal mechanisms of interaction between local government and religious leaders within the framework of the Constitution and legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic increased

KEY RESULTS:

- Based on the training and workshops, ToT training modules on mediation, conflict sensitivity, and conflict analysis were developed. At the request of the Development Policy Institute (DPI), a four-day ToT training session was held for 14 DPI experts from all regions of the country to prepare them for further training on mediation and conflict sensitivity for beneficiaries of the "Voice of citizens and accountability of LSG bodies: budget process" project, funded by SDC. Approximately half of the training participants rated the training highly and feel they could apply new, relevant skills.

Dialogue

- Partnership was established with state authorities, local self-government bodies, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, NGOs, and local communities
- A dialogue platform was created between local self-government bodies (LSG), religious leaders and civil society, where they identified local social issues and worked together to resolve them within the framework of the Constitution and legislation of KR
- Sustained initiative groups composed of representatives of LSGs, religious organisations, and civil society were created for cooperation on the resolution of local social problems:

-Priority needs were identified and joint action plans of local communities developed to address social issues o The initiative groups of the pilot municipalities provided annual work plans for working together on local social issues

-Five mini-grant projects were developed and implemented by initiative groups of pilot municipalities aimed at reducing conflict potential, increasing social tolerance, civic identity and human rights protection were implemented

-The capacity of teachers to prevent conflicts between young men and women and work with "difficult" children was increased o Short training manuals on the prevention of conflicts among young people in schools for teachers and school staff were developed in the Kyrgyz language

-The "Development Centre for Children and Adolescents" opened in Yuryevka AA to provide a space for leisure and spiritual and physical development

- A high-level conference, entitled "Islam and Christianity – experience of cooperation and relations", was organised and co-funded, involving participation of officials from the Russian Federation, KR, and the President of KR





The main focus of the project was to reduce conflict and strengthen social cohesion of communities in the pilot AA by increasing their peacebuilding capacity to build dialogue through the organisation of joint activities. These activities brought together the interests of citizens regardless of gender, age, ethnic and religious affiliation.

The main implementation tool of the project was the creation of effective dialogue platforms between LSGs, state authorities, civil society organisations and religious leaders at the local level. The project created the necessary prerequisites for cohesion of pilot communities and enhanced dialogue between LSG bodies, civil activists, and religious leaders. The public dialogue platforms created have become accessible, simple channels of communication between local authorities and the public to obtain/distribute reliable information, clarify issues, identify partners, support groups of like-minded people, both learn from and influence public opinion, and promote new initiatives.

THE OBJECTIVES OF PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION BETWEEN DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS WERE:

- **discussing local policies, proposing community development programmes/plans, and developing actions for implementation at the local level;**
- **creating favourable conditions for improving the quality of life of community residents;**
- **developing tools and mechanisms to address community issues and concerns;**
- **mobilising and engaging the population and resources, and attracting partners for local development;**
- **identifying needs and building the capacity of stakeholders;**
- **shaping public opinion and influencing decision-making processes.**

Mini-grants for social projects were an integral part of the project and were seen as an opportunity to unite the interests and increase the cohesion of all participants, as they worked jointly to resolve problems. Different teams within the pilot communities submitted 8 social projects to the competition, of which 5 mini social projects were supported (total disbursement of €12,500). All projects were aimed at solving urgent social problems in local communities. The projects created platforms for testing dialogue mechanisms between stakeholders, including religious leaders.

Combining capacity building and micro-financing of community social initiatives ensured not only increased cohesion and achievement of the project goal, but also create a team of like-minded people to solve new problems. For example, Maksatbek Ibraimov, Head of Zhazy LSG, Uzgen district (Osh oblast), set up a social initiative fund from the local budget of KGS200,000 as he was so impressed with community cooperation. This is a clear indicator that the dialogue mechanism was successful and can be sustained beyond the project. Dialogue has built up considerable momentum within the pilot communities and must be sustained further to ensure its institutionalisation.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In general, the project managed to ensure that the topics of the selected social projects are consistent with the overall goal of the project – to increase tolerance and community cohesion with the involvement of representatives of religious institutions and communities. The following lessons have been identified:

Training

- Capacity-building of participants should be innovative and active, based on interactive methods of adult learning. Training should be joint between LSGs and civil society. There should be additional, separate training for LSGs bodies on public administration, legislation, coordination, and diversity management.

LSGs

- The authorities do not fully understand the importance of communication; they do not know how to organise properly and communicate effectively with the public. The creation of public dialogue platforms has become an accessible, simple channel of communication between the government and communities. Organising dialogue at the local level is an effective peacebuilding tool in this context and needs to be extended to other communities, drawing on this project's lessons for scale-up.
- LSGs in the pilot communities are beginning to understand the need for inclusivity and that different members of the community (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, health status), all have different needs and requirements. However, they need additional support to increase tolerance, reduce stigmatisation, and manage diversity to reduce exclusion of different, including vulnerable, groups. Dialogue can be an effective tool in this regard.

Religious leaders

- The involvement of religious leaders in civic education and awareness-raising activities allowed us for constructive dialogue and inclusion in community decision making according to legislation of KR. With the right coaching and facilitation, they have proven an active group promoting the goals and objectives of the project.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Partnership with religious leaders can be an effective resource for increasing awareness of secular values (including legislation) and civic education in religious communities. They are under-utilised by LSGs and other state agencies at present.
- Joint, targeted community work raised awareness and led to behavioural change (for example, the imams' awareness of underage marriages and preventative work).


Communities

- The project was able to influence the emergence of initiatives from community members to change their lives and improve security. The bottom-up social initiatives helped them to see the advantage of joint discussion and joint actions. The approach of combining capacity building and micro-financing of these initiatives ensured not only increased cohesion and achievement of the project goal, but also a team of like-minded people to solve new tasks.
- The basis for local community development is peace and mutual respect and understanding. This does not require large financial resources, but instead efforts to increase trust and identify interests and positions to mobilise stakeholders around a single goal.
- Working around single identified goals helped participants to establish partnerships and find resources.
- Social media proved effective in reaching local communities through information campaigns, changing attitudes, particularly towards women and girls.
- Communities understood that the involvement of women and children was beneficial in decision making. For young men and women, involvement led to increased motivation to participate in civic engagement activities. The short-term nature of social projects (1.5-2 months) did not allow all mini-social projects to go through their entire life cycle, meaning that results and impact will not be understood within the project's timeframe.

The short-term nature of social projects (1.5-2 months) did not allow all mini-social projects to go through their entire life cycle, meaning that results and impact will not be understood within the project's timeframe.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **To sustain the positive results of the local dialogue processes, the project should be extended, including the refinement, learning of lessons, and identification of good practices to ensure successful roll-out to new communities. The project has created the prerequisite building blocks for dialogue at the local level and effective mechanisms; however, they need further support as one year of implementation is not enough to achieve sustainable results.**
- **A second phase should:**
 - Expand and work on the results obtained in the first phase in the pilot AA, aimed at the institutionalisation of a dialogue methodology, and mini-projects to accompany the KR government's "Kyrgyz Jarany" concept to make it conflict sensitive, promoting peace, tolerance, and respect for diversity.
 - Implement end-to-end capacity building at all stages of implementation. Training and mentorship should be built in throughout the project cycle to provide ongoing support for knowledge and skills. Training skills in demand include:
 - o Effective communications;
 - o Facilitation, presentation, and moderation;
 - o Effective negotiations;
 - o Computer literacy and working with social networks;
 - o Fundraising;
 - o Project design and management (setting goals, inclusive participatory planning, time management)
 - o Monitoring and evaluation.
 - Provide training of trainers for members of existing initiative groups so they act as co-trainers and bring relatable experience to other communities.
 - Take the methodology to new communities and intensify inter-community experience exchange, both face-to-face and online to allow for non-facilitated interaction. -Extend information campaigns to the national level, using digital technologies for communication purposes (Whatsapp, Wechat, VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram).
- **To develop partnership and cooperation between dialogue participants more effectively:**
 - Create favourable, safe conditions for involvement of the whole community (particularly vulnerable groups, such as men and women living with a disability or women parenting children with disabilities);
 - Ensure that diverse voices contribute to local decision making
 - Promote locally led initiatives to sustain results beyond the project and local resource mobilisation
 - Make use of religious leaders in the discussion and solving of local problems, as they carry social weight and learn from the experience. They can convey important messages around civic education and secular governance to religious communities, with which they have significant trust. Therefore, they can complement the work of the secular state and not be a parallel governance institution.
 - Expand and strengthen the practice of involving state authorities and LSGs in project activities so that they witness positive results and coordinate their work with various dialogue platforms.



This publication has been prepared with the support of European Union (EU) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The content of this publication is the International Alert's responsibility and does not reflect the views of the EU and the SDC.