

Praxis Paper 27

Research in Action: civil society working to improve governance in post-conflict Kyrgyzstan

Experiences from the Analytical Skills Training Programme 2011-12

Anara Moldosheva, Gulgaky Mamasalieva, and Charles Buxton

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INTRAC
International NGO Training and Research Centre



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Part 1: Description of the programme

1. Introduction

This Praxis Paper is based on the results of the Analytical Skills Training Programme (ASTP) conducted in Southern Kyrgyzstan from June 2011 to January 2012. The Programme was initiated by INTRAC Central Asia, involved two partner NGOs – the Public Association ‘Centre Interbilim’ in Osh and the Civil Society Support Center in Jalalabad – and funded by the British Embassy in Kazakhstan. A final conference presenting the findings of research projects organised during the programme was funded by the Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan.

The paper begins with a short history of ASTP in Central Asia, the post-conflict context in which it took place in 2011-12, and its participants. The main components and methodology of the programme are then described, including the training course, and also research studies carried out by participants and a variety of discussions organised to bring together actors from the civil society, government and business sectors in Osh and Jalalabad. Further sections give a more detailed analysis of: 1) how the programme coped with the unstable external environment, 2) how successful it was in enhancing the capacity of participants, and 3) how well it succeeded in improving civil society-state relations and local governance.

2. History of ASTP

ASTP is one of INTRAC’s most innovative and successful programmes in Central Asia. It was first run in 2002-04 in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, with a focus on strengthening local NGOs involved in international development programmes.¹ In 2008-09, a mixed group from the same three countries attended a slightly adapted and updated ASTP, focused on NGOs and self-help groups working for better access to education and health services. Practical work designing and writing a short research study was an integral part of the programme from the start. In 2011-12, ASTP’s focus changed significantly, to focus on government accountability and conflict prevention via the proper provision of services to marginalised and vulnerable groups in the local population.²

3. External context

Kyrgyzstan has experienced two revolutions in recent years. In March 2005, President Askar Akaev was ousted from power after a country-wide mobilisation to protest against corruption in the ruling elite. In April 2010, President Kurmanbek Bakiev suffered the same fate. Unlike in 2005 this was accompanied by serious violence, with 90 people shot dead in the capital Bishkek’s main square during an assault on the “White House” (the national parliament).

¹ See Sorgenfrei, M., and C. Buxton. 2006. “Praxis Note 22: Building Organisational Capacity through Analytical Skills Training in Central Asia.” Oxford: INTRAC. Available in English and Russian at: www.intrac.org/resources.php?action=resource&id=236

² The title of the project approved by the British Embassy Astana under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Conflict Pool was “Conflict prevention by increasing local government accountability in Southern Kyrgyzstan”. The project purpose was “to reduce the potential for conflict in Osh and Jalalabad by improving the accountability and responsiveness of government in ensuring basic rights and services for marginalised and vulnerable sections of the community.”

Two months later, interethnic violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz broke out in the country's second city of Osh and neighbouring Jalalabad. The violence resulted mainly from the political conflict between supporters of Bakiev and the new temporary government (headed by Rosa Otunbaeva), plus underlying social and ethnic tensions in a country with serious problems of increasing poverty and inequality.

The conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan included interethnic clashes, and destruction and damage to homes and businesses in which both communities suffered. A significant number of people simply disappeared. Tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbeks (citizens of Kyrgyzstan) were forced to flee over the nearby border to Uzbekistan. Government buildings suffered significant damage, alongside shops, market stalls, restaurants and other businesses. Whole neighbourhoods were burned down in the provincial centres of Osh and Jalalabad and violent clashes took place in outlying villages in the surrounding Fergana Valley.

The tragic loss of life, homes and jobs in June 2010 highlighted a large number of problems and weaknesses in the political system and overall economic situation in the region. One of the main reasons for political instability and conflict was the weak and inefficient government at both national and local level. In particular, the authorities had failed to manage cultural diversity, that is, there was a chronic shortage of mechanisms for democratic citizenship and participation of minorities; a lack of open space for dialogue between different groups; and few individuals or groups that could provide expertise or leadership in these areas.

In the second half of 2010, an urgent priority in the post-conflict situation was to gradually try to tackle these problems. But at a number of meetings and roundtables held in Osh and Jalalabad at this time, it was clear that people were unsure how to build peace or prevent a further conflict, and in particular what the responsibility of government was in these matters. It was to help meet this challenge that the Analytical Skills Training Programme was re-launched by INTRAC and its local NGO partners.

4. Participants

In May 2011, 25 participants for the programme were selected on a competitive basis from the oblasts (provinces) of Osh and Jalalabad.³ Two-thirds were staff in NGOs, with priority given to middle and senior managers-practitioners who had previous experience of research work or policy development to benefit local communities. And for the first time in ASTP, one-third was made up of representatives of the business community and local government. This reflected the programme's heightened stress on social partnership.

5. Main programme components

ASTP was a complex programme lasting approximately nine months. Its main components in 2011-12 were:

- Four three-day training workshops, held alternately in Osh and Jalalabad, in June, July, September and November 2011, with two main elements: 1) introduction to key themes

³ Plus one person from Batken oblast.

- such as governance, the role of civil society, diversity; 2) practical research skills and approaches. The workshops were led by a mixed team of international and local trainers
- Four Community of Practice events held immediately after the workshops
 - Seven applied research studies on themes around conflict prevention and good governance, carried out by the participants and discussed with local experts
 - A regional conference held in Osh in February 2012 with a wide range of participants from NGOs, international agencies and government bodies to hear the results of the seven studies and discuss issues related to them
 - Four local advocacy projects implemented in early 2012, based on the research findings.

6. Training content and methodology

The content of the four training modules was based around the concepts of democracy and good governance, as well as on promoting diversity and social partnership. Participants got the opportunity to improve their theoretical knowledge and practical skills in applied, participatory research, and to try them out.

The approach taken by the programme fits the concept of “action research” as understood by INTRAC. The approach is practical, participatory and served to collect information and views that could be useful in either advocacy work or in the improvement of projects and services being run by NGOs. The approach was experimental and open-ended, creating wider spaces for reflection. Civil society and local government representatives were encouraged to challenge the norms and assumptions that frame their practice, and thus set new priorities and strategies.⁴

7. Community of Practice

All four training modules were followed by a ‘Community of Practice’ meeting to discuss questions posed by participants with invited representatives of civil society, government and international organisations. The Community of Practice aimed to share approaches and methods of work, support joint action and build collective experience and knowledge.

Each Community of Practice was designed to reflect the content of the training module it was linked to and the stage of research at which the participants were at. Therefore, they supported the planning, implementation of the research studies and the promotion of their results. The Community of Practice became a key component of the training programme as well as a research method.

This approach enabled participants to get feedback on their research and further enhanced the interaction between practitioners, researchers and managers in the field, thus helping to increase the accountability of the researchers to the target groups and local authorities. They helped to give the studies a rounded, objective approach and acted as ‘validation meetings’.⁵

⁴ See Popplewell R., and R. Hayman. 2012. “Briefing Paper 32: Where, how, and why are Action Research approaches used by international development non-governmental organisations?.” Oxford: INTRAC. Available at: www.intrac.org/resources.php?action=resource&id=752

⁵ See Bucheli, B., and G. Romo. 2005. “Praxis Note 16, Communities of Practice: Lessons from Latin America.” Oxford: INTRAC. Available at www.intrac.org/resources.php?action=resource&id=184 COPs often establish an

Box: Training modules, Community of Practice (COP), and final conference

Module 1

- Introduction to the programme. Analysis of the post-conflict situation in Osh and Jalalabad. The roles and responsibilities of local authorities, business and civil society. Introduction to research methods. Decision on group research topics.

Community of Practice 1

- First feedback from international agencies and local civil society organisations on the proposed research topics. Identification of other useful reports and information.

Module 2

- Introduction of issues around gender, ethnic diversity and equality of access to services for vulnerable groups. Quantitative and qualitative research methods. Participation. Stakeholder analysis. Planning the data collection phase for the research groups.

Community of Practice 2

- Feedback from government and civil society experts on the data collection plans made by the research groups, discussion on the likely content of the studies.

Module 3

- Introduction to the key themes around accountability of local government, democracy and good governance. First discussion of the results of the studies, how to analyse them and to draft conclusions and recommendations. Identification of the main target groups for lobbying and advocacy.

Community of Practice 3

- Presentation of data collected and draft conclusions to local government experts in the various fields of study.

Module 4

- Presentation of research results and recommendations. Introduction to strategies for effective dissemination. Presentation skills (verbal, Powerpoint) and how to answer questions from an audience. Analysis and report writing skills.

Community of Practice 4

- Formal presentations of the research studies to a panel of experts from government, civil society and international agencies.

Final conference

- Distribution of final version of the full research studies (10-15 pages) and presentation and discussion within expert sessions. All participants from Community of Practices invited, plus other representatives of local government, international agencies and civil society.

8. Research projects

ASTP participants were recruited on the explicit understanding that they would be able to complete a short research study as part of the programme. During the first module they are invited to name a topic that they would like to study. As a result, the organisers gathered a list of over 20 possible study topics reflecting policy and action priorities in post-conflict Osh

IT platform to assisted shared use of resources. While this would undoubtedly have enhanced the programme, this is something for the future. In our project the priority was given to face to face dialogue and coalition building.

and Jalalabad. For the first time in INTRAC's running of ASTP, it was decided to form groups and carry out a limited number of joint studies.⁶

The topics of the research projects were chosen by participants and trainers together, in line with the programme's goals and key aspects of community development like access to basic services, fair economic development, and conflict resolution. The rationale was that work in this area would enhance community activity, assist poverty reduction and increase citizens' influence on decision-making at local level. The group approach brought together NGO and local government staff, organisations from urban and rural areas, and the two oblasts Osh and Jalalabad, in mixed research teams. It was hoped that this approach would help build local alliances and increase the spread, representativeness and impact of the studies.

The seven studies conducted by participants tackled real, current problems and produced practical recommendations on conflict-sensitivity and promoting diversity in local governance.

The seven research studies and the governance issues they addressed⁷	
Governance issue	Focus of research / Main research question
Basic conflict resolution systems in place and functioning / access to services	Compensation for damaged and looted businesses <i>How far did government compensation and benefits cover the losses of business that suffered damage in Osh and Jalalabad cities?</i>
	Compensation for people disabled during the 2010 riots <i>What were the possibilities and difficulties in access to state social assistance in tow locations in Osh and Jalalabad?</i>
	Documentation for forced migrants <i>What obstacles and problems do forced migrants face in gaining access to government status with the status of (ethnic Kyrgyz) kairalman?</i>
	Restoration of civic infrastructure destroyed in the riots <i>How far did the choice of construction projects reflect the population's needs?</i>
Government able to ensure basic services to most of the population	Provision of communal services: e.g. utilities, street lighting, waste disposal <i>What mechanisms will best ensure transparency and accountability in access to public utility services in rural areas?</i>
	Extra-curricular education for youth <i>What platforms exist in the City Administration of Osh and Jalalabad for supplementary education for youth?</i>
Government able to ensure fairness in justice	Reform of custody and court proceedings for juvenile justice <i>To what extent does legal practice in Osh reflect the standards and principles of juvenile justice?</i>

⁶ In previous training programmes, participants had carried out individual studies. In 2008-09, two participants were recruited from each NGO and chose a study reflecting the current work and priorities of their organisation.

⁷ See appendices for full titles and the names of group members.

Mentoring

A mentor was appointed to each group to support the research. There were four mentors, all from INTRAC and its partners – either trainers in the programme or experienced researchers. The participatory research projects were a kind of “action learning”. They had a learning or educational function as well as aiming to be objective, relevant and useful in post-conflict Kyrgyzstan. In general, the willingness of participants to review and challenge their own positions in assessing the situation became central to the process.

9. Final conference

Two months after the fourth training module, when the participants’ studies had been finalised, a conference, “Diversity in Local Self-Government”, was held in Osh State University with the official support of Osh City Administration to present the results. About 150 people attended, including most of the local experts who had earlier given advice during Community of Practice meetings.⁸ The conference opened with plenary contributions regarding national policy on local self-government and conflict prevention. In the second session, the audience split into groups to hear the results of the ASTP research studies plus commentary from other specialists in these fields. The results of the groups were brought back to a plenary discussion and a well-attended press conference.

The conference proved to be an excellent platform for public discussion of the research results. It enhanced the researchers’ confidence in the usefulness of their work and gave them a wider stage on which to practice their skills in advocacy and persuasion. Most importantly, it showed how detailed research into a problem can be one a core component of a convincing argument. It also cemented and demonstrated individual skills obtained during the training programme.

10. Advocacy projects

At the end of the programme, mini-grants were awarded to four project teams to enable them to organise round table discussions for the dissemination of their research results.⁹ An example of one of these is given in the final section of this paper.

⁸ Main contributors were: Gulgaki Mamasaliev (Director of NGO Centre Interbilim) Elmira Mavlyanova, (Director of Jalalabad CSSC), Charles Buxton (Regional Representative, INTRAC), Askhat Dukanbaev (Soros Kyrgyzstan), Irina Karamyshkina (national parliamentary deputy, Social Democratic Party), Bakhtiar Fattakov, (director of the National Association for Local Self Government), and Gulnara Ibraeva (American University of Central Asia).

⁹ The costs of the research studies in ASTP were borne by the participants and their organisations – except for a nominal US\$200 granted by INTRAC for each study. In reality, the participants and their organisations make a very significant contribution to the overall success of the programme.

Part 2: Key lessons from the design and implementation of ASTP in the post-conflict situation of Kyrgyzstan in 2011-12

1. Responding to a complex and uncertain external environment

Building trust

During programme implementation it was necessary to take account of the political instability in the country, as well as frequent changes of management and staff within state and local governance structures. In general, the complexity and uncertainty of the external environment were due to the weakness of government institutions and the low level of public confidence in them. Restoring an element of trust was one of the programme's main aims.

For example, there were parliamentary elections in October 2011 and a risk that this could lead to renewed violence. Over 40 parties registered to take part in the elections and during the autumn not just parties but many individual state officials were actively involved in political campaigning. No long-term, serious or difficult decisions could be expected in relation to the situation in the South until a new government had been established. As the elections resulted in a "hung parliament" in which no one party had a majority, it took significant time to form a new coalition government. In the meantime, high turnover of staff in decision-making bodies continued to negatively affect their collaboration with CSOs, despite the latter's active participation at various levels from the national (in the design of a new Constitution, Election Code, etc.) down to the local.

In summer 2010, international agencies had demonstrated impressive speed in responding to the crisis. However, they faced a complex political situation in the South. The position they took in response to the violence against ethnic minorities made them unpopular among nationalist leaders and sections of the majority community. There were substantial tensions between government agencies and international aid organisations, including mutual accusations of a lack of coordination, transparency and the ineffective use of resources. The International Commission on the events in the South is a good example: this independent report was requested by President Otunbaeva, but when it published its results in early 2012 Parliament rejected them because they differed from its own assessment..

Working with local partners

During the preparation of the programme, INTRAC staff analysed the external environment, based on meetings and consultations with international organisations and local NGOs. This helped us adapt ASTP to focus on governance and conflict issues. By contrast, for direct contacts with government agencies and detailed knowledge of the local situation and risks, INTRAC primarily relied on the experience of our local partners.

NGO partners in the project

Centre Interbilim is a public association devoted to civil society development and lobbying citizens' interests with the government authorities. For this project INTRAC worked with the Osh branch of Centre Interbilim, a long-term partner whose leading staff had earlier taken part in ASTP and carried out a successful study into water services in the city. During the June 2010 events, Centre Interbilim helped to pass aid to victims of the violence and later became coordinator of the Regional Humanitarian Forum, an alliance of local NGOs set up to provide essential aid and to lobby the interests of those who had suffered with the local authorities.

Jalalabad Civil Society Support Centre is a provincial-level NGO resource centre. After the June 2010 conflict, it coordinated civil society actions, and took an active role in rehabilitation of homes damaged in the violence, working closely with government on these issues.

For both organisations ASTP was an important initiative not just for building the capacity of local CSOs, but also for tackling the issue of government accountability. It gave them a space in which to reflect – alongside constant action. Both have now developed a long-term strategy to improve conflict prevention programmes and to monitor the work of government in this area. The research studies they carried out as part of ASTP provided a vital evidence base with which to persuade local politicians on the need for dialogue and policy change.

Monitoring of the external environment and associated risks was conducted module by module by the project team and included in its main reports. The inclusion of several representatives of local government as ASTP participants helped here, not only as a source of information, but also as their presence in the cross-sectoral research teams helped to ensure that many different opinions were heard. Potential problems with access to government officials were addressed through inviting them to attend the Community of Practice.

During the training programme, an attempt was made to talk about the link between democratisation, accountability of local government, good governance and a respect for diversity as a strategy for reducing conflict. The training team encouraged participants to talk openly about the challenges associated with interethnic tensions in the region after the June 2010 events, as well as age and gender differences.

As noted above, during the first module participants proposed more than 20 potential topics for the research. On the one hand, these ideas arose from the work and mission of their organisations; on the other hand, participants were trying to respond to new challenges and topics posed by recent events in the South. The main criteria for the choice of topics was that they should reflect urgent social needs and provide an opportunity to develop more equitable relationships between decision-makers and the public. It was also desirable to include at least one local government participant in each group.

Early challenges in agreeing research topics

In order to identify common priorities, members of the research groups had to compromise with each other. They represented various interest groups and inevitably they sometimes had different points of view regarding the events or problems to be researched. This can be described as a form of collective “sense-making”.

Example 1: a group researching problems with access to the state assistance programme for people injured during the June events had a series of difficult discussions in order to overcome their own prejudices as to who were “victims” and who were “guilty”. This group included representatives of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities.

Example 2: during the first module a group of younger participants proposed a topic on the influence of religion on young people. Their assumption was that religion had a negative impact on youth in the region. However, the discussions within the group on how to investigate this effect did not lead to any clear way forward. Foreseeing that the topic might lead to counter-productive discussions with members of religious groups, they changed the focus of their research study.

Example 3: another group of participants explored the problems around the access to social services for ethnic Kyrgyz who returned to Kyrgyzstan immediately after the troubles, mainly from Uzbekistan. This question was much less visible than the situation of Uzbek refugees after the June events. However, the study was politically less risky because it was acceptable to the majority population.

Overcoming their own prejudices and posing unbiased, sensitive research questions was a difficult task for the participants. The fact that many of them were already experienced community workers and professionals helped them to cope with these difficulties, for example, by establishing contact with the local community and local authorities early in the research process. The involvement of INTRAC’s partner organisations in specific post-conflict projects helped too. Both Interbilim Osh and Jalalabad CSSC were actively involved in monitoring and evaluation of various anti-crisis and post-conflict programmes during the period ASTP was running. Their experience and contacts at various levels helped participants to see their research themes from different angles. Interbilim, for example, was directly involved in monitoring the work of the government’s Directorate for Reconstruction, while Jalalabad CSSC worked closely with the authorities on local government services and projects to support the Kairalmans.

Lastly, ASTP’s participants included influential local activists and leaders: for example, the group researching state compensation to businesses looted or burned down in June 2010 included a representative of the main entrepreneurs association in Osh.

2. Building capacity as a “political act”

The programme aimed to enhance the capacity of participants in analysing post-conflict situations and anti-crisis policies of the state at national and local levels. It argued that public policy has a direct or indirect effect on the interests of vulnerable groups – and good policy can help to reduce the risk of conflict at local level.

In pursuing this goal, the organisers had to decide: 1) how to assess the participants' existing education level and analytical skills, so as to maximise the value of the programme for them and their organisations; 2) how to work with the heterogeneity of the research groups, including the fact that participants included representatives of both "old" NGOs and "new" associations created after the conflict to protect the interests of the affected people, plus local government representatives. INTRAC's approach did not include formal tests and was based on the adult learning cycle with its emphasis on working from participants' previous experience and interests. The main lessons of the programme included:

Maintaining motivation and ensuring self-confidence of the participants

The participants demonstrated a high interest in learning and their motivation increased with every success in defining, organising and implementing their research studies. We have already emphasised the value of group work. However, we also recognise that it is important to track participants' individual learning and achievements. This depends on developing relevant success criteria at the outset of the training programme and breaking overall learning objectives down into sub-objectives for each participant.¹⁰

The modular nature of the programme

Breaking down the training programme into distinct stages ensured coherence and helped overcome organisational disruptions such as when for various reasons some participants could not attend all modules or when the representatives from some organisations were changed. The formation of research groups, supported by a mentor between modules, helped ensure the continuity of the process.

The training modules were staggered – with six to eight weeks between each workshop. This gave participants time to take their research to the next stage between modules – from defining and planning the study, to data collection, report writing and finally dissemination. This was an "iterative", cumulative learning approach, based on stage-by-stage discussions of the results of the research with other participants, mentors and experts attending the Community of Practice. Frequent rethinking of the research questions and solutions to the problems clearly provided incentives for the development of analytical thinking.

Use of case studies

One of the most popular methods of training among the participants was the use of situations or case studies in order to analyse issues. The main examples were provided by the seven research projects themselves. But looking at other examples was useful too, in helping to suggest ways in which participants could tackle specific tasks related to the stages of their research projects. The importance of case studies (preferably using quotes, photos or video material) was also stressed as a way of presenting the research in an accessible and convincing way.

¹⁰ INTRAC did not use individual development plans as a tool. However, this would have helped participants to better identify barriers to their learning and ways to overcome them. Here as elsewhere, mentors play an important role in providing support.

Example from the research on victims of the June 2010 violence



Lifelong injury. Victim X was shot in both legs. He received first aid at hospital, where he stayed for two days, and then got treatment at home. Physically unable to get out of his house and fearing for his safety, X did not formally apply for obtaining injured person status in a timely manner. It was only a few months later that he started to collect the required documents. The bureaucratic barriers were formidable – it took three months to get a certificate from the hospital and four months to draw up disability related documents, He was examined by the

medical commission three times, although he already had the relevant documents....X now faces complicated surgery... and a sure result can only be obtained in other countries, which is very expensive and X has no money.

Developing presentation and writing skills

Writing complex texts or reports posed a real challenge for some participants in ASTP. Many of them never have to write formal texts of 10-15 pages in their current work. The presentations they made for the Community of Practice at the end of each module helped them to gather their thoughts and defend their arguments – and they coped with this quite well. However, writing a detailed, reasoned text was a different, more difficult challenge.

Skills in data analysis and report-writing were presented in modules 3 and 4 of the training programme. They were a vital part of it. The trainers worked hard to ensure that all the participants played a part in writing – not just delegating it to one person in each group. Key issues at each stage included:

- *Selecting a topic, defining the research question and research methodology.* At this stage, question formulation practice is very important. It makes sense to organise special sessions on questioning techniques, for example based on action learning methods.
- *Collection of information.* It is important that participants adhere to the triangulation approach and can describe the results of the information collection in the interim report.
- *Information analysis, formulation of conclusions and recommendations.* This part of the report requires a clear structure and expertise, together with mentors and ‘peer-to-peer’ reviews to ensure consistency and justification in interpreting the data and arguments.

Problems in establishing key definitions and focus in a research study

Participants learnt the importance of **formal definitions of key terms** in any study. Often these terms are set in official documents. In a confused post-conflict environment, stories abound and it is hard to establish the facts. For example, in the study of those affected by the violence in June 2010, the example above illustrates the problem that many people didn’t go to hospital because they were afraid for their safety if they did. Hence statistics on the number and type of victims were absent or disputed. The research group eventually established some key definitions, without which further analysis and discussion would have impossible:

1. *The affected persons* are “citizens with serious, moderate and light injury, having a respective conclusion of the forensic medical examination” and “citizens recognized as persons with health related disabilities as a result of injuries caused during the June 2010 events”.
2. *State social assistance.* Affected citizens who have received the above status in accordance with the Decree No 124 of the Provisional Government of the Kyrgyz Republic of 24 August 2010 were entitled to certain benefits and state social assistance, defined by the group in their report. This included formal disability status and monthly disability payments; also medical assistance or care to those injured or maimed as a result of the June events.

The Kyrgyzstan government established a monthly allowance of KGS 3,700 (USD 80) for citizens certified as disabled or injured as a result of the June 2010 events; as well as a lump sum of KGS 50,000 and 100,000 (USD 1100 and 2200) for lesser or more serious injuries.

Another key lesson was the importance of **comparing research** results in ASTP and other studies. For example, a comparison of the findings by the same group with previous studies carried out by NGOs showed that victims of violence had slowly begun to regain their confidence in the state and its services. Thus, monitoring conducted by NGO Interbilim in February 2011 showed that 80% of victims did not trust the state, while in the ASTP study this figure had reduced to 45%. This was an important, hopeful result.

Linking broader concepts (diversity, accountability etc.) with the research studies

The work with general concepts, different ideas and approaches required a high level of reflection from the participants. It was a key objective of the training programme but in reality a difficult task. In order to achieve the objective of incorporating diversity aspects into the research, we tried to ensure above all that the participants based their analysis on data disaggregated by sex/ethnicity/age/health and other parameters. The ethnic breakdown raised sensitive issues in several studies – for example, the study into businesses damaged or destroyed in June 2010. The Osh and Jalalabad authorities were not keen to highlight the losses to the Uzbek community, and CSOs too were concerned not to cause more divisions.

Nonetheless, the involvement of local authorities in the training, research and Community of Practice was a useful tool. Critical discussion of the research, and feedback from representatives of different sectors and stakeholders contributed to a deeper analysis of the problems. The participatory approach focused on collecting the views of people directly affected by the research topics. This was recognised in the assessment made by an external expert at the final conference:

“As a result of deeper investigation of specific problems of local communities related to peace-building identified by project participants and their successful implementation, the participants became more sensitive to stereotyped prejudices, arguments with regard to myths and rumours. In general, thanks to the research and research methodology, the project participants saw alternative viewpoints, understood them and even critically rethought their previous viewpoints regarding interaction in a multicultural community”. (Analytical note – G. Ibraeva)

The role of organisations in supporting staff attending ASTP

A condition for participation in ASTP was that candidates should be supported by their employers or line managers. Though much depended on the individuals, it was essential that their organisations were willing to release them for the training modules and the time-consuming research study. In addition, the organisation could help in many different ways with its specialist knowledge and contacts. INTRAC had checked the interest of NGOs during its preparatory work for the programme, and during ASTP the local NGO partners maintained regular contact with participants' organisations.

A good example of cooperation between ASTP participants and their organisations was the experience of the team that researched the provision of utility services in rural areas. Increasing access for rural residents to good quality utility services was one of the main activities of the organisations whose representatives were members of the research team. Participation in ASTP enabled them to expand the geographic coverage of their activities and to explore the situation in several new villages, strengthening their evidence base for advocacy work and gaining new impetus for promoting the interests of rural people.

Public presentations and discussions of the research findings and feedback in the mass media helped organisations enhance their image. For example, one participant of the project dealing with entrepreneurs affected by the violence was later approached by journalists and experts to provide an assessment of the current situation. The team working on issues around juvenile justice in Osh used the results to gain wider support for a new project on this.

The one significant area where the training team encountered problems from employers came when several participants from local authority bodies could not attend all the modules.

Opportunities and challenges of research projects conducted by mixed groups

It was hoped that the formation of mixed groups (from Osh and Jalalabad, NGOs and state, urban and rural) in the programme would contribute to building alliances between representatives of different areas and organisations. Indeed, through group work participants gained an experience of joint research on broader topics agreed together by members of their group after consultation with their organisations. ASTP helped to bring together mini-coalitions for promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, to increase the accountability of the State Directorate for Rehabilitation and Development, to improve access to public services for rural dwellers, and to promotion the rights of businesses affected by the June events. This was a significant achievement.

At the same time, in the post-ASTP evaluation participants commented that it was difficult for group members to maintain close contact with each other during the research work. This was due to geographic distance and a lack of time and funds for joint meetings, plus individual work responsibilities between the modules. As a result, the dynamics within the groups were not always positive, which in turn led decreased the motivation and active involvement of some participants in the project.

Participants' comments after the programme

ASTP impact at individual level

- The knowledge was systematised. It helps me in my own postgraduate studies for a Master's degree. I feel proud of having participated in the research; the experience I gained helps me to cope with my assignments.
- I was invited to participate in another research study – a survey on activities in local self-government and the Mayor's.
- I have now started a research project of my own on migration.
- I had no knowledge before – ASTP has turned my professional life upside down. I have chosen to become a researcher. I use analytical skills everywhere – it has become my way of life!
- I became more confident.
- New contacts – after our report was posted on the website, I was approached by foreign journalists asking me for an interview.

3. Working with local authorities - “between consultation and partnership”

Problems of governance

One of the main reasons for launching ASTP was the weakness and ineffectiveness of government in managing cultural diversity at the local level. INTRAC's local partners Centre Interbilim and Jalalabad CSSC identified several aspects of this, for example:

- Insufficient mechanisms for democratic governance and participation by representatives of ethnic/national minorities (e.g. lack of special measures to ensure their representation in government structures)
- Unemployment, corruption and marginalisation of particular groups, increasing the risk of violence
- Absence of institutions or policies ensuring that all citizens can share in national prosperity
- Lack or absence of open spaces for dialogue between different groups, leading to an inability to deal adequately with problems or disputes arising between them
- Lack of trust by the population in government structures and decisions.

These problems were seen during the research. For example, in the study on participation of the rural population in discussions around the quality of local services, a survey was carried out in target villages with some very telling results. Local residents and recipients of services were asked what kinds of participation they knew of.

Citizen participation in local self-government – survey results

Mechanisms for participation by local people in discussions about services	Yes, I take part	No, I don't take part	I don't know
Public hearing	0	148	12
Village assembly	24	121	15
Kurultai (traditional meeting led by elders)	5	133	22
Various community councils (e.g. women, youth)	0	127	33
Meetings of the territorial self-governing board	6	102	52
Other	0	142	18

The study concluded that the main form of participation familiar to respondents is the village assembly. Most local people were unaware of or inactive in other mechanisms for self-governance and enhancing transparency such as public hearings, community councils and advisory bodies. This is the low base on which ASTP was trying to build good governance and accountability.

Liaison with government agencies: some pluses and minuses

The most effective form of local government involvement in the programme turned out to be the contribution of government experts to the Community of Practice meetings, and the final conference. One problem was that several participants from local authority bodies could not attend all the modules. This was partly due to other duties, and partly to the complexity of the political situation. For example, during summer 2011 there were constant pickets and street demonstrations in Jalalabad, leading eventually to a change in the leadership at the city level. One of our participants, a senior public officer in the social sector, lost her job during this time. This meant that the research work fell heavily on the shoulder of NGO participants.

One example of how ASTP helped to develop useful new contacts between civil society groups and government is provided by the research group that began with a question about the influence of religion on young people. This group eventually decided to study supplementary and continuing education provision for youth. One of their main government partners were local officers in the Ministry of Youth. This ministry is quite new, having been set up after the 2010 events to respond to the increasing radicalism of young people. The study found that local youth committees were involving significant amounts of young people (mainly young men and representatives of the majority community). This study collected basic information about current provision and the needs of young men and women, and began a dialogue on how best government policy can become more conflict-sensitive.

At the final conference, government officials and elected deputies expressed their willingness for further cooperation in several areas. One of these was in tackling the issue of access to juvenile justice for minors; another was in improving the position of kayrylmans – by raising the issue of their status and access to state benefits in Parliament.

Towards advocacy - findings and recommendations from the research studies

In modules 3 and 4, participants paid detailed attention to writing conclusions and recommendations from their studies.

Findings of the study on the work of the State Directorate for Reconstruction

The work of the State Directorate for Reconstruction in Osh and Jalalabad was a highly controversial issue throughout 2010-12. This body was established by the Temporary Government in Bishkek¹¹ but the local authorities in the South contested many of its decisions (for political and other reasons).

¹¹ With financial and technical support from the international donors (e.g. UNDP)

The ASTP study analysed the different construction projects undertaken by the Directorate, considering the level of public consultation and their relation to existing city plans etc. The study concluded that:

1. The mechanism for selecting facilities for inclusion in the list for construction and repair of the State Directorate has not been properly selected.
2. Facilities included in the list at the request of the population comprise a small portion of those selected by the Directorate, though many of them clearly reflect priority needs of the population (as shown by focus groups carried out by the team).
3. Insufficient cooperation between the Directorate, the Mayor's Offices in Osh and Jalalabad, and local self-government bodies in selecting facilities for inclusion in the list for construction and repair. Only a few items suggested by the Mayor's Offices were included for construction.
4. The State Directorate's press service is supposed to inform the public about the Directorate's activities, but functions more like a PR-campaign for the Directorate.

Quantity, quality and the positioning of NGO research studies

The examples above show how the researchers had to include both quantitative and qualitative data. Clearly these were not major surveys such as those carried out by academic institutions, government ministries or the World Bank. But they had to include statistics as well as case studies and draw up appropriate, credible conclusions.

As these conclusions were made after regular discussion with government staff at different levels during the research, this meant that 1) they were carefully and accurately stated (not likely to cause misunderstanding or conflict), 2) it was relatively easy to suggest useful recommendations for government and CSOs to improve future consultation and planning.

Recommendations from the study on access to local services

The work of this group, and the results of their survey into participation in local consultative mechanisms at village level, has been described above. To tackle the problem of poor local services, the group made a number of recommendations:

1. Make efforts to improve knowledge and skills of local keneshes (elected councils) and aiyl okmotu (local self-government) staff, especially on legal matters.
2. Conduct a round table on introducing a payment for garbage disposal involving heads of districts and local kenesh chairmen in Jalalabad Oblast.
3. Carry out awareness raising activity among the population to improve the collection of payments for local services.
4. Lobby for an additional full-time staff position through the Ministry of Finance in each local self-government unit, to be in charge of managing utility services. Or formally include this function in the job description of existing aiyl okmotu staff.
5. Place information boards on utility services (tariffs, method of payment, etc.) in villages.

In conflict situations, people tend to either ignore the problems, or to put their hopes in some ideal solution. As was noted by external expert Gulnara Ibraeva at the ASTP final conference, the conclusions and recommendations reached by the research studies help to overcome myths about the likelihood of finding a "recipe for miraculous reconciliation" after conflict. They ask difficult questions about what can or should be the strategic or short-term plans for consolidating and integrating the community, and what are possible approaches to

enhancing access for citizens' participation and ensuring decision-making rules are understandable to all. As she said, perhaps not all researches were perfect, but the process of rethinking issues and monitoring the compliance of research results with the initial change objective (the research question) is central in teaching participants to think analytically.

Lobbying the results of research

The account given above shows how advocacy and lobbying was built into the programme from the beginning. The intersectoral approach and Community of Practice not only helped participants write accurate, balanced, constructive reports – it also began the process of persuading government agencies to improve their work. In the final stages of the programme, considerable attention was given to dissemination issues, including practical work on presentation skills and liaison with the media. Two short examples are given below from the follow-up work organised in early 2012.

Examples of follow-up work

Uniting the kairalmans

INTRAC's partners Jalalabad CSSC are planning training for kairalman representatives to help them prepare an advocacy campaign. They plan to unite seven kairalman communities into a network. The research project helped CSSC staff develop a long-term strategy for support to ethnic Kyrgyz in the Jalalabad region that resulted in a major new project with USAID. This project will help develop economic activities via microcredits and the setting up of Community Development Funds.

An important success regarding state benefits for kairalmans was achieved by lobbying. Previously a child could only get special benefits if both parents were kairalmans, now the child can get them if one parent is a kairalman. People are also much clearer about what documents need to be presented when applying for benefits.

Tackling issues around local services

With the help of a mini-grant from the INTRAC programme, Jalalabad CSSC hosted a round table at which government officials and civil society activists from three districts, plus the Community Advisory Council on Conflict Prevention, discussed the research findings. As a result, in Bazar Korgon district plans were made for better street lighting in the district centre, and in the village of Mogol a project was submitted and approved for a new water pipe. In Nooken district the authorities agreed to organise a users' survey on the quality of local services – after which a decision was taken to clean up and upgrade a local park.

In Suzak district the issue about rubbish collection raised in the ASTP report has not been solved yet due to budgetary issues. The United Nations Development Programme is a major partner in improving public services in Jalalabad province. In their report, the research team notes that "the main thing is that the local self-government bodies have begun to realise that improving local services is a key part of municipal development and to achieve this they must improve accountability and transparency to service users."

4. Recommendations for further programme work

In early 2012, INTRAC and its local NGO partners gained funding for an extension of their governance and conflict prevention project in Fergana Valley. This gave added incentive to review and consider improvements to the content and methodology of ASTP. Two months after the final conference, the trainers met participants and considered possible improvements. Some of the most important ideas raised are listed below:

- Preparation of individual development plans could be used as a tool. This would enable participants to better identify barriers to their learning and ways to overcome them.
- Find ways to ensure all participants take their share of personal responsibility for the research studies.
- During the modules, provide more time for planning the research and work with mentors.
- Each module should have specific results related to research preparation.
- Devote more time in the training workshops to ways of analysing data.
- Participation of the organisations' leaders in the Community of Practice would be helpful.
- In future courses, consider again the pros and cons of group and individual research projects. Perhaps the programme could be more flexible and support both. Ensure that all research projects are closely linked to the mission and activities of the participants' organisations.
- Organise an internet platform for programme resources and wider discussions.
- Follow-up. Continue to search for ways to include civil society groups in the monitoring of conflict risks and improvement of local government accountability.
- Make the stages of the research process clearer and break preparation of the research reports into these stages so that sections of the report are written gradually and not all left to the end.

Annex 1: Research studies and their authors

- Priority and justification of the selected facilities for construction by the State Directorate for Reconstruction and Development of Osh and Jalal-Abad and its interaction with the local self-governments – Bakyt Denizov, Abdurasul Hamrabaev, Nurgul Tashtanova.
- Support to businesses affected by the June events in the cities of Osh and Jalalabad – Daniyar Nurmatov, Zarapshan Saliev and Medet Ergeshov
- Access to the state social assistance for the affected, injured and maimed as a result of the June 2010 events in Osh city and Osh Oblast – Rozapasha Yuldasheva, Elvira and Chjen and Erkingul Karakozueva
- Transparency and accountability of LSGs in managing utility services in Osh and Jalalabad Oblasts – Chinara Jusupova, Biynazar Kainazarov, Tursunai Kadyrova and Muzaffar Isakov
- Improving the lives of resettled people, who have received the status of “Kayrylman” (using Toruk village in Aksyi rayon as an example) – Kanykei Myrzaeva and Jyparisa Temirkulova
- Access to fair judicial proceedings for minors – Lilya Kambarova and Rahat Shakirova
- The role of further education in the development of young people in the cities of Osh and Jalalabad – Feruza Tolonova, Genghis Israyilov, Akbiy Musayev and Nurgul Parpieva.

Annex 2: The training and mentor team

INTRAC: Kazbek Abraliev, John Beauclerk, Charles Buxton, Anara Moldosheva
Centre Interbilim: Chinara Irisova, Gulgaki Mamasaliev
Jalalabad CSSC: Elmira Mavlyanova