

UN GPI Project, Kyrgyzstan

Conflict Sensitivity: Risks and Opportunities

May 2017

Introduction

This note outlines some of the conflict sensitivity risks and opportunities around the Gender Promotion Initiative (Project Title: Women and Girls as Drivers for Peace and Prevention of Radicalization) by 4 UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF, UNODC and UNDP) in Kyrgyzstan. The majority of the risks and mitigating actions were identified by participants at a workshop in Bishkek, 29-20 May 2017. We spent most time exploring the programmatic and operational risks together. In a final section, we, as facilitators of the workshop, outline a few additional suggestions from our perspective.

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Strategic risks

Risk	Indicator	Mitigation
The PVE label hinders how we understand groups and their motivations by giving them a label		Good, regular analysis, engagement with stakeholders.
We pay inadequate attention to governance issues.		Research to understand VE drivers. Other parts of UN team work explicitly on governance.
		Focus on preventing (as opposed to countering) violent extremism
We are not clear conceptually between religiosity, radical views, and violent extremism and how one is linked to the other.		More exchange and sharing with information and research on regional and global levels.
Differing views on importance of freedom of religion and non-interference of the state		Develop advocacy work to formulate unified strategies

Programme design risks

Risk	Indicator	Mitigation
Biased community selection	Percentage of projects by main ethnic group; by location	Baseline research to see real situation in pilot communities. We have included diverse communities in our pilot locations: ethnicity, rural/urban, N/S. Selected in partnership with government as they aware of problems. Tried to make sure not all communities are Uzbek. We can change in main phase of project if necessary.
Communities don't understand what we mean by PVE and what our project is about.	Continuous communication and feedback with target communities	Careful design of questionnaires and careful process of asking questions Clear communications strategy and branding (see below for more detail) Perception studies
We don't understand the differences between and within groups in our target communities and therefore we target our interventions incorrectly.	Results of FTI monitoring Project reporting: of training, engagement, conversations	Support and prepare our facilitators to work with diverse groups. UNFPA system of third-party monitoring analytics: to observe trainings and gain greater insight into attitudes and motivations of participants Possible extension of UNFPA third-party monitoring to other UN agencies' activities
We merely address the symptoms and not the root causes	Ongoing research	Good analysis to inform programme design; use of evidence; use of expert analysis
Is our understanding of radicalisation the same as the communities and people we want to influence? Not clear whether they want the same as we do.	Baseline study. Repeat those questions once a year.	Baseline study (happening now) includes Qs around what radicalisation means for you, do you want to work on it etc. We may need to adapt programming as a result of its findings.
Programme design means whole religious communities are suspected of being radical	The quality of programme design and its adaption to the intermediate findings in terms of religiosity-radicalism nexus	Work not only with vulnerable groups. But also work with concepts, biases, stereotypes that are prevalent throughout society. Communications campaign has role to play in both addressing stereotypes and framing the project as about addressing marginalised communities/women and girls as drivers of peace (ie not PVE language)
Secular bodies, and secular discourse, not able to meet the needs of parts of society	Secular-religious communication platforms and efforts to	Create a platform where they can communicate with more religious bodies and people and stereotypes be overcome. Information campaigns.

	address mutual stereotypes	
We and partners equate outward signs of religiosity with radicalism	Concrete efforts to escape equating religiosity and radicalism	Change name. Take care with terminology. Talk about other types of extremism. Evidence that religion only plays small role. Engage in dialogue with government about this.

Operational risks

Risk	Indicator	Mitigation
Lack of data means we don't know about conflict sensitivity impacts	Availability of data	Be aware. Be diligent with collecting data. Baseline survey underway. Analytical monitoring planned. Develop and track indicators. Make sure we integrate conflict-sensitivity-related Qs.
Law enforcement agencies (including prisons) and their methods; eg. arrests aggravate the situation by arresting people who are just distributing leaflets	No. of complaints from people; No. of arrests	Work with police and prisons on improving their knowledge so they can differentiate between what is allowed and what is banned. Conversation with eg Minister of Interior to lead to degree that this project should be supported by law enforcement. Use UNODC relationship with Ministry of Interior to try and develop joint action plan. More work in main project phase.
We are not aware of the motivations of our partners; their discourse may be different from behaviour	Feedback from participants	Independent monitoring of what partners are actually doing and to collect participant feedback. Make partners aware that we will be watching. Increase monitoring visits, especially to sensitive projects. Engage more with trusted partners. Widen group of trusted, skilled partners. Work jointly with partners eg to develop agendas, methodology etc
Heads of local government are afraid to engage in discussion around these issues. Security risks to partners and those who get involved; our work makes partners vulnerable	No. times LSG heads refuse to participate; No. of reported threats;	A prikaz from GAMSUMO so they know we are here with good intent. MoU with LSGs. Communications strategy. Think about different project title. More softly-phrased themes and topics. Positive peace approach. Link with SFCG project and see what they are doing – facing same problems. Workshops in other places eg Osh, Bishkek. Security planning with partners. Do IPs need additional equipment eg radios?
Communities are stigmatised	General discourse. Names of communities or members being mentioned. No. of mentions in public space, media. Perception surveys. Ethnic backgrounds of arrested (at local	Change name of project – remove radicalisation word (in local language). Reprint materials if necessary. Tell more positive stories about these communities. Add work in wider range of communities.

	level) compared to overall ethnic structure of population.	
We're only working in some communities	Project info on target communities and their ethnic identity	Work in neighbouring communities. Presentation of the project more through a social development framework – communications. Explore communities more through baseline surveys.
Only working with women	Numbers of men and women (participants) and ratio.	Part of UN approach. See also risk management matrix of the main ProDoc.
Too many partners makes it difficult to come to a consensus, loss of effectiveness	Lack of system, good process eg agenda agreed etc. Slow progress.	Regular coordination meetings. Develop joint documents eg communications strategy, implementation plan, M&E; meetings with implementing partners and state partners. Email list. Good process throughout all project stages.
Not everyone ready and prepared to work at local level. Weak local capacity.	No. of people involved locally at different stages of the project	Involve local people in designing processes, methodologies etc Create vertical linkages. Less direction from Bishkek and more locally-led processes and priorities. Inter-sectoral approaches.

Opportunities

- During the workshop, participants identified a number of further opportunities to increase the peacebuilding impact of the project. These were not discussed in the same details as the risks, but we have captured below those that we heard.
- Identify and track key peace indicators for Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia from a global index to give greater sense of progress and key areas requiring attention
- We have a good range of partners across government and non-government sectors, which provides us with a good base upon which to build, to collaborate, and to develop further work
- Share information that we find out through research with government institutions and others to improve overall approach
- Potential for peace within Islam as a religion (which we are not currently using)
- Considerable experience of good peacebuilding practice, both within the region and globally, that can be built upon
- Language carries potential for integration – see UNICEF Multilingual Education programme, for example
- We need, and could develop, a deeper understanding of radicalisation
- We don't know how we are perceived, but could put more effort into finding out
- PVE can be framed so that we take an approach based on positive peace
- New government draft strategy on PVE presents a good opportunity for further engagement, as the language is now more about prevention, less about security response

Reflections from the facilitation team

We enjoyed working with you and think you have done an excellent job of identifying risks and mitigation strategies. We think there are a few additional conflict sensitivity risks which, as a group, you chose not to include. We would encourage you to continue to think about these.

Risk: the project instrumentalises communities to serve the PVE agenda.

We realise that this is not your intention, but nevertheless feel that there is a risk that PVE is an agenda owned and driven more by the government and international partners than by local people. You seek to address some issues related to this by developing and refining your communications strategy. However, we think there is a need to ensure that changes are not purely cosmetic. At the heart of this is ensuring that local people and partner organisations feel comfortable with the activity, approach and rationale. This can be supported by clear, open, transparent and honest dialogue throughout the project and in planning any further or supplementary work. It should also include regular check-ins and conversations with partners to ensure that this is what they want to be doing, especially if the situation changes.

Risk: the project is not engaging in dialogue with people with extreme views

Many of you stated that you thought that this was not the role of the project. The conflict sensitivity risk here is not so much of doing harm, but of failing to maximise the peacebuilding potential. We know from experience elsewhere such as Northern Ireland and many other peace processes, that transformation comes when one engages with those who hold very different views. We suggest that the UN country team might benefit from a more strategic discussion about how to engage in, or support, dialogue with those who hold more 'extreme' views, and how that fits within your policy dialogue and programme portfolio.

Risk: policy priorities influence programme design more than local context

We are clear that the team we met with has a good understanding of the local context in Kyrgyzstan, although we identified the team's understanding of particular local dynamics could be improved. However, we also hear that the project had undergone design changes in response to feedback from policy leads outside the UN Country Team. Whilst the expertise gained from similar work in other contexts is to be welcomed, we also think there is a risk that policy priorities can outweigh the specificities of the local context. We do not know enough to judge whether that has happened or not in this case, but would encourage the team to continue to be aware of the importance of local context and insight in designing programmes.

Donors are more interested in current conflict dynamics (currently framed as PVE) than in post-conflict/conflict prevention work, and in shorter-term results than in longer term positive peace

Donor interests inevitably influence UN choices. There is a perception that a focus on PVE comes at the expense of a broader and longer-term focus on peacebuilding and conflict prevention writ-large. There is scope for the UN project team to continue to engage in dialogue with donors about the diverse set of longer-term risks to peace and stability in Kyrgyzstan, including structural issues which also underpin violent extremism.

Next steps

The risks tables above identify a lot of potential next steps in the mitigation column. The responsibility for these now rests with the project team and the various UN agencies that are part of this project partnership. Participants at the workshop identified a number of significant first next steps, including:

- Meeting as an inter-agency project team to prioritise these next steps, mitigating actions, and to assign leads and responsibilities.
- To put in place clearer and more effective collaborative working practices among project partners
- To develop a clearer communications strategy

A set of agreements to be undertaken by 4 agencies

1. Joint Action on Monitoring and Evaluation (lead: UNFPA)
2. Joint Communications Plan (lead: UNFPA)
3. Joint activity Plan with Law Enforcement Agencies (Lead: UNODC)
4. Promoting communications with IPs and State Partners through mailing list. (Lead: PB Secretariat)
5. Enhance regular communications among agencies