
Special Series Paper

May 2019

Charles Buxton, Anne Garbutt, Janice Giffen,
Chynara Irisova, Konstantin Kovtunets, Anara
Moldosheva, Brian Pratt, Medet Tiulegenov,
Chris Wardle and Nazgul Zakiriaeva



INTRAC in Central Asia 1994-2018: a story of the past, the present and the future

FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I present this special bulletin to celebrate the next phase of INTRAC's support to civil society in Central Asia. For 25 years, since we were first commissioned by the UN Volunteer Programme 1994, INTRAC has provided training and capacity building for civil society groups and associations across the region. Over the years INTRAC has constantly shifted its focus, expanded work into new areas and countries or reducing it, based on the ever-changing needs of communities and the organisations that support them. The list of donors and funders we have worked with over the years at the end of this bulletin is testimony to this incredible history.

As capacity building support has become more available from within Central Asia, the need for on-the-ground presence of international organisations like INTRAC has reduced. It is the right moment to close our remaining office in the region and to enter a new era.

This is by no means the end of our involvement with civil society in Central Asia. Indeed, challenges for civil society remain acute across the region with pressures on civic space, and many social and economic inequalities to tackle. Where such needs persist, there remains a role for INTRAC. We are just changing our way of working.

We remain connected to a fantastic group of consultants, trainers and participatory researchers across the region, who we will continue to work and learn with as part of the global INTRAC network.

We also build on an amazing track record and many great friendships with civil society networks, social development foundations, academic institutions and professional associations. Over the years we have produced a wealth of publications on civil society issues and practical methods for strengthening organisations in the Central Asian context, including in Russian and Kyrgyz. In 2018 we handed many of our publications over to our partners, ensuring that this wealth of knowledge is available for future generations of social activists.



INTRAC Central Asia trainers and consultant with Helen Mealins after a meeting in the Bayalinova Library, Oct 2018

I had the great pleasure of spending some time in Bishkek and Almaty last October during the process of closing the office. There I met with some of our longstanding partners and capacity builders, I heard about the work INTRAC has supported over the years, and explored ways for INTRAC to continue to strengthen the role and impact of civil society. I am proud of the work that INTRAC has done in Central Asia, from helping to build the knowledge and skills of thousands of people to ensuring that the projects and programmes of international institutions and organisations were relevant and effective.

The articles in this special bulletin capture the story of INTRAC in Central Asia from the early days through to the present and into the future. As we look forward to the next chapter in our story, may I express my thanks to all our contributors for sharing their memories, reflections and ideas with us, and to all our partners and friends in the region.

Helen Mealins,
INTRAC Chief Executive,
May 2019

SETTING UP INTRAC'S CENTRAL ASIA PROGRAMME

Brian Pratt was INTRAC's founding director, running the organisation from 1991 to 2013. Brian took INTRAC from an idea to a fully functioning organisation with well-established programmes in development communications, training, research, overseas programmes and consultancies. He is now an INTRAC Associate. In this article, Brian reflects on establishing the INTRAC programme in Central Asia in 1994.

Early in 1994 INTRAC was approached by the UN Volunteer Programme, who we had previously worked with elsewhere. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union the Central Asian republics had found themselves to be independent states. Kyrgyzstan was considered probably the poorest of the former soviet republics, and the UN had decided to open a UNDP office supported by UNV. The World Bank had written a review of the weak economy in Kyrgyzstan, concluding that there would be a massive need for social support and that "civil society groups would be a key player in rebuilding such social support". This single line in a full report on the needs in Kyrgyzstan led the UN to consider how they could help this sector, on the assumption that it existed and had resources which could be mobilised.

Kyrgyzstan had been heavily dependent upon subsidies from Moscow, something like 50% of government budgets, and this stopped when Moscow gave independence to these countries. Mark Sinclair (a long-time INTRAC associate) and I went to Bishkek in February with the aim of mapping civil society and trying to identify possible programmes for UNV.

Bishkek was a barely functioning city. The airport was closed, so we had to fly to Kazakhstan and drive through snow-covered mountains to get to Bishkek. The government there was reeling from an unasked for and unexpected independence, many of the old soviet institutions had all but collapsed, and social services were being cut. Everything from child care, factories employing people with disabilities, special pensions for a whole raft of groups (from Chernobyl survivors to Afghanistan veterans) were all under threat or already in chaos. Some institutions had already converted themselves from state into voluntary organisations, and we met groups that had once counted a huge proportion of the population as members (for example, the Women's League and the Red Cross) which now found themselves without government support.



Brian Pratt with INTRAC staff member Kulara Djamankulova (second from left) and NGO partners from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, 2008

At a personal level it was hard for our team (which included a non-INTRAC member hired by the WFP to look into food aid for the winter emergency). We had difficulty just feeding ourselves: private restaurants were almost unheard of, although some old canteens struggled along. We stayed in an ex-communist party hostel staffed by stern elderly women, whose skills in managing to get working phone lines and tell us where we could find something to eat made them our essential support.

Several things came out of that initial visit:

1. We realised that there were some organisations that the old soviet state had spun off into independence and which still had potential to become genuine civil society organisations.
2. Other new groups were emerging in a very ad hoc manner, some offering services, others offering lessons in English and computing.

3. The World Bank report which had led us to the area was grossly optimistic about the ability of civil society to deliver the required services.
4. Many larger factories and collective farms were in total disarray due to the collapse of the soviet system of trade and the grip of the communist party on all forms of organisation.
5. Women were major losers, with the collapse of social services such as child care facilities, soviet working conditions and rights which had favoured them.
6. Our WFP colleague discovered that there wasn't a net food shortage, but rather that the old distribution system had collapsed and farmers were sitting on barns full of grain which no one had the ability to pay for and distribute. This led to the scrapping of the original UN/WFP plan to ship food by land thousands of miles from Baltic ports, in favour of a local food purchasing system at a much lower cost and with more immediate effect.

Our suggestion was to organise a programme of civil society strengthening through training and mentoring. We persuaded UNV to send some volunteers and were fortunate that many people from places like Nepal and Pakistan had studied in Russian-language universities and returned to their countries to work in NGOs, so UNV was able to recruit Russian-speaking NGO workers. INTRAC was contracted by UNV to help develop the civil society programme. We held early training programmes where, in the absence of Russian (or Kyrgyz) speakers who knew about NGOs or civil society, we had to train in English with help from translators. In one session we had a particularly good chairperson who spoke Russian, Kyrgyz and good English. I asked how come his English was so good: the reply was obvious, that he was ex-KGB because that was where the best language facilities had been under the old regime.

In the early days of the programme, we were not only working with translators, but also with many concepts that had to be discussed before a Russian equivalent could be identified. Even concepts that could be considered basic from a Western perspective were new to all of those with whom we were working, so we were introducing ideas around civil society, community based organisations, NGOs, participation, and so on. In my last visit to mark the 15th anniversary of INTRAC in the region,¹ one local partner stood up and said that at independence people were confused and had no idea what the future would bring, "then INTRAC came and brought us the idea of NGOs."

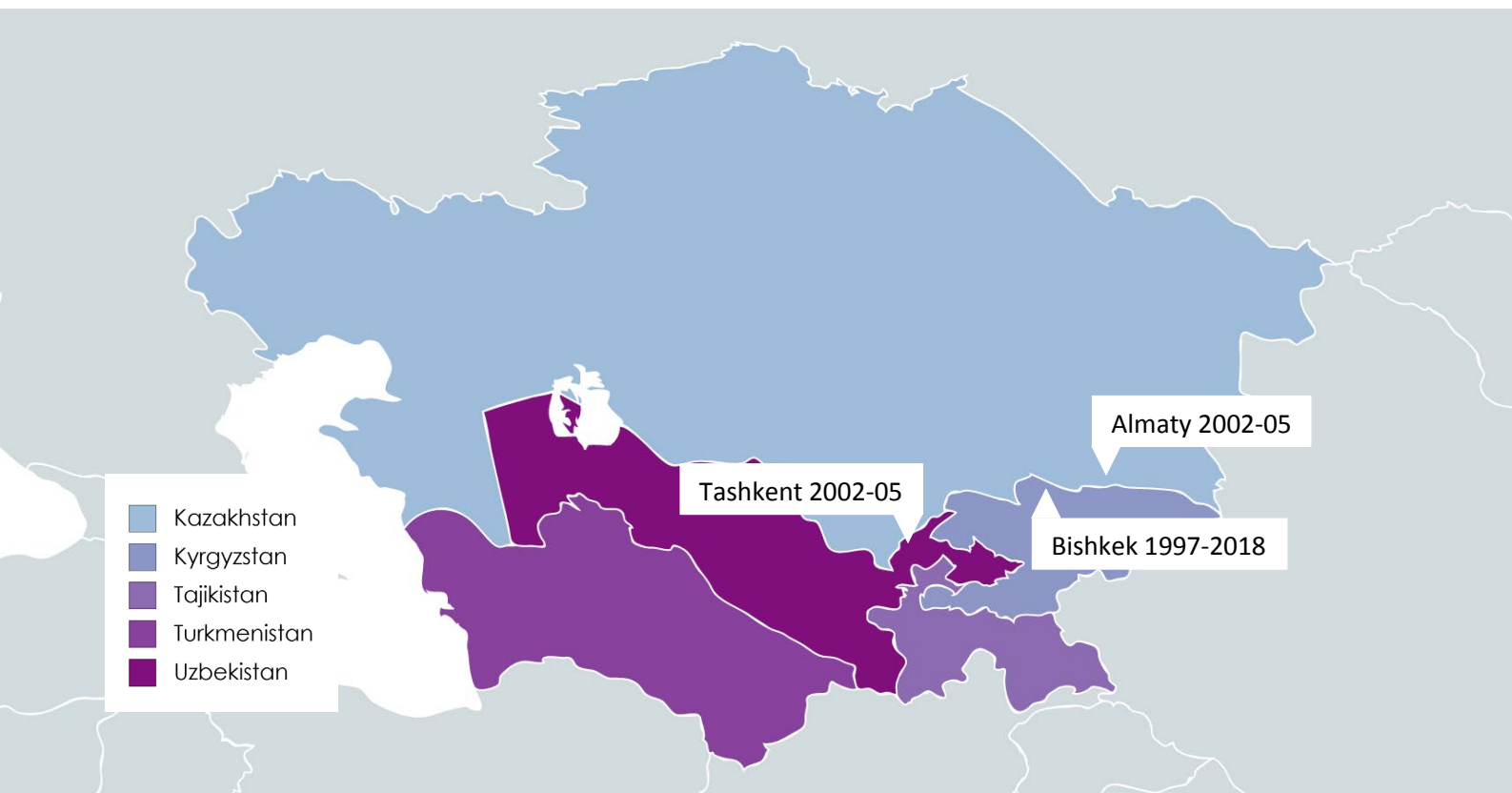


Brian Pratt with Asiya Sasykbaeva at a presentation of civil society models to mark INTRAC's 15th anniversary in the region

We used the UNV contract as our contribution to get matched funding from the European Commission, which enabled us to hire Jonathan Goodhand to further develop the programme. Jonathan made regular visits along with other INTRAC staff (Mark Sinclair, John Beauclerk, Janice Giffen, and others) as well as external consultants. It was around this time that we held a series of meetings including people from other countries in Central Asia, which turned out to be pivotal in the development of civil society in the region. Many years later, when we were commissioning local groups to evaluate INTRAC's programme, senior NGO types would consistently point to those early meetings as being the start of their careers and the origins of their organisational take off. One specialised area was the introduction of participatory techniques, and we invited Robert Chambers (an early INTRAC trustee) to run courses on PRA in his own inimical manner. These were also referenced many years later as a totally revolutionary approach in the region. Jonathan also started some initial work with UNV/UNDP in Kazakhstan.

¹ See '[15 years of INTRAC in Central Asia](#)', ONTRAC 45, May 2010, Oxford: INTRAC.

As the programme and our reputation grew we spread slowly out to the other former soviet republics. When Jonathan moved on, we hired Anne Garbutt in Oxford and Theresa Mellon in Bishkek to develop the programme in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. When Theresa left we set up more permanent offices in Bishkek, then Almaty and finally in Uzbekistan. Our programme in Tajikistan was delayed due to the civil war making it difficult to work there, but was eventually established. Meanwhile we were able to provide a yearly course for local NGOs in Turkmenistan despite the severe repression, thanks to support from the British Embassy in the country. Eventually our offices were staffed by a mix of local and Russian-speaking colleagues.



Locations of INTRAC offices in Central Asia. The Tashkent office also covered Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Looking back, I believe we did the right thing in beginning operations in Central Asia. We were well ahead of the field in developing programmes for people who had previously lived under a very different regime, and who were ill-prepared for independence, the collapse of the one-party state and indeed the collapse of the state itself. We always sought to tailor our programme to local needs and context, and as the programme matured we introduced more coherent extended training programmes with modular formats that allowed multiple opportunities for people to try out new ideas. This was supplemented by a set of analytical modules aimed at helping people analyse the social situation and plan a campaign of lobbying and advocacy. The previous approach by local NGOs was characterised by a tendency to shout at the representatives of government and occasionally throw shoes at them! Some other support agencies merely reproduced the same pre-designed courses every time, whereas we had a reputation for aiming higher and adapting our interventions to fit the needs and interests of participants.

A whole generation of people in civil society have gone through the programmes offered by INTRAC between 1994 and 2018, or have used the materials produced by the programme in the region. We trained local consultants (both staff and independent) who now work in the local languages, a huge change from the early dependence on English-speaking trainers. Much of what we learnt through the Central Asia programme was also useful in working in other societies that have historically been less open to external ideas and influences, and this demand for our approach continues today in several parts of the world.

A PROGRAMME MANAGER'S VIEW ON INTRAC IN CENTRAL ASIA

Anne Garbutt joined INTRAC in 1997 to manage the Central Asia programme, having lived and worked for 15 years in development and health in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. After various managerial roles within INTRAC, in 2018 Anne became an INTRAC Associate, continuing to deliver on consultancies and MEAL training courses.

Anne reflects on her early experiences of developing INTRAC's work in Central Asia. Over the years she regularly treated INTRAC staff to stories about crossing borders, hotel fiascos, and ensuring money reached INTRAC's offices in times when the banking system was limited.

If someone had said to me in November 1996 that I would move to Oxford to manage a programme in a Russian-speaking region of the world I would have laughed. Yet here I am in 2019 having had that experience and enjoyed every minute of it. My journey began in December 1996 when a friend in Bangladesh shared a piece of information that was going to change my life for ever. The International NGO and Training Centre (INTRAC) in Oxford was looking for a programme manager for their newly developed Central Asia programme. Not speaking Russian and never been to that part of the world I was not optimistic of my chances. However, I decided to go for it as I had been managing an NGO capacity building programme for five years in Bangladesh and had an inkling of how complex NGO capacity building was.

I flew in from Bangladesh for an interview and to my delight was offered the post, so in March 1997 I began my journey with INTRAC in Central Asia. INTRAC had begun the programme a few years earlier and had built a firm relationship with Centre Interbilim, a local NGO that was establishing its own reputation and developing new skills. They kindly provided us space in their offices to work from. The also newly appointed project manager Theresa Mellon and I flew to Bishkek with the co-director of INTRAC to initially establish an office there. We rented a flat for Theresa who was going to stay in-country, and began meeting people and introducing the newly established INTRAC Capacity Building programme for NGOs in Central Asia.



Anne Garbutt (second from right) with INTRAC staff and NGO partners, 2004

Our initial impression was that there was no civil society in this former Soviet Union country, and yet as we began meeting people and traveling around the country what we found was a civil society that was very different to anything we had ever seen. There were no formally registered NGOs other than one or two in Bishkek, but there was a mixture of a newly establishing private sector intermingled with philanthropic values that was the beginning of a growing civil society. During a mapping exercise in Kyrgyzstan we learnt so much about our own biases and prejudices. Our minds were opened to a whole new world that was based on a society moving from a communist past into one that was not only civil but was open and hungry for knowledge from outside. INTRAC was drawn into a plethora of new experiences and a society that was very much open to change.

We began by holding small workshops called WINGOs (What is an NGO), where we shared our experiences from various British NGOs we had worked with previously. During our second year we managed to get substantial funding from DFID to establish a capacity building programme

across all five states of Central Asia, establishing new offices in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Our initial exercises were to map civil society in the other four states, flying into countries that neither of us had been before and at times causing quite a stir at airports. I remember we flew into Turkmenistan without visas hoping to get admitted as it was impossible to get visas in advance at that time. Fortunately the boarder agency contacted the Minister for Overseas Affairs who came to the airport to meet us and allowed us to enter. In Turkmenistan we met a small group of local men and women who were tentatively establishing ideas for how they could get involved in decision making in their own country.

Support to NGOs in all five states was sparse and not very well established; indigenous support organisations tended to be based in capital cities and had major weaknesses in managing the donor resources available. INTRAC was well placed to begin a programme of institutional development methods, such as mentoring, consultancies, training and assisting with strategy planning.

During our time in Central Asia INTRAC worked at multiple levels using several different methods, including: facilitation, advice and dialogue, organisational development, training, and exchange visits. Our multi-level interventions were flexible, focusing on a wide perspective of needs at all times rather than on project activities. We believed that the information we gathered and disseminated led to NGOs having a better understanding of their role in developing the capacity of communities to solve their own problems, and therefore increased the capacity of NGOs within civil society. Only civil society organisations in Central Asia that have worked alongside INTRAC since 1997 can say if we were truly successful or not.



(from left) Brenda Lipson, Lola Umatalieva, Simon Heap, Natasha Laptieva, Anne Garbutt, Simon Forrester, Lola Abdusalyamova, Anvar Umurzakov, Guljahon Mavlani and David Marsden, at Blue Sky Thinking Workshop, Tashkent, 2002

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Janice Giffen was a staff member of INTRAC for 15 years before becoming an INTRAC Associate. After a period in academia researching the evolving central planning process within the Soviet Union, and working for the Food and Agricultural Organisation on methods of project planning, she worked in the NGO sector in both East and then West Africa. Here, Janice looks back at the context in which the INTRAC Central Asia programme evolved.

For 25 years, INTRAC ran a programme in the former soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. At its height, it had offices in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) Almaty (Kazakhstan) and Tashkent (Uzbekistan). This was in the days when the programme was funded largely by the UK's Department for International Development. When that funding ceased, INTRAC reduced the offices to one in Bishkek (two rooms in a block on Kievskaya Street) and the programme continued to work in the wider region from this office until it closed in December 2018.

It is a time to look back. The programme grew out of the funding made available by the Western post-Cold War strategy of providing support to the democratic development of the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union. These five Central Asian former soviet republics were countries which most people in the West knew very little about.² They had independence thrust upon them by the break-up of the Soviet Union – it was largely unsought.

INTRAC has worked with the not-for-profit sector in the developing world since the early 1990s. It was not alone in branching out to work in parts of the former Soviet Union. USAID supported the installation of a series of support centres (Counterpart Consortium) with local staff trained in traditional social development support work, and INTRAC was going to work in a similar fashion: helping people to identify and plan projects, to seek funding, to involve the beneficiaries of projects in the planning, implementation and monitoring of progress. All standard stuff for the development worker of the 1980s and 1990s. The difference here was that, despite the poverty arising from the collapse of the previous centrally-planned economic structures and corresponding budgets and income streams, this part of the world was not really like the rest of the developing world where development practitioners knew the ropes. And it resisted being labelled as part of the 'developing world' – after all literacy levels were over 99%; basic needs had once been met; the people INTRAC was working with were often much better educated than we were.

The sort of development work that INTRAC was involved with came to be classified as support for civil society. The rediscovery of the concept of civil society was part of the reconceptualisation of the importance of working with community groups. For the previous two or three decades the NGO sector had talked about community development and community empowerment. Now, with the demise of the eastern bloc, we found ourselves involved in the task to enable groups of civilians to engage in political discourse, to lobby for their interests and organise for the benefit of the community or wider sectors. This was part of the democratisation agenda which came to be adopted by all the major donors (including USAID, DFID, the EU). And we learnt to talk the language of 'civil society strengthening'. In the late 1990s, INTRAC – as part of its training programme in the UK – ran a series of courses entitled 'What is civil society?' – the concept was that new. It seems hard to believe now, so familiar have we become with the terminology.

Some of the first courses that INTRAC ran in Central Asia held surprises for us: we ran courses for members of civil society groups (NGOs or local community groups). We thought we knew what

² I have a large tome published in 1996 by the US Centre for Strategic and International Studies, edited by Zbigniew Brzezinski, which documents the failure of the Union Treaty (between the Russian Federation and the 15 Soviet Republics) in 1991, the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and then provides documents, data and analysis for each of the newly independent republics. This was information we needed.

sort of people would be attending, but the term civil society was clearly new to this region too and was interpreted to mean anything that is not funded by the state, or that used to be state funded but now was not. So, we got people from the newly emerging private sector interested in running a business and accessing any funds that were available to get it off the ground. On one occasion we got a representative from the Union of Security Guards who were suddenly without an income; on another an artist who was baffled by this new world where artists were not supported by the state but rather had to make their own way. As the idea of civil society became more widely accepted, we got people who came from largely newly established, largely urban-based NGOs – many of which had been set up by enterprising members of professions whose jobs or salaries, or both, had ceased with the economic collapse of the 1990s. These were mostly well-meaning people, ex-teachers, doctors, union workers, who had an interest in solving current problems in their areas of expertise. There were also some chancers who could see the opportunities provided by foreign funding.

In the early days, it was difficult to find groups working in the rural areas, where much of the extreme poverty was to be found. I remember the relief when meeting someone from the UNDP office in Bishkek who actually did know something about the situation in the villages and whose programme was clearly aimed at this sector. Poverty in both urban and rural areas was a real problem, with high levels of unemployment and then the degradation of the once comprehensive utilities systems. I remember asking someone in an office whether we should phone someone about the strong smell of gas in the street. He laughed and asked me whom I would phone.



Students from the first ASTP programme in 2003. With Anne Garbutt, Janice Giffen and Simon Heap

Many Western aid workers were woefully ill prepared for work in this part of the world. Experiences gained in parts of the developing world and then applied in a one-size-fits-all mentality did not go down well. Techniques developed for use with largely illiterate populations – aimed at involving such populations in discussions about developments in their communities – were met with incomprehension or offence. It is now becoming accepted that the simplistic

expectations of Western foreign policymakers about how to help former centrally planned economies 'transition' to market economies were at best naïve and at worst arrogant – and in either case showed a remarkable lack of understanding of contexts and history. The same is true of the optimistic view of how provision of support for civil society groups would establish the thick network for democracy. There was frustration at the lack of understanding about what networks had existed before, both in Soviet times and in traditional communities.

INTRAC, to its credit, strove to understand these things, although it was constrained by its need to access donor funds and therefore comply with whatever the strategic view of the donors was at that moment. It became known for its more nuanced approach to providing support, and for its local knowledge – employing both local staff (which is good practice in the sector anyway) and only Western staff with the local knowledge and relevant language skills. One of our programmes, which was repeated in most of the countries over the years, encouraged and supported individuals working in the civil society sector to conduct their own small-scale research projects in their areas of expertise – identifying local issues and conducting analyses – and then making presentations to local media and relevant government and local authority officials.

Different budgets offered new opportunities for funding. For instance, when the DFID funding ceased there were new budget lines available for particular forms of work such as conflict resolution; these budgets often based at the British Embassy level in the region. There were also, and continue to be, smaller foundations such as the Aga Khan Foundation and the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, which support groups here. And Soros, of course.

Naturally, there are problems associated with reliance on funding from abroad, and some of these countries have followed Russia (and India) in introducing 'foreign agent' legislation which prevents many groups from receiving foreign finance. Often so-called 'socially oriented' NGOs are exempt from this legislation, although it can be difficult to negotiate the finer points of the law. In recent years, INTRAC had been working closely with local authorities and local philanthropists in striking links between them and the civil society sector. It is interesting that Russia is now advocating that its local government structures provide increased support for socially oriented NGOs and has begun to rate the performance of the regions in terms of level of support provided.

My involvement in the programme ceased a few years ago, but I have many memories and vignettes. The few below are not all work related, but provide a resonance of the particular contexts:

A meeting with a local group in Kara-Balta which had experience of working with the local government structures. The venue was a huge room in a deserted brick building with a table running its whole length – rather like a board room of a large corporation. It turned out that this was what it was, in effect: not the board room but a meeting room in the trade union headquarters which once must have had many hundreds of people coming and going. In Soviet times Kara-Balta was the processing centre of the eponymous Ore Mining Combine, which processed uranium from deposits in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Kara-Balta also produced a well-known brand of arak, or vodka. After the meeting I was given a bottle from the stores – I was not sure if they still produced it in the town, or whether there were just a lot of bottles still remaining from old times.

Travelling by road with one of the local Uzbek staff members from Uzbekistan to work in Tajikistan. She knew that our route would take us near Kairakkum in Tajikistan where, in Soviet times, there had been large carpet factories. She also knew that although the factories were mainly closed, there were still a lot of carpets to be had, stored in garages and outhouses, presumably by ex-factory workers. It seemed that carpets came in three or four standard sizes, to fit the dimensions of the different types of soviet apartment rooms. They also came in three or four standard designs. My colleague wanted a particular design in a particular size. We stopped in a likely area, and word went out that a potential customer had arrived. The street became busy with hopeful young men unrolling carpets for her

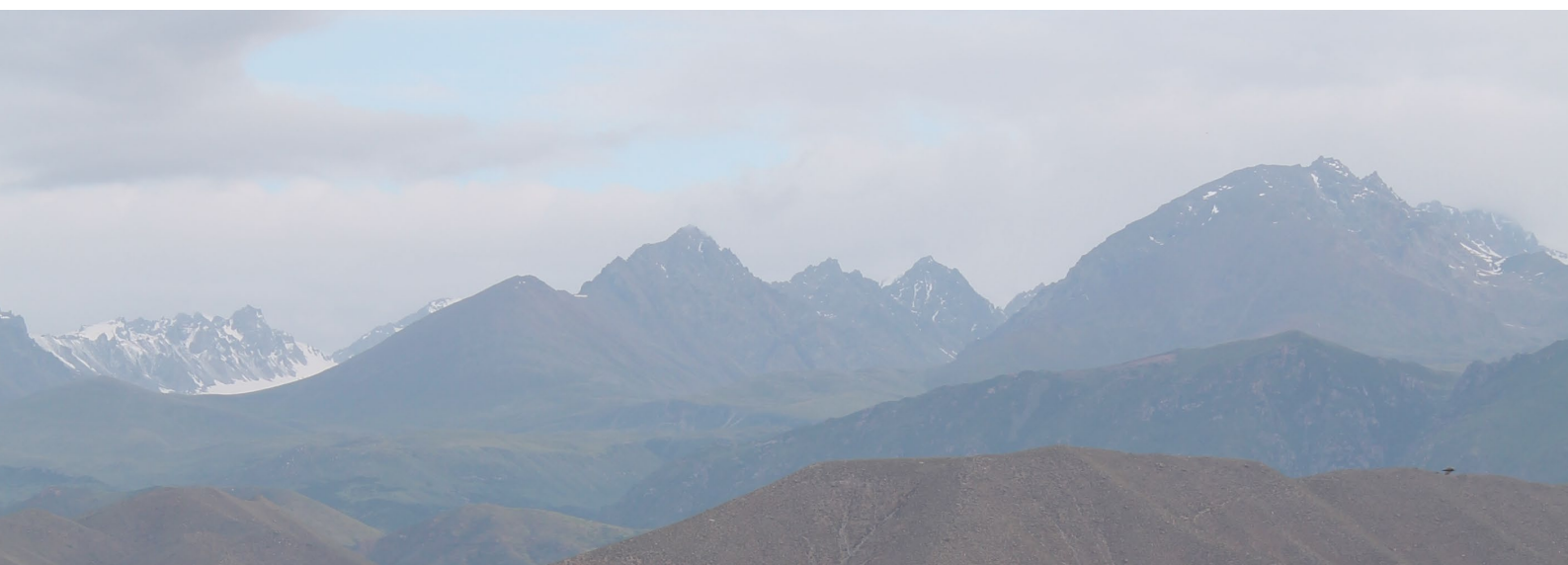
inspection. However, none matched her precise specifications, and she gave them notice that we would be passing back through in several days' time and, if they could find the carpet she needed, they would have a sale. I cannot remember what the outcome was – I had just been fascinated by this window on other peoples' lives.

Spending time trying to understand the development of links between the re-emerging local government structures and the newly emerging civil society groups. As in Russia and many of the other ex-soviet republics, local authorities increasingly recognise that it is sensible to work with local community groups where these groups are working to provide for local needs. There were mechanisms in soviet times to enable what were known as 'initiative groups' to seek funding from the state. These groups were often set up by groups within a branch of a trade union. In the early noughties, such mechanisms were being revived by enterprising officials and activists and lessons from different former soviet republics were being shared widely within the incipient civil society sector. Ukraine was a leader in this field with Kazakhstan following close behind.

A local self-help group in Bukhara run by a woman whose previous career had been in the trade union movement. Close to the old town, next to a large Hauz (a public water space in front of a mosque) a small building had been turned into a civic information centre, a tourist information centre and a place where young people could come to learn IT skills in the evening. Also in Bukhara, visiting a programme aimed at supporting interested residents of the old town to set up boutique hotels in their homes. The local woman running this programme had a day managerial job at one of the larger ex-Intourist hotels – a million miles away from the idea of boutique hotels - but she was an entrepreneurial sort. This was evidenced by the stacks of bottled vegetables at one end of her office – another of her quiet sidelines.

Visiting Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan, in the days when it was under construction. Huge space-age structures emerging from the steppe, and at that time largely unconnected with each other. Visions of the future. For many years government officials flew in for the week's work in Astana before returning home to Almaty for the weekend.

But nothing is forever, and the INTRAC office has closed. The region will continue to develop in its diverse ways, with its eyes on the changes unfolding from new strategic directions of both China and Russia: there will be new opportunities arising and work to do for the variety of civil society groups that have emerged in the past 25 years. We wish them well.



Kyrgyzstan, 2017

A TALE OF FOUR INTRAC PROGRAMMES

Charles Buxton joined INTRAC in 2001 and was based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan as programme manager for the Central Asia region until the INTRAC office was closed in December 2018. He still lives in Bishkek and now works as an INTRAC consultant and trainer across the post-soviet region.



Thanks to the hard work and pioneering spirit of Brian Pratt and Anne Garbutt, when I arrived in Bishkek in November 2001 it was as regional coordinator for a five-country programme entitled “Institutional Development of Civil Society in Central Asia”, which was funded by DFID. Our two country managers, Lola Abdusalyamova and Simon Forrester, plus a team of 10 local staff, helped manage three offices – in Bishkek, Almaty and Tashkent. For me, two main elements in the programme were the most successful. First, the training programme – a regular series of major events, most with participants from two to three countries, led by an INTRAC international trainer and accompanied by a local expert. With Chris Wardle, I travelled to Bukhara and Samarkand for the strangely named Education Training and Support Programme (ETSP) course, providing basic skills and strategies for NGO support workers. With Rob Wells, we went north to train social sector NGOs on resource mobilisation in Almaty and Astana. With Jerry Adams, we went to Dushanbe to give courses on M&E – one of INTRAC’s first initiatives in Tajikistan. During 2002-04 the programme developed and disseminated courses on almost all the topics offered by INTRAC to development agencies in the UK. Everything was translated into Russian and a whole generation of civil society activists in the region benefited from it.

The second key aspect was the community development component, which during the DFID programme was mainly exploratory. We employed three local advisors – Kulnara Djamankulova, Chinara Tashbaeva and Bahodir Fozilkudzhaev – and with the help of Lucy Earle they produced a ground-breaking analysis of key factors (traditional, soviet and post-soviet) that have to be taken into account in any grassroots project in Central Asia. This built on INTRAC’s earlier work introducing PRA, also on our early focus on the position of women in society (led by Anne Coles). A third element of the DFID programme was another huge piece of work – the programme-level participatory M&E project, which almost everyone (all our staff, all our partners) took part in. After this piece of self-evaluation, there wasn’t much else for the external evaluators of the DFID programme to say (maybe this was part of the point of it)!

Bishkek continued to be our regional office. This was where DFID had its main base in Central Asia (though until a few years ago there was no embassy in Kyrgyzstan). It was and remains the easiest place to work in civil society in the region. Coming from London I really enjoyed the quieter pace

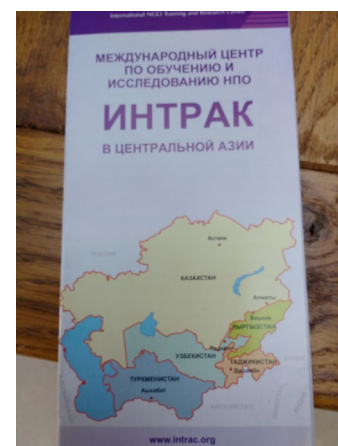
of life in Bishkek. Our office looked out on the Tien Shan mountains, rising to 4,000 metres just a short distance away. In 2001 there were no bank tills or credit cards and the city authorities couldn't afford to switch on the street lights at night. But the city has developed quickly and now we can hardly see the mountains for all the high-rise flats, and every main street seems to have its own business centre or shopping mall.

Between each of INTRAC's main programmes have been difficult interim periods where funding was uncertain. This was especially the case after the DFID very demanding programme. Luckily, Simon and I had made some useful contacts with the Dutch agency ICCO and in 2005 we submitted a proposal to them to support a network of 15 NGOs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the "Strengthening NGOs to Support the Self-Help Movement". In this programme, we implemented the organisation and community development methodologies that we had explored with DFID. It was a time for critical management decisions. We exited the DFID administrative umbrella and registered as an INTRAC "representative office" in Kyrgyzstan – and with great sadness closed the offices in Almaty and Tashkent.

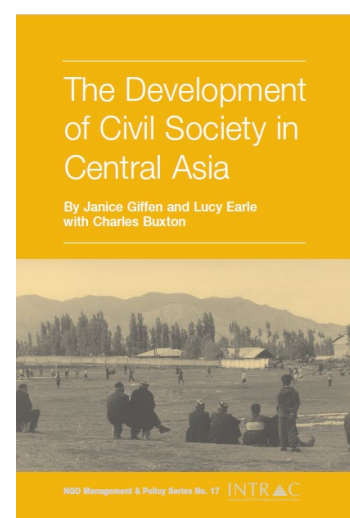
Here external factors played a large role. Kazakhstan had just achieved middle-income status and many donors rapidly wound down their programmes – much to the dismay of our local partners working in rural areas that did not benefit much from oil money. In Uzbekistan, the May 2005 Andijan uprising and subsequent political fallout led to the closure of foreign-funded civil society programmes right up until President Karimov's death in 2016. Kyrgyzstan also experienced its first revolution in 2005, although thankfully this did not lead to downturn in civil society activity.

Also in 2005, INTRAC published *The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia* – a very useful compilation of the results of our civil society mapping studies and development programme. Three research studies in the region in 2006-08 had a large effect on my own understanding of the environment for civil society. The first was a study on the role of self-help groups in the community, supported by Janice Giffen. This involved all 15 NGO partners in the ICCO-funded programme, and showed that groups were not just engaged in economic activities for their families but were also playing a lead role at village level. The second was a study I carried out with a new staff member, Kazbek Abraliev, on leadership in civil society. This was a very topical issue after the 2005 revolution, when everyone was hoping for a new start after the crisis and depression of the transition period. The third study was led by Anara Moldosheva for Oxfam-Novib and explored the relationship between Central Asia CSOs and networks, and global civil society. We studied 40 civil society networks (ten per country, excluding Turkmenistan as so often, sadly). Our report raised a huge number of issues that we had not really tackled before – including about inequalities as to resources and voice within civil society and the difficulty Central Asia NGOs have in getting their voice heard at international level.

The ICCO-funded programme enabled us to innovate in the delivery of new skills. Inspired by Peter Oakley and led by Anne Garbutt and Simon Heap, we had developed our analytical skills training programme (ASTP) during 2003-04, but the three-country course coordinated by Konstantin Kovtunets in 2007-08 took it to a new level. For the first time, all participants completed and published a research/case study. The 15 NGO partners all took part and used the course to develop new lines of work. Konstantin's position as knowledge management worker was funded by ICCO and during this time he coordinated a major strategic planning exercise with support from our manager Rod MacLeod. This was vital in updating our analysis about where INTRAC's input was most needed in the region. Data collection showed that a number of topics (for example M&E or organisational development) were now being delivered very capably by local experts in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan; INTRAC's support was no longer needed here. We



INTRAC information leaflet promoting the programme with new partners and donors, 2005



The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia, 2005

continued to carry out programme evaluations and organisation assessments where donors wanted an international input. I remember the organisation assessments led by John Beauclerk particularly well, working with key NGO partners like Baspana in Almaty and Arysh in Bishkek. They set the standard for our work later.

The ICCO programme was a great expression of development cooperation where the donor was committed to NGO partners in the long term and allowed the capacity building organisation (INTRAC) to establish trusting relationships with the NGOs and achieve results over an extended period of time. Another innovative methodology that we tested successfully in 2008-09 was action learning, with the help of Bill Crooks and Nuriya Omurbekova (ex-Centre Interbilim). More and more, INTRAC was relying on local trainers and consultants to implement the work. Thus, whereas in the DFID programme we hosted a dozen consultant visits from the UK each year, in the ICCO programme this reduced to three to four visits, and after 2010 just one visit per year.



A largely new local team delivered the ICCO-funded programme. From the left: Kazbek Abraliev, Konstantin Kovtunets, Galina Cheppa, Charles Buxton, Rod McLeod, Kulnara Djamankulova, Burma Baitokeva

Another breakpoint for INTRAC in Central Asia came in 2010. The ICCO programme ended and Kyrgyzstan's second revolution turned violent, with the loss of hundreds of lives in Bishkek and Osh. In both 2005 and 2010, crowds stormed Bishkek's "White House" (the Presidential administration) just two blocks from the INTRAC office. All the shops in our section of Kievskaya Street were looted. In 2005, President Akayev was caught unawares and fled the country, so the revolution was almost bloodless. The second time round, with President Bakiev defiant, the security forces were more prepared and hence the toll in lives was higher. By 2010 I had begun my own writing projects, building on insights from the INTRAC programme and trying to bring a deeper, more historical angle to the analysis of civil society development in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union. For example, I wrote short analyses of the two revolutions from a civil society standpoint.

Before 2010, INTRAC's work in Central Asia had not really addressed the issue of conflict. The events in Bishkek and Osh forced us to do this and the next five years were notable for an adaptation of our analytical skills training programme entitled "Research in Action: Civil Society Working to Prevent Conflict in Fergana Valley", funded by the British Embassy under the FCO's Conflict Pool. Here we had three NGO partners, two in Kyrgyzstan – Centre Interbilim Osh and Jalalabad Civil Society Support Centre, and one in Tajikistan – EHIO Farhang van Tariqot, Khojend.

For the first time, we were able to do intensive civil society support work in northern Tajikistan and in the sensitive areas along the border with Kyrgyzstan. The trainers were almost entirely local – though I attended all the modules in a support role. We ran the nine-month analytical skills training programme three times and produced almost 20 local research studies (see table 1) on economic, social, diversity and governance themes, all published and distributed locally or nationally. Through our NGO partners we developed highly productive relations with local authorities in the three main locations. New analytical and conflict-related materials were added to the ASTP toolbox. Our community of practice meetings during the training programme played a real, practical, effective role in keeping the studies on course.

Governance/conflict issue	Kyrgyzstan research 2011-12, Tajikistan research 2012-13, Kyrgyzstan research 2013-14
Basic conflict resolution systems in place and functioning/access to services	<p>Compensation for businesses damaged and looted in June 2010</p> <p>Compensation for people disabled during the 2010 riots</p> <p>Documentation issues for ethnic Kyrgyz forced migrants from Uzbekistan in 2010</p> <p>Restoration of civic infrastructure destroyed in riots via consultation mechanisms with the Government Directorate</p> <p>Youth contribution to peace-building in border villages in the Isfara-Batken area</p> <p>Access to irrigation water in B Gafurov (Taj) and Leilek (Kg) border districts</p> <p>Effective cooperation between district police patrols and the local community in three villages in Batken, Osh and Jalalabad</p> <p>Involvement of the community in conflict resolution efforts in cross-border areas of Batken, Osh and Jalalabad</p> <p>Transparency in housing allocation in Jalalabad city for those affected by violence</p>
Government able to ensure basic services to most of the population	<p>Provision of communal services at local self-government level: e.g. utilities, street lighting, waste disposal</p> <p>Government provision of extra-curricular education for youth</p> <p>How to tackle problems facing children of work migrants</p> <p>Problems in enforcing rights of people with disabilities to work in Khojend city – and good practice</p> <p>Negative aspects of child labour in Isfara district</p> <p>Access to drinking water in Turan district of Osh and in Janibek Kazy district of Jalalabad</p> <p>Inclusion of youth from rural areas in decision-making processes for the implementation of youth policy at local self-government level (Batken, Osh and Jalalabad)</p> <p>Children with disabilities' rights to secondary education (physical access)</p>
Government able to ensure fairness in justice system	<p>Reform of custody and court proceedings for juvenile justice – problems of at-risk youth in Osh</p> <p>Main reasons why formal agreements made between dekhkan farmers/associations are not observed</p>

Table 1: Research studies in INTRAC's conflict pool project and the governance/conflict issues addressed

From around 2008, INTRAC's Central Asia office came gradually to resemble the UK office much more closely in terms of the overall profile of our work. In the final 10 years, we carried out 100 different contracts and projects for around 50 main agencies. These ranged from larger, multi-year programmes like the one funded by the British Embassy, to smaller and one-off training workshops and evaluations. We also launched open training in Central Asia, managed by Kulnara Djamankulova, and for five years ran four to five regional courses per annum, based in either Bishkek or Almaty. With the help of the consultancy department in Oxford – Claire Moberly and Irene Pietersen in recent years – we maintained a simple but effective system for bidding, implementing and dealing with finance from a range of partners.

There were a few disappointments here too. EU funding eluded us, despite several attempts, though it became the staple diet for many European INGOs active in the region. We have had little contact with DFID in recent years. Our NGO partners regularly tried to persuade us to open an office in Tajikistan since there was more abundant development aid money and a need for NGOs to take on a more strategic role, but it always seemed to me that while the Bishkek office was INTRAC's only permanent base outside the UK, to open a second office in Central Asia was not really justified. And it would have taken management challenges to a new level.

Gradually INTRAC adapted to the situation of dwindling funding for civil society in Central Asia, that is, our projects became smaller. We ran a very successful leadership project for youth, followed by a leadership programme for women with disabilities. This built on work led by Brenda Lipson a few years earlier, adapting it to the priorities of women's networks. In Kazakhstan, our partners in the women's disability NGO Shyrak, gained EU funding for the leadership training that we organised. After two years supporting a network of youth centres in the south of Kyrgyzstan, from 2015-18, we gradually moved into the area of youth, enterprise and employment. With the help of the Ebert Foundation, we completed the "Research in Action" programme with a regional study of youth and employment – focusing on CSOs' contributions to tackling unemployment – and began work with youth association and trade unions on labour rights. In late 2017 we carried out a country study of social entrepreneurship in Kyrgyzstan for the British Council.



Team meeting at Issyk-Kul to discuss results of ASTP, 2014

Most of the topics mentioned above have been written up as INTRAC Praxis or learning papers. It was especially satisfying in 2016-17 – when we got a major contract with GIZ for capacity building of local CSOs, suddenly trebling our annual spending – to be able to compile training handbooks on organisation development, financial management, communications and partnership, and social enterprise, in both Russian and Kyrgyz. In 2017 we welcomed participants in INTRAC's "Consultants 4 Change" programme to workshops on Lake Issyk-Kul, and in 2018 we translated and published the C4C handbook in Russian.

Visits by Michael Hammer in 2015 and 2016 helped us keep in touch with INTRAC's strategic thinking, and Helen Mealins' visit in autumn 2018 has laid the basis for continued networking with NGO partners – and in particular with our group of loyal and experienced local trainers and consultants.

DEVELOPING CIVIL SOCIETY IN KYRGYZSTAN: THE EXPERIENCE OF CENTRE INTERBILIM

Chynara Irisova was for many years a key staff member in the Centre Interbilim Osh office. She attended INTRAC's Analytical Skills Training Programme in 2008-09 and later worked as a mentor and trainer on the programme. In 2017 she became an independent consultant working with NGOs and local government in the South of Kyrgyzstan, and was a participant in INTRAC's [Consultants for Change programme](#).

Chynara presents an analysis of civil society in Kyrgyzstan from one of INTRAC's oldest and closest NGO partners in the region. Centre Interbilim, led by founder Asiya Sasykbaeva, was one of the first NGOs to take up organisation development methodology and opened civil society support centres in Bishkek and Osh at the end of the 1990s. In the early 2000s, they published a regular bulletin and three collections of articles by NGO experts and activists – one of the first attempts by Central Asian civil society to undertake its own analysis of the growth of the sector. Asiya visited the UK several times and with Ian Smillie carried out an evaluation of INTRAC's work globally in 2005. Later, Centre Interbilim began to specialise in rights issues and advocacy. Asiya became a national deputy in the Ata Meken party after the 2010 revolution and the adoption of a new constitution.

What is civil society? For me it is an area where citizens meet to discuss and resolve relevant problems. This is the sphere of free citizens and voluntarily formed non-profit organisations, without the direct intervention of state governments and businesses.

It was not an easy path to develop a civil society in the Kyrgyz Republic. Civil society organisations started to appear in the mid-1980s in the Soviet Union, when political reforms began. In Kyrgyzstan, the first informal groups began to organise in order to try to understand the political processes taking place in the country.

These groups were trying to work in the sphere of civil society to protect their rights. When the USSR broke up, many people lost their jobs; salaries and state welfare allowances were not being paid. Between 1995-1998, important legislation was adopted that formed the foundation of the civil society, for example, the Laws of the Kyrgyz Republic "On State Registration of Legal Entities" on 12 July 1996 and "On Business Partnerships and Companies" on 15 November 1996. The accreditation of representative offices of major international organisations and foundations also played an important role in the Kyrgyz Republic, and during this period, more than 300 non-governmental organisations were formed. The creation of the first institutions of civil society was characterised by a lack of consistency and pronounced spontaneity. These were difficult times for Kyrgyzstan and a job in an NGO was a good opportunity to make a bit of money and provide for the household.

From 1998 to 2000 there was a six-fold increase in the number of NGOs, with qualitative changes occurring alongside this quantitative growth.³ For example, NGOs were divided by type of activities, and regional expansion was notable. An important factor in the expansion of the non-governmental sector in this period was massive financial support from international foundations and organisations through a system of grants. International organisations contributed to the promotion of democratic principles and were interested in the sustainable development of the country. Grant support was directed not only at seminars, roundtables and training, but also had an organisational, technical, and methodological nature, which had a positive effect on NGOs' activities and their effectiveness. Due to the quantitative growth and qualitative development the

³ E. Shishkaraeva et al. (2006) "Review of the history of establishment and development of the NGO sector in the Kyrgyz Republic", Association of Civil Society Support Centres, Bishkek (ACSSC).

non-governmental sector has begun to take its place in public processes. The number of public associations, public funds, credit unions, and homeowners' associations is increasing all the time. To date, a fairly stable group of NGOs exists in the environmental, youth, gender, human rights, work with people with disabilities, education, and health arenas.

Changes do not always occur where they are needed. The NGO sector is trying to participate in development programmes, but are currently more successful in providing social services. The state, with its limited resources and lack of qualified staff, does not always have the opportunity to respond to new challenges and problems in the social sphere. Social services provided efficiently by NGOs have long been successfully competing with government services. For example, NGOs are active in the creation of rehabilitation centres for disabled children. NGOs are also key participants in maintaining democracy in Kyrgyzstan and preserving fundamental human rights as the country's development priorities. A direct indicator of the overall level of respect for human rights in the country is the freedom of action of public institutions.

The state has occupied a detached position in relation to NGOs for a long time, and only since the early 2000s has a partnership between public authorities and NGOs begun to form.⁴ CSOs note the dual position of local government. On the one hand, local authorities have limited local budgets and are unable to solve all the social and infrastructure problems on their own. However, the authorities see CSOs as "investors" and invite CSOs only for the sake of formality, which does not provide real participation that leads to concrete changes in their political direction. On the other hand, reacting to the activities of human rights organisations, the government recently took the initiative to restrict CSOs activities. CSO leaders have called for changes in public policy, to move from suspicion to constructive dialogue and active support of the non-profit sector.

It should be noted that international donors have an impact on activities. International donors represent 68% of all the financial resources of NGOs in the country.⁵ Representatives of non-governmental sector have pointed out that the requirements set by donors as regards internal financial and organisational policies and procedures have increased, but institutional support has decreased significantly. Many small NGOs without internal strategic plans, developed financial policies and procedures, or streamlined financial and organisational management systems have thus been deprived of access to finance. This leads to disappointment, rumours and speculation about corruption schemes, and too close relations between a few large NGOs and donors. This affects the overall image and credibility of the NGO sector. To counteract these rumours, donors should provide clearer information about grant recipients, along with strict monitoring of implementation of projects and use of their funds.

Several large-scale events in Kyrgyzstan have also led to changes in people's thinking and a strategic reorientation of the activities of NGO sector, for example, the change of government in 2005 and 2010 through revolution and ethnic clashes in the south in June 2010. This was a time when the country was especially in need of joint action by the government and CSOs so as to form a bridge between the government and public. For example, in 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan an informal network, the Regional Humanitarian Forum (RHF), was formed. Its main objective was to create a unified platform for communication between partners in the humanitarian community and to coordinate their activities.

Centre Interbilim provided the initiative to create RHF and so it was necessary to take the leadership into our hands. My role was to coordinate an informal network on a voluntary basis, as immediately finding donors to support the network was not easily achieved. To avoid duplication of activities, all the NGO networks were divided into clusters: legal aid, humanitarian assistance, psychosocial assistance, internal migration and refugees, conflict prevention, and so on, linked by the Centre Interbilim. I organised regular meetings with the cluster groups to summarise weekly work and the development of further steps. My responsibilities included the implementation of

⁴ Shishkaraeva E (2006). "Review of the history of establishment and development of the NGO sector in the Kyrgyz Republic", Association of Civil Society Support Centres, Bishkek (ACSSC).

⁵ 'The state and prospects of development of the NGO sector in Kyrgyzstan', Association of Civil Society Support Centres, Bishkek (ACSSC), 2013

HAP standards (humanitarian accountability standards) and writing reports on the work done by RHF. I was able to develop a partnership with the local authorities, especially in the joint provision of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. When the acute phase of the conflict had passed, RHF began to focus on further actions to create trust between citizens of different nationalities. Today the inhabitants of southern Kyrgyzstan are not in need of humanitarian assistance. However, RHF did not shut down. Network members, after discussing their further steps, concluded that they should actively respond to the challenges of sustainable development around the country. This emphasises the flexibility of organisations, which is very important for successful development.

I would like to highlight an example of how rash actions by the government can lead to changes in NGOs' activities. In 1971 a general plan of Osh city, the southern capital of Kyrgyzstan, was approved. But no one could predict the rapid processes of urbanisation, and due to the increase of urban population, the need of expand roads and build new ones arose. As a consequence, in 2012-13 the local government initiated a campaign of confiscation and demolition of 55 ethnic minority households, over 400 people. Kyrgyzstan had not seen such cases before and NGOs did not have experience in dealing with such a problem. With the help of lawyers, Centre Interbilim represented and protected the interests of homeowners, lobbying for fair compensation for houses to be demolished.

Where there are human rights violations by municipal and state authorities, the population appeals for help and protection to CSOs, as they are confident they can receive real practical assistance in the form of legal advice, support and a detailed explanation of the relevant existing legislation. It is exactly in these situations that CSOs are in demand and need.

The legal framework in the country plays a key role in affecting the work of the NGO sector. The activities of many NGOs were threatened when in 2015, a Member of Parliament introduced an initiative to adopt a law on "foreign agents". According to this bill, all CSOs funded by international donors were to be viewed as foreign agents and had to be registered as such. This bill contained discriminatory provisions contrary to basic democratic principles. For example, the Ministry of Justice could suspend or end any NGO activity at its own discretion. CSOs' independence and especially NGOs protecting human rights were under threat. Thankfully, a large-scale campaign against the bill successfully defeated it and to remove the label of "foreign agents".

An active civil society is able to protect and promote the public interest, to influence and change public policy, and promote the principles of a democratic state, where every citizen has access to participation in decision-making processes. The more active the work of civil society, the more accountable and transparent activities of the state will be and people will revive their confidence in the government. As noted by Herbert Wells, English writer and publicist, "there is no intelligence where there is no need of change".



Consultants for Change workshop, Kyrgyzstan 2017

TAKING A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

*INTRAC advised the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Kyrgyzstan, managed by Carlbro, from 2002 to 2008, one of INTRAC's longest running consultancies in the country and a project that we have written about in previous publications.⁶ Here, **Nazgul Zakiriaeva**, an independent gender expert and women's movement activist, considers the ongoing impact of this initiative, reflecting on the participatory methods used and the enduring lessons. Nazgul was employed as a community worker in the Carlbro project, working closely with Chris Wardle and Anara Choitonbaeva, and later worked as an administrator and community development expert in INTRAC's Bishkek office. Nazgul continued to be active in the network of drinking water unions after Carlbro and this article was written with one of the leaders of the community water sector in Kyrgyzstan, **Imash Azarbayev**.*

The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (RWSSP) was implemented in Kyrgyzstan from 2002 to 2008 with financial support from the World Bank and DFID. The project covered more than 200 villages with approximately 350,000 people. Its main goal was the construction or rehabilitation of rural water supply systems and provision of clean drinking water.

Unlike many large infrastructure projects, this project used a community participatory approach. Local communities were involved at all stages of project implementation, from the monetary/labour contribution and planning the water supply system to creating an organisation to operate, maintain and manage the system. More than 200 community drinking water users unions (CDWUUs) were created, which assumed responsibility for the future rural drinking water supply. In turn, INTRAC was responsible for the community development component and was engaged in strengthening the capacity of not only the local communities, but also the employees involved.

We, the staff and participants of this project, recall these years with great enthusiasm, because each of us had very positive impressions at the time. All my colleagues were from the NGO sector, and were professionals in their field; they were "Leaders" with a capital L. We were a large team responsible for the involvement of the local population. "Mobilisation of communities" for us meant not only residents' engagement in the project implementation, but strengthening their capacity for sustainable livelihoods. We were called "mobilisers" – community development specialists – and were supported by external international consultants, including INTRAC consultant Chris Wardle. From our first meeting, Chris impressed us with his simplicity and understanding of community related issues. He was very easy to communicate with, as at home he was an "ordinary farmer" just like most of us. Therefore, he better than anyone else understood the situation and local needs, and his experience and knowledge helped us improve our efforts.

One can remember many community leaders, one of whom should be specifically mentioned. He was elected as a CDWUU leader when his village was on the verge of exclusion from the project. Under the project's terms, the population should have made a monetary contribution. However, after several months, the residents has failed to collect the required amount and it was only after election of the new CDWUU chairman that the residents mobilised and provided the contribution.

⁶ See Chris Wardle and Nazgul Zakiriaeva, '[Ten years on: reflections from a self-funded post-closure evaluation in Kyrgyzstan](#)', ONTRAC No. 61, January 2016, INTRAC.

Imash Azarbayev, the CDWUU leader of Chyrak village in the Issyk-Kul region, was awarded a prestigious national prize called “Precedent” in 2018 for activities that set an example for others to follow. He recalled that:

“Sometimes people... said that we are not able to collect monetary contribution, as we had many poor people. Gradually, I understood why people collected money reluctantly. It turned out that many residents did not believe in the success of the project and did not trust the authorities. Nevertheless, we managed to collect [the] necessary amount within one month and at the end of the year a tender was announced to select a sub-contractor.”



Women in Kyrgyzstan collecting water from a well

“Indeed, residents of many villages could not imagine ... that the project would be implemented and would have visible results. After all, this project was one of the largest in the history of Kyrgyzstan at that time, and mobilising the population for monetary and labour contributions was one of the most difficult tasks, because all actions and efforts made by the government and various donors had unfortunately been unsuccessful before, and this caused a lot of distrust among the population. It was necessary for the project not only to be implemented, but gain trust and make ordinary residents’ hopes come true. INTRAC as a ‘community development consultant’ managed to develop, adapt and improve methods, approaches and tools in a timely way, ensuring maximum involvement ... of the local community at all stages of project implementation, as a result of which the trusting relationships between residents and stakeholders revived and enhanced. As a result of close work with the local communities, the project gained real outcomes: the population contributed cash and labour ... residents continuously monitored the construction and upon project completion assumed full responsibility for the maintenance, operation and management of the water supply system.”

WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT WERE OUR EXPECTATIONS?

Now, ten years later, residents in our 200 villages have access to clean drinking water: there is water not only in the yard, but also inside the house, and both hot and cold water. Households have now a shower and a washing machine, and water meters have been installed. Rural children no longer fetch water from rivers, and women have more time for other needs. Hot meals are organised in many schools where there is clean water.

Gradually, the CDWUUs in the villages realised that as owners of the water system they could not be fully sustainable on their own, and therefore they began to unite in networks. Having united in the CDWUUs Network, they now lobby the authorities for their rights, can present their activities in various programmes, and also help each other to address internal issues. Practice has shown that in water-related issues the voice of the CDWUUs Network is more significant than that of a single CDWUU. According to Imash, now the chairperson of the CDWUUs Network in the Jetty-Oguz district of Issyk-Kul region, “they take into account our opinion and recognise us”.

However, not all the 200 CDWUUs created survived and are sustainable. Some newly constructed/rehabilitated water supply systems already have problems: they are not properly maintained, get insufficient funds for maintenance and there is indifference both from the authorities and residents. Unfortunately, over time, such examples may increase if the state does not pay enough attention to the drinking water supply sector. It is indifference from the authorities that leads to irresponsibility of the residents. The communities (CDWUUs) survive on their own, they have neither support for sustainable development, nor privileges or loans; CDWUUs are considered just like any other ordinary taxpayer. CDWUUs leaders state that:

“We are concerned that there is no support from the business sector either; it is sad that businesses in Kyrgyzstan haven’t made any large-scale investment in water resources so far. Although we know that many businessmen in the country promote eco-business ideas, there is no meaningful water-related activity at the national level, as in for example, in many countries like Germany and France. Even Kumtor [one of the largest mining companies in Kyrgyzstan] only occasionally allocates funds [to improve] the water systems in certain villages.”

According to Imash:

“The state should carry out large-scale work to create conditions for CDWUUs’ sustainability. It is necessary to systematically strengthen the capacity of the employees, as well as to work to increase significance of water-related topics. Long-term and sustainable results can be gained only through responsible attitudes of the residents; it means that each time when promoting an idea we can only rely on the engagement and participation of the local communities.”

INTRAC’s participatory approach was responsible for the successes in setting up CDWUUs in the villages. Our community development methodology was taken up by the Community Development and Investment Agency (ARIS) in a variety of infrastructure projects, and by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in its programme for rehabilitation of urban water supply systems. Meetings held at street level with representatives of households, and village general meetings – all the activities developed in the INTRAC project have repeatedly proved themselves as a way of ensuring maximum transparency and responsibility and trust.

Box 1 SEVEN LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE RWSSP

Chris Wardle, who was an INTRAC Associate for many years until he retired, offers his reflections on the important lessons that emerged from the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project:

1. Strong Commitment to a Community Participatory Approach (CPA)

A strong commitment to CPA was essential to successfully create Community Managed Water Systems. Involving the village in all stages of creating their Community Managed Water System helped to create a sense of ownership and builds the skills to operate and maintain it.

2. Importance of Using a Local Team to Implement CPA

The Project recruited a team of 20 Kyrgyz community mobilisers with experience in CPA. Most were from rural areas and were therefore accepted by the villages chosen to participate in the Project.

3. Involving the Whole Village, and especially Women in the Process

It was vital to mobilize the whole village in the process of creating Community Managed Water Systems. This included the elders, the young and especially the women. They, after all, are the ones most directly affected by the lack of clean drinking water.

4. Creating Strong Rural Public Drinking Water Users Associations (RPDWUA) to Operate and Manage the Water System

A strong RPDWUA was essential to ensure the Water System was properly operated and maintained. It needed motivated and experienced staff. The Chairperson was key. Women should be encouraged to be part of it.

5. Need to Build the Capacity of the RPDWUAs

Initially, many RPDWUAs lacked the full range of skills they needed to manage their Water Systems. The most common gaps were organizational, bookkeeping financial skills. They required ongoing capacity building in these areas for a year or more after completion of the Water System.

6. Be Financially Viable

To be sustainable, RPDWUAs needed to be financially viable. This was not easy as villagers never paid for water during the Soviet era. The RPDWUA needed to agree sensible rates with households and have an effective payment collection system. Other sources of income were needed e.g. from cultivating a field and selling its produce.

7. Ongoing Support to the RPDWUA's and Promotion of Community Managed Water Systems in Rural Villages

Governments should support the RPDWUA's and their Networks in practical ways such as ensuring local government pays water rates for village institutions (school, etc.), and making resources available to continue to strengthen the RPDWUAs and enable them to further develop and extend their Water Systems. Governments should also promote the use of CPA to create more CMWS. This is a practical and cost effective way to provide clean drinking water in rural areas.

REFLECTIONS FROM ASTP GRADUATES 2012-2015

In 2001 Anne Garbutt and the late Peter Oakley visited Central Asia to introduce Peter to the INTRAC programme. During this visit they observed that many of the newly established civil society organisations had limited analytical skills and the idea of developing an analytical skills training programme was born over a coffee in a Kyrgyz restaurant. Sadly, Peter passed away in Indonesia the week after returning from Central Asia. However, the idea of developing an innovative research programme that was aimed at helping local CSO staff to develop their analytical skills went ahead.

David Marsden and Janice Giffen led the design and in late 2003 the first analytical skills training programme was delivered by Anne, Simon Heap and Janice. The modules were designed to present a theoretical overview relating to conducting research, and to help participants identify a manageable research project tailored to their own projects or areas of interest. With continuing provision of relevant theories or approaches to conducting research, participants were supported in carrying out their research between the modules of the programme. The final module consisted of presentations by participants to other course members and invited local politicians and media representatives.

The following reflections from much more recent ASTP graduates are a tribute to Peter's first and only visit to Central Asia.

"My organisation was created in 2009, and until 2012 we only had three mini projects. After the ASTP training, and particularly after completing the research, I gained self-confidence. We found partners. Now the organisation has 10 projects, of which three are research projects.

One of the very important things we got from the training was communication skills. We began to communicate more with the general public, and during one of these conversations it was revealed that many elderly women are still full of strength and energy and would like to make a substantive contribution to the good of society. That's how the 'Babushkas University' was created, and today it is successfully reducing conflict and strengthening families, particularly young families.

Completing the ASTP training, our six-person team acquired important knowledge. We were taught communication skills and conducted a questionnaire with another 20 volunteers from our organisation. Now, I think, we have enough capacity to conduct good research."

(Roziya, Khodjent)

"Involvement in the ASTP project gave a lot in terms of raising knowledge levels and broadening outlook on topics which we previously simply did not think about. After taking part in the Programme my organisation became more serious about analytical work. So when we were preparing a new training programme we decided to investigate enhancing its effectiveness by identifying those who were most in need of it and who could use it most effectively. Studies have shown that the bulk of those interested in the programme are the least mobile. Therefore, we came up with the idea of a touring course, which we had not done previously. I hope we can analyse the impact of this innovation."

(Muzafar, Khodjand)



Charles Buxton and Rachel Hayman at the 2015 ASTP final conference in Osh

"It was the first time I had been to this sort of training. The research tools and analytical skills we acquired helped us to write better quality analysis in our organisation at the end of the project. Analytical skills helped to make the organisation's profile more interesting. Also, four new projects were written and submitted from the organisation with an analytical base. The involvement in the programme of state officials played a significant role. This, along with the joint work on the chosen studies helped to create a more productive and close working relationship both with state structures and with staff of other NGOs in the oblast."

(Rafoat, Khodjand)

"ASTP gave use the chance to develop new areas of cooperation for the NGO. For example, we cultivated good relations with academia, and developed mentorship capacity. Many ASTP participants were afraid to conduct research. We had to teach them self-reliance. There were difficulties connected to the limited time to conduct research (2-3 months), personnel (2-3 people) and finances. However, we did all we could so the ASTPers could start independently putting together reports."

(Chinara, Osh)

"We acquired our skills on conducting research about mechanisms to ensure transparency in allocation of social housing. It is not limited to this. Research was conducted into the problems of ethnic Kyrgyz immigrants (kayrilmans). They had limited access to social services, did not receive pensions or benefits, and did not have documents. They were given consultative assistance. In total 375 people received kayrilmans status, 45 families receive child benefits, and six people pensions. It is planned to lobby for simplification of the list of documents needed to receive kayrilmans status and citizenship."

(Islambek, Kanybek, Kanykey, Jalalabad)

"The Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth of the Kyrgyz Republic has established youth centres. The most active and successful centres are those whose staff members have gone through INTRAC training. For example, a project was put together based on analysis of the youth environment in Uch Korgon. A sports hall was equipped, and balls, mats and other equipment purchased. Now fights among older pupils no longer take place, and attendance at classes has improved.

To give another example: in the remote village of Toskol there is no school, and 25-30 children study in one house. We helped them receive desks, new textbooks and learning materials."

(Mayrambek, Jalalabad)



Tajik participants and trainer in 2012-13

"I came to the NGO sector from business, and I had no idea about NGOs. Thanks to the well-designed ASTP training programme and its interesting training methods, I began to understand the basics of NGO success. Now I work in a consulting company, conducting interviews and focus groups. I introduced a research component, external evaluation, monitoring and evaluation and so on to my NGO work. That allowed me to improve the outputs of our work. The most important thing is that we started to talk with the authorities."

(Emma, Osh)

"The research has given additional impetus to the implementation of international organisations' projects. For example, as a result of various studies, UNDP and other donors began funding a project to provide clean drinking water to Uzgen town."

(Mira, Osh)

"The most important thing is that people have begun to think from different perspectives and to set down their thoughts on paper."

(Rasul, Osh)

"Our organisation works on conflict issues, and I myself am a mediator. This is the first time I've participated in this sort of training event. The skills we received on conducting analysis and research tools are very useful for our organisation's work. Participation of people from the Kyrgyz Republic in the training and, later, in the research was useful, particularly after the results of the analysis had been received, conclusions made and recommendations developed. Now our organisation is introducing a UNDP project in a border district, and I will conduct some research as part of this project. I feel confident and think that I can use the knowledge and skills I have acquired. I think this project is useful, but the number of trainees was very small in my opinion."

(Munir, Khodjand)

"I worked as a financier, but after being involved in the ASTP programme I started working as an assistant, and conducted a survey. Then I learned to develop questionnaires and conduct interviews myself. I learned to communicate better with people and find common ground, and to organise meetings. Now we are already working on a large project, which we felt brave enough to take on only thanks the research skills obtained through the Programme."

(Gulnora, Khodjand)



Kyrgyzstan participants and trainer in 2013-14

CIVIL SOCIETY IN CENTRAL ASIA TODAY

Charles Buxton presents an overview of issues facing civil society in Central Asia today, offering a background to INTRAC's past, present and future work.

In recent years most of INTRAC's work has focused on three out of five countries of Central Asia where the environment for civil society support is more favourable: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. By contrast, in the other two countries – Uzbekistan (where INTRAC had an office from 2002-2005) and Turkmenistan – civil initiatives have been very restricted since around 2005.

This introductory article to this special bulletin, adapted from a contribution to the University of Central Asia Civil Society Initiative in August 2018, demonstrates how different the process of institutional development is even in the three countries of the region where NGOs play an important role. It shows pluses and minuses in each country, plus some common factors. Civil society development in the region has diverged significantly along national paths, driven both by political events and economic opportunities or restrictions.

In no case can we say that 'the job has been done' – rather that INTRAC has contributed to key changes and is ready to continue to support civil society in whatever way it can.

UNEVEN CONDITIONS FOR THE GROWTH OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Even in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, there are major variations in the external environment for civil society. Coming from a similar legislative base in the perestroika period, with quite a similar set of laws passed on public associations in the 1990s, the three countries have moved at different rates to recognise civil society and involve CSOs in dialogue, decision-making or implementation of government programmes.

In Kazakhstan, high oil and gas revenues throughout the 2000s helped provide a base for government support to civil society. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan's economic development was much patchier and more affected by political instability. Tajikistan began its transition to the market economy almost 10 years late, due to civil war, infrastructure destruction and loss of life. While CSOs in all three countries enjoyed major support from international donors in the first 15 years after independence, since then donor funding in Kazakhstan has been cut, while remaining at a relatively high level in poorer Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, problems caused by lack of adequate public sector budgets – plus political instability and security factors – have hampered policy-making and government support for civil society in those two countries.

LEGISLATION USED TO ENABLE OR CONTROL

CSOs are highly vulnerable to legislation and associated rules and regulations directly or indirectly affecting their work. At one end of the spectrum, in Kyrgyzstan the framework for civil society has been relatively favourable. The country's legislation includes freedom of association, freedom of speech and a wide range of possibilities for CSOs to engage with the government in decision-making processes. Freedom of association is well observed in Kyrgyzstan and there are few restrictions on how CSOs operate. By contrast, in Tajikistan regulations and procedures adopted in recent years tend to control and restrict rather than enable civil society. Added to which, Tajikistan does not formally recognise civil society in its Constitution and strategic documents in the same way as the other two countries.

Even in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, there are concerns about the legislative environment, documented in detail by expert agencies like the International Centre for Not-For-Profit Law (ICNL). Increasingly, we see pressures to enforce more detailed reporting by CSOs (both financial and activity reports). Some of these are associated with attempts to label CSOs as "foreign agents", while others are demanded by the international security agenda related to anti-money

laundering and countering terrorism. Although the draft law on foreign agents in Kyrgyzstan was eventually voted down in parliament, there is still the risk of attempts to introduce new regulations that would be onerous for civil society.

IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

For the future sustainability and impact of CSOs, advances in public policy and institution building are vital. Here the unbroken rule of President Nazarbaev in Kazakhstan has provided the most stable conditions for new institutional frameworks for civil society. President Nazarbaev began this process in 2002, when discussion papers defining the concept of civil society were published. The next year saw the launch of a government-sponsored Civic Forum that has met every two years since, providing an opportunity, albeit official, for CSOs to contribute to national policy and strategy planning. In 2005 the government launched the “social orders” system, with state social services contracted from NGOs. Alongside the Internal Affairs Ministry, a national Citizens Alliance came into being, registered as a public association but aligned with government, with regional branches that began to offer NGO resource facilities alongside those that had long been provided in US-funded civil society support centres coordinated by ARGO in Almaty.

Social order contracts up to a year in length were awarded each year from 2005 onwards. While the contracting system had many weaknesses in terms of prioritisation of topics for financing, and procedures for awarding and monitoring contracts, pressure from NGOs over the next 10 years gradually saw improvements and an increase in the money routed through social orders. In 2014, the government agreed to award two to three-year grants to NGOs with a good record of work.

By contrast, international agencies measuring progress towards democracy (USAID, Freedom House, etc.) regularly point to weaknesses in democratic processes in Kazakhstan, contrasting it with the freer and more open political situation in Kyrgyzstan. Here there is a paradox. Undoubtedly there has been progress in Kyrgyzstan towards, for example, a more open multi-party system with more power for parliament. However, the 2005 and 2010 revolutions, while pushing forward the agenda for political transformation, also tended to disrupt the arrangements for civil society consultation set up by the previous regimes. CSOs were as divided as anyone else in support of or opposition to the various political leaders and regimes that emerged and fell. There is currently no national association of CSOs in Kyrgyzstan representing views across the sector. Influential democracy NGOs like the Association of Civil Society Support Centres and the Coalition for Democracy and Human Rights have organised national Civic Forums at critical moments, but these have led neither to the creation of a permanent civil society association nor to the development of the kind of NGO-government liaison bodies seen in Kazakhstan.

In Tajikistan, governments have paid more attention to relations with Islamic associations than to developing secular civil society. This is one result of the 1992-97 civil war where Islamic forces played an important role, and the country’s proximity to war-torn Afghanistan. However, issues around religion are now very important in all three countries, and in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the government agency responsible for liaison with civil society is the same one delegated to work with representatives of various religions.

Institutional development is closely linked with funding issues for civil society, where the perspectives for financial viability and access to diverse sources of funding are now quite limited across the whole region. Local philanthropy has been slow emerging, and is more visible in Kazakhstan because of the presence there of major national companies. One of the main sources of earned income for the population is labour migration, and hence some development agencies are actively searching for ways in which remittances from migrants in Russia, Turkey and South Korea could be used to fund local projects (e.g. village infrastructure or services).

DISTRUST OF NGOS’ “POLITICAL” ACTIVITIES

Across the region, there is a well-established pattern of negative discourse regarding the so-called political activities of CSOs. This reflects a level of public distrust of CSOs, but also the rise of populist politicians ready to accuse CSOs of inefficiency and the pursuance of a foreign agenda. To

counter these forces, a re-conceptualisation of civil society is required alongside intra- and cross-sectoral engagement to communicate a new vision of civil society. Here, as elsewhere, capacity building is important to help create a better understanding and use of communication channels to reach the public and government more effectively.

In recent years, the development of new “invited spaces” for civil society within government-sponsored consultative groups provides a route into acceptable political activities. Kyrgyzstan’s experiment with public councils in ministries and other national government agencies is a very positive step forward, promoted by President Otunbaeva after the 2010 events. In Kazakhstan, community/public councils were established at the national level and in the main cities in 2015, and while there is some scepticism about how much room civil society representatives will have to do useful work within these spaces, many activists are willing to try.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

The original five countries of INTRAC’s engagement in Central Asia vary considerably today in terms of their economic and political situations and how these contexts affect the needs and possibilities for civil society. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have seen significant economic development, but democracy and civil society are weak. Tajikistan fares poorly from an economic and political perspective, and presents a more challenging environment for civil society development than Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Despite these challenges, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan there are many opportunities for civil society development. First, civil society needs to make use of technological advances to pursue online forms of group activism more seriously. Second, to mitigate pressure from the state, civil society needs to work in coalitions and/or networks rather than individually. Third, a win-win strategy for civil society and their various stakeholders is to engage more actively with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals 2030 via the priorities set out in each country’s national development strategy. Fourth, CSOs should enhance reliance on domestic sources of funding through development of paid services and philanthropy.



Kyrgyzstan, 2017

CURRENT CSO SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES IN KAZAKHSTAN

Konstantin Kovtunets picks up on a critical theme highlighted in the previous article. He focuses on CSOs in Kazakhstan and the consequences of a changing and challenging funding environment for CSOs. Konstantin is a civil society and social policy expert based in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and is an INTRAC Associate. He spent 18 months with INTRAC as Knowledge Management Advisor (2007-2009), including coordination of INTRAC's research skills programme for local NGOs in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

While CSOs in Kazakhstan enjoyed major training and funding support from international donors in the first 15 years after independence, donor programmes were sharply cut in early 2000s when the country experienced economic growth due to high oil and gas revenues and moved to middle-income status according to World Bank criteria in 2005. As a result, most international donors ended their programmes and moved to less-developed countries. By that time, over 14,000 CSOs engaging many well-trained innovative change agents were fighting poverty, supporting and defending rights of various deprived groups in Kazakhstan.

In 2003 the Kazakhstan government started to substitute international aid by introducing a social procurement mechanism allocating financing to CSO projects. Social procurement was welcomed by the third sector at that time as a progressive innovation and today allocates over 10 billion KZT (approximately US\$26 million) a year at national and local levels. However, it proved to be a corrupt and socially inefficient tool, leading to poor social impact and nurturing loyal government-organised NGOs that consumed funding rather than supporting genuine social change.

State regulations adopted in recent years also tend to control and restrict rather than enable civil society development and funding. Social procurement was originally expected to be a social impact mechanism supporting CSO projects filling in policy gaps, but in the absence of public supervision it proved to be just a tool of control over CSOs for authorities and source of easy revenue for quasi-CSOs. As in other government procurement spheres, within the social procurement scheme the least amount requested remains the main criteria for selecting a CSO project, and the main criteria for impact assessment is the timely spending of the allocated amount, ignoring any social efficiency. No findings of the programme evaluation or the social impact of these fund allocations are currently available for CSO leaders.

CSO surveys in 2017-2018 showed that government financing to CSOs is uncoordinated between authorities at the local and central levels. Since 2015, government control over CSO's activities and their international funding has tended to increase, decreasing the remaining international sources of funding for CSO projects. The drastic withdrawal of international donors and active promotion of the social procurement scheme active made government sources the predominant funding for CSOs during the last three to five years, creating a huge quasi-CSO sector and excluding many genuine CSOs and limiting their access to alternative funding.

At the same time there are some achievements of the government support to CSOs which cannot be ignored. Since 2003 regular Civic Forums have been conducted as central dialogue platforms bringing together officials and CSO leaders, and their recommendations forwarded to the relevant authorities for consideration. Social procurement allocations by the central authorities have also decreased, with such funding by local authorities increasing, so in 2016-2017 there were 200 regional and 262 municipal programmes which allocated social procurement funds to CSOs, making such funding more tailored to local needs. In 2015 the government also introduced simpler and more transparent government forms of CSO project support – CSO grants and premiums which provided genuine CSOs with extra project support opportunities. Some of these

positive changes also became possible due to the lasting global and national economic crisis raising issues of social impact, and government interest in investing the limited resources available in initiatives demonstrating financial sustainability and more effectively alleviating acute social problems.

Many researchers conclude that out of all Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan CSOs today have the least opportunities for international funding and support. At the same time, the activities of the remaining international donors often leave much to be desired. Many international agencies do not have sufficient information on what is going on in the regions, where people's needs differ from Almaty or Astana where the majority of agencies are based. Donors are often governed by their own priorities in their work, not adjusting to local conditions and requirements; for example, for decades supporting predominantly political human rights dimension, whereas in some regions social, economic, environmental or cultural rights are more relevant. Claims of poor transparency, outdated website information or poor coordination with other donors and government can also be applied to international missions.

Therefore, local needs assessments, CSO project funding and social impact measurements by national and international donors demand serious review. We can also conclude that the outcomes of the CSO sector as a whole are not as efficient as they could be due to the reasons outlined above.

Despite the current development challenges, to improve viability and effectiveness CSOs should become more pro-active in managing partnerships with government and international agencies and review their sustainability strategies, diversifying funding sources mainly at the local level and employ a social enterprise model to develop paid services, innovation and organisational efficiency. In turn, international and government agencies can facilitate CSO sustainability and social enterprise development through training, small incentive funding and mentorship.



Kyrgyzstan, 2017

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE - MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

Medet Tiulegenov is assistant professor in the Department of International and Comparative Politics at the American University of Central Asia, Bishkek. **Anara Moldosheva** is an independent gender expert and women’s movement activist. Along with **Charles Buxton**, here they utilise research by INTRAC founder Alan Fowler and Kees Biekaart from the Institute of Social Studies⁷ to describe how civic-driven initiatives can contribute to complex development relationships in Kyrgyzstan. Once again, the picture is full of contradictions and challenges. However, this is now on the agenda for the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and in particular SDG17.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) are an important theme in the new Sustainable Development Goals and a priority area for INTRAC in its work to support civil society’s input to development. In 2015, INTRAC’s Central Asia office carried out a study of four civic-led MSIs in Kyrgyzstan, commissioned by the CSO Task Team for Aid Effectiveness at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Netherlands. These were:

1. SUN (Scaling up Nutrition) Kyrgyzstan – a UN-sponsored programme with a national platform for initiatives in nutrition and food security.
2. Regional Humanitarian Forum – a civic-led association created in Osh in 2010 after political and ethnic conflict to work on humanitarian, reconstruction and rights issues.
3. Public councils at ministry level – an initiative by President Roza Otunbaeva after the 2010 events to open up government to civil society oversight.
4. The national debate about a new draft law describing foreign-funded NGOs as “foreign agents”.

In the initial phase of research, considerable attention was given to the external environment for MSIs, resulting in the following table.

Enabling Factors for effective MSI	Disenabling Factors against effectiveness
Active civil society	Poor capacity of civil servants and municipal and local authorities
Need for all sectors to unite after the violent events of 2010	Continuing economic problems and state budget deficits
Willingness of the state to cooperate with civil society (e.g. the law on public councils)	Business structures not interested to participate in joint platforms unless there are direct incentives for them
New parliamentary system keen to prove itself	Low interest of citizens. Increased competition from the “non-liberal” segment of civil society.
Strong NGO leaders and experts, some with technical skills in financial transparency and budget policy	Reduced donor resources to support civic initiatives
Availability of influential civic networks interested in promoting democratic institutions	Ignoring/sabotaging by public authorities of initiatives aimed at democratisation of governance (e.g. the draft law on foreign agents is widely perceived as an attempt to counter democratic reforms)

Table 2: Main Enabling and Disenabling Factors for MSI effectiveness in the four case studies

⁷ Buxton C., Moldosheva, A. and M. Tiulegenov (2016) ‘Kyrgyzstan Country Report’ in A. Fowler and K. Biekart, [Comparative Studies of Multi-stakeholder Initiatives Volume III: Country Comparison and Reports Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives and Contextual Conditions](#). Secretariat of the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, March 2016

The team used categories developed by ISS to define the purpose and character of MSIs. Previous country studies showed that MSIs could have one or more main purposes: 1) aiming at more effective service provision (national or local level); 2) setting new standards in governance or administration; 3) implementing institutional reforms (usually at national level); and 4) stimulating a political power shift from one social grouping to another (local or national level). First it was necessary to define the different stakeholders; then, interviews and focus groups were used to assess the quality and dynamics of relations between them. Another key issue for the team was the nature of facilitation carried out in these complex initiatives – who does it, how, and with what results?

This was an international effort, working alongside teams from Costa Rica, Indonesia and Kenya.

ANALYSIS – PERFORMANCE OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES IN OUR CASE STUDIES

At the end of the research, the INTRAC team attempted to answer four “higher order questions” set by ISS in relation to the case studies.

Do MSI approaches work? What are the main drivers to their functioning?

In two of the case studies MSIs can be said to have worked, and in two they were partially working.

In Osh, the Regional Humanitarian Forum successfully brought civic activists from different ethnic communities and a range of organisations together on several fronts. First, the violence of June 2010 was not repeated over the next five years. Second, CSOs successfully negotiated with international agencies and implemented crisis, humanitarian and reconstruction programmes (for refugees, recovery of documents, housing, education and other programmes). Third, the Forum played a vital role in its relationship with the city authorities – providing assurance both to international agencies and central government that there were not just checks on but also constructive engagement with Osh city hall. However, we can see clearly another side of this success. The Forum limited its own ambitions by not registering officially, not seeking donor funds in its own name, and not bringing other sectors into its membership. This is a very important lesson for those who would preserve civil society independence, flexibility and sovereignty.

The SUN initiative can also be presented as a success. The platform gained active participation from all sectors, it is generously funded by UN agencies, and on some health indicators (e.g. child mortality and stunting) Kyrgyzstan is making some progress. Whether this alliance can achieve the aim of attracting grassroots participation or developing a truly popular programme for nutrition is a different question – one that remains open. The Civic Alliance that operates within SUN includes many seasoned NGO activists but it is currently more expert-driven in character, and there is a possibility that a technocratic approach comes to predominate.



Improving rural electricity supplies, Kyrgyz Republic - Esen Turusbekov / DFID 2005

The development of public councils, by contrast, show partial success. Councils have been piloted in a large number of different ministries and in some areas government financial and procedural transparency has already been improved, for example, with better formats for communication of government budgets. It is important to note that Kyrgyzstan’s new parliamentary form of government was only introduced in 2010, that many people questioned the legitimacy of the new

government due to its coming to power by violence, and that the first set of deputies are only completing their term under the new rules in October 2015. The new systems need time to prove themselves. The public councils were a “second line of attack” on the old system introduced by President Otunbaeva. Indirectly they reduce the power of the new parliamentary system by introducing checks on the line ministries that carry out government policies – and they challenged the hold that the political parties in the government coalition wanted to establish on “their” ministries. This means that it is hard to judge the long-term impact of this MSI.

The foreign agents debate was still ongoing at the time the MSI report was written. Civil society groups maintained their opposition to the law and a national Civic Forum held during the campaign helped to consolidate their opposition, avoiding possible disunity. This represents a partial victory. However, CSOs did not engage with other groups that might have opposed the law (e.g. religious associations with foreign donors) and it was hard to see real signs of dialogue with those promoting the law or concrete steps to institutionalise dialogue and collaboration with government that might allay the latter’s fear of foreign influences. Despite this, deputies finally voted down the new law in Parliament in early 2016.

What collaborative competencies are needed to make MSIs work?

Here the team made some general conclusions. First, our analysis showed the importance of well-established collaborative mechanisms (e.g. civil society-government liaison channels). Second, the need for even-handed and competent representation of different interests was strongly shown by the public councils. Here we saw clearly the challenge of how achieve both citizens’ (popular) and experts’ contribution to the work of government (recognising that these two inputs might be slightly contradictory). Communication challenges were also emphasised in the public councils study, since they are complicated structures and councils deal with highly technical and often confidential information.

In SUN – being a more elaborate MSI – a lot of the process and management issues were already being considered by the facilitators and main players, in particular collaborative structures and effective communications. In the Regional Humanitarian Forum, by contrast, systems are not the main focus, but rather commitment, a positive attitude and respect for different elements in the community.

What actors orchestrate and sustain these collaborations?

Our studies showed some good examples of government moderation of MSI activities: for example, a Deputy Minister of Health ably led the SUN initiative in its first phase. Another impressive interviewee was the State Secretary in the Ministry of Finance who liaises in a constructive and professional way with the new Public Council in that ministry. But in general these officials were reacting to a situation where multi-stakeholder work has become incumbent on them. Individually they may be in favour of the new initiatives, but the government machinery as a whole is struggling to cope. Indeed, it is hard for a government beset by political and economic problems to orchestrate complex activities with outside bodies.

The SUN case study showed that international agencies have the vision, experience and resources to coordinate this kind of work. Their problem is how to achieve government or civic ownership of the MSIs. In the foreign agents case, by contrast, the international agencies “pulling the strings” (embassies, governments, presidents) were almost all operating “off-stage”. One important exception was the then-UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, who came out against the foreign agents law during his visit to Kyrgyzstan on the anniversary of the Osh events in June 2015.

The four cases showed the ability of civil society activists to get involved with new initiatives and sustain their commitment to them over an extended period of time. However, they remain subordinate to international agencies in MSIs like SUN and can probably only retain control where they lie outside the system (like the Regional Humanitarian Forum). In the public councils we observed a very complex game where it was unclear whether civic activists will give away more than they gain. We can assume that government will not lose the game because they can make it

a no-win situation for civil society at any time, since bodies created at the initiative of the state strongly depend on the state's backing. Here international agencies can only play a backseat role.

How do citizens navigate and hold accountable the authority exercised over them from various sites and in multiple ways?

The four cases all show attempts to navigate and hold accountable the power exercised by government and international agencies, as shown in the sections above. The input of the business sector was almost invisible in our cases, and we conclude perhaps that the market economy is working in a chaotic, hidden, and unaccountable way. It is not visibly present at the negotiation table, and yet all the main actors hedge their bets about development, saying it depends on or has to be acceptable to the market economy.

We heard different opinions about how active citizens are, and the global statistics on social development in Kyrgyzstan are not hugely impressive. But these case studies showed an impressive set of attempts to work in a cross-sectoral way, for citizens and the general public. In all the cases, citizens' actions undertaken through CSOs rather than by individuals were more sustainable and effective.

The shape of the post-2015 development agenda was still being discussed when this report was written. However, MSIs have now become the focus of Sustainable Development Goal 17. The danger is that this could simply lead to the creation of complex and bureaucratic partnerships and an unnecessary proliferation of networks. Civil society will be split into small specialist or thematic sections and the tendency will be to work on donors' technical agendas. However, the SDGs will play an important role in development and the participation of civil society will remain crucial to this. Therefore, the attributes required by MSI facilitators and participants identified in the report will surely remain relevant. The agenda for some activists will remain a socio-political power shift from the rich to the poor, but in the absence of this institutional reform, the standard setting for different sectors, and service development, will remain areas where civil society will continue to be involved.



Kyrgyzstan, 2015

LIST OF MAIN DONORS AND CONTRACTORS FOR INTRAC CENTRAL ASIA PROGRAMME

INTRAC received support from, and worked with, numerous international funders, agencies and NGOs over the years. Here we list some of the key ones:

Aga Khan Development Network Kyrgyzstan, 2012-15

Bearr Trust UK, 2015, 2017

Biosafety Association of Central Asia and Caucasus, 2013

British Council Almaty, 2017-18

British Embassy Astana – Democracy & Human Rights Programme, 2011-14

British Embassy Bishkek – Conflict Pool, 2012-15

Caritas France, 2017

Central Eurasia Programme (Open Society Foundation), 2009-10

Christensen Fund Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, 2010

Christian Aid Tajikistan, 2013

Dan Church Aid Central Asia, 2013

Danish Democracy & Human Rights Programme Ukraine, Moldova & Belarus, 2013-14

Department for International Development (UK), 1997-2004

Dutch Interchurch Aid (ICCO), 2005-09, 2009-10

Dynamics Ltd Tajikistan, 2010

European Bank for Reconstruction & Development, 2014-15

Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kyrgyzstan & Tajikistan, 2010-18

FAKT Consultants Germany, 2015-16

GHK Consultants Brussels, 2013

Help Age International Kyrgyzstan, 2016-17

Helvetas Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, 2011, 2018

Institute of Social Studies The Hague, 2015-16

International Alert Tajikistan, 2014

Internews Central Asia, 2017

Nama Foundation Malaysia, 2016-17

Open Society Institute Budapest, 2011

Open Society Institute New York (SBS), 2014-18

Public Association Shyrak Kazakhstan (EU-NSA), 2010-11, 2014

Public Association Child Protection Centre Bishkek, 2015

Public Association IDEA Kyrgyzstan, 2017

Public Association Rural Advisory Services Jalalabad, Kyrgyzstan, 2017

Public Association National Mediation Centre Kyrgyzstan, 2017

Red Crescent National Society Kyrgyzstan, 2009

SOS Villages Kyrgyzstan, 2013

Swiss Red Cross Kyrgyzstan, 2011

UN Volunteers and UNDP, 1994

UNDP Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan & Georgia, 2014-17

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, 2012-14

World Bank Kyrgyzstan, 2018

Copyright © INTRAC 2019

First produced in 2019 in the UK by

INTRAC
Oxbridge Court
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1865 201851

Fax: +44 (0)1865 201852

Email: info@intrac.org

Website: www.intrac.org

Suggested citation: *INTRAC in Central Asia*.
Special Series Paper, May 2019. Oxford: INTRAC.



INTRAC is a company limited
by guarantee No.2663769,
Registered in England;
Registered Charity No.
1016676