Berghof Foundation

External Aid Incorporated?
Infrastructures for Peace and the Challenge of Coordination in Kyrgyzstan

Silvia Danielak

Introduction

Kyrgyzstan experienced severe inter-ethnic clashes in June 2010. The events had a devastating impact, particularly in the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabat, where people were displaced and infrastructure destroyed. Distrust among Kyrgyz and Uzbeks remains high and simmering tensions escalate easily between members of the different ethnic communities. The issues include pastures and water, property and urban planning, extractive industries and religious extremism.

Working on sustainable peace in Kyrgyzstan touches upon fundamental questions, such as how to root conflict resolution capacity within communities and promote national ownership. Many international organisations work in the country to build capacity in conflict resolution, using a variety of approaches to connect mediation and other forms of dispute resolution with local traditional structures of arbitration by community elders. Despite their different approaches and the training they provide, they all struggle to truly anchor their work in society. Further, there is a lack of a common vision and disagreement over whether to favour a bottom-up or top-down approach to peacebuilding. While it is common in post-conflict situations to have different approaches to building peace, the challenge lies in coordination and ensuring the complementarity of different peacebuilding tracks. In the absence of a national dialogue or any overarching initiative close to a track one process, a multitude of activities contributes to peacebuilding along the continuum from emergency relief aid to long-term development cooperation. Most of these efforts are, however, limited in scope or duration. Against this background, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been supporting the Kyrgyz government and civil society in establishing the infrastructure for peace since 2007. Its approach is to support processes, policies and institutions that engage government, civil society, communities and individuals at the local, regional and national level towards a more peaceful and resilient society.

The term "infrastructure for peace" appeared in the UN Secretary-General's 2006 report on the prevention of armed conflict which highlights the importance of a "national *infrastructure for peace* that allows societies and their governments to resolve conflicts internally with their own skills, institutions and resources" (UN Secretary-General 2006, 16). The term predominantly used by the UNDP is "infrastructures for peace", while the term is generally understood in a broader sense of what Borja Paladini Adell calls a "proactive" understanding of infrastructures for peace (2012, 47). For the purposes of this comment, I use the term "peace infrastructure" (in line with Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka's definition) when talking about the efforts in Kyrgyzstan, as it reflects the comprehensive nature of the conflict prevention efforts envisaged in the country. According to Hopp-Nishanka (2012, 2), peace infrastructure allows all stakeholders to connect and jointly embrace a long-term vision and systematic approach to conflict transformation. For international actors, such as the UN, this perspective underlines their self-perception as enablers and conveners. The importance of external actors and third parties in this process, and in peacebuilding at large, is widely recognised. What remains to be investigated, however, is their coordination (or lack of it), with a view to the peace infrastructures approach.

Using the case of Kyrgyzstan, I discuss the extent to which peace infrastructure can help coordinate external aid interventions and overcome some of the divergent and competing visions of external peacebuilding actors.[1]
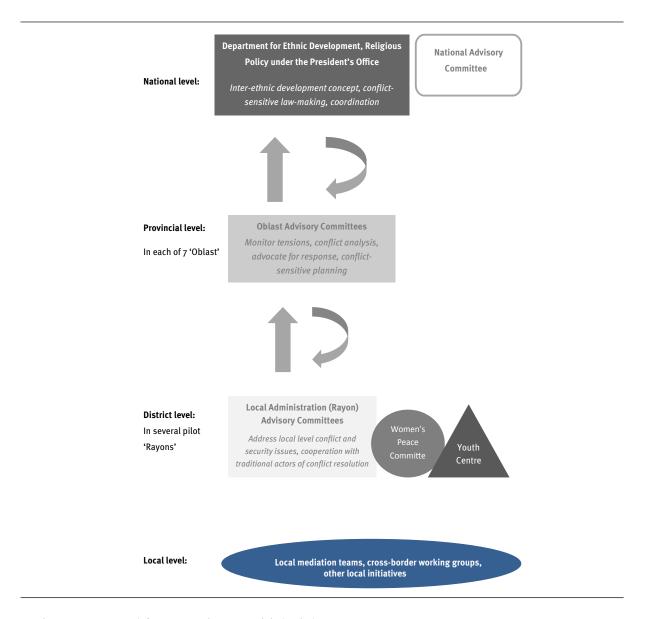
A Brief Overview of the Infrastructure for Peace in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's peace infrastructure comprises several elements supported by different actors, often in partnerships between the government, UN agencies and national implementing partners (see Figure 1 below). Only the UN uses the label "infrastructures for peace", but many other international organisations support crisis prevention and peacebuilding structures, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the World Bank, and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED).

Elements of peace infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan include peace councils, women's peace committees, youth centres, and cross-border working groups. Peace councils known as "advisory committees" were established in 2007, and today Oblast Advisory Committees exist in all seven provinces (*oblast* in Russian), as well as Local Authority Advisory Committees in a few pilot districts in the south of the country. The committees consist of ten to fifteen representatives of the administration and civil society who meet regularly to update each other on news, events, and tensions in their community. Each member brings in a different perspective, whether from a minority organisation, a profession or an institution. The institutionalised exchange allows them to analyse conflicts, develop responses and function as an early warning system and as an early response mechanism for rising tensions and conflicts. In practical terms, this engages the members of the committees in the community life as mediators and bridge-builders. They facilitate dialogue, bring in expertise, raise awareness on particular issues (for example, on the radicalisation of Muslim youth), and they mediate conflicts.

Following the events of 2010, Women's Peace Committees were formed in three provinces in the south of the country, composed of female members of community-based organisations that seek to restore peace in their communities. Youth centres were also established with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund, providing a space for young people in both mono- and multi-ethnic communities to develop life skills and build contacts across ethnic divides. In addition, cross-border working groups were formed to work in close cooperation with border security forces at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Tajik borders in order to reduce tensions around the use of pastures.

---

1   Writing about peace infrastructures with a particular focus on Kyrgyzstan is shaped by my experiences working on conflict prevention in this country, and what I have seen and heard during interactions with many internationals and locals working in this field in Central Asia. My perspective is influenced by my work with UNDP Kyrgyzstan and by discussions with former colleagues at the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery and from the field. However, I do not claim to speak on behalf of UNDP, and the views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the organisation.

National level:	**Department for Ethnic Development, Religious Policy under the President's Office** *Inter-ethnic development concept, conflict-sensitive law-making, coordination*	**National Advisory Committee**

Provincial level: In each of 7 'Oblast'	**Oblast Advisory Committees** *Monitor tensions, conflict analysis, advocate for response, conflict-sensitive planning*

District level: In several pilot 'Rayons'	**Local Administration (Rayon) Advisory Committees** *Address local level conflict and security issues, cooperation with traditional actors of conflict resolution*	Women's Peace Committe	Youth Centre

Local level:	**Local mediation teams, cross-border working groups, other local initiatives**

Graph: Kyrgyzstan peace infrastructure elements and their relations.

Two crucial elements of peace infrastructure are missing however. First, in field visits and discussions with members of the different advisory committees in summer 2012, I observed that while the members of those different institutions often have close personal ties and memberships that sometimes overlap, there are no significant institutionalised relationships at this point. Functioning links between the different organs are generally still underdeveloped and coordinated action and crisis prevention is therefore not yet ensured through the peace infrastructure. A form of reporting exists between the Local Authority Advisory Committees and the Oblast Advisory Committees, but it seems to play a minor role in the eyes of the committee members. They emphasised their desire for better horizontal connections, and more opportunities to exchange experiences and collaborate. Ideally, a formalised structure of communication and regular updating would exist horizontally as well as vertically. Combined with direct access to the national level, this would allow for a coordinated crisis response system.

Second, for the infrastructure to be complete there should be a national level forum for dialogue. A national advisory committee is wanted by certain parts of the international community, but it is not yet working. The current lack of action reflects a general hesitancy by stakeholders to engage on the national level due to its intricacy and risks. Several attempts have been made by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the British non-governmental organisation (NGO) International Alert to facilitate a

national dialogue, but they have so far been unfruitful. The obstacles include practical issues, the format, the issue of facilitation, the participants' motivation, and a lack of governmental support.[2] There is a Department for Ethnic Development, Religious Policy, and Public Relations under the President's Office, which aims to develop and coordinate policies and processes for conflict prevention on the national level. It advanced the drafting of the *Concept on Ethnic Development*, a major policy aimed to improve inter-ethnic relations, and currently acts as the prime interlocutor for conflict prevention activities at the national level. But with its institutional constraints and partiality, it is no substitute for a forum for dialogue. Civil society has also made some innovative national level efforts. A "crowd sourcing for conflict prevention" online platform has been piloted to track and map irregularities/threats during elections through text messages. Despite its limited use, it helped NGOs to inform relevant stakeholders and mitigate violence.[3]

The External Dimension of Peace Infrastructures

The approach to peace infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan is based on the understanding that selective, external interventions often have only a modest effect in protracted conflicts and during instability, and that conflict transformation has to come from the inside in order to be effective (Kumar and De La Haye 2011, 1). Sustainable peace infrastructure must have national buy-in and political will behind it (Hopp-Nishanka 2012, 12; Kumar and De La Haye 2011, 18), but in many countries the government's willingness and ability to take a lead in organising peacebuilding is limited (as outlined by Hannes Siebert in his response article, 2012). Kyrgyzstan has seen several changes in government, four alone since former President Kurmanbek Bakyiev was ousted in 2010. With the inauguration in late 2011 of President Almazbek Atambayev, policy priorities moved away from establishing conflict prevention architecture towards economic and social needs, with less support for mediation and conflict resolution capacity building. Government "invitations" for external actors to provide peacebuilding support (Siebert 2012, 39), therefore, need to be revisited time and again.

While Kyrgyz ownership of the peace infrastructure is crucial for its sustainability, it may well be the case that the infrastructure needs to be kick-started and accompanied by external actors. This idea contrasts with Hannes Siebert's argument (ibid., 37) that the perception of the need for peace infrastructure must be home grown. While we cannot reiterate often enough that domestic forces are the key element in the peace infrastructure concept, external assistance may in some cases be just as crucial. This might especially be the case in developing linkages between multiple levels of intervention and a mentality of cooperation, which might not come naturally to political leaders in contexts without a long tradition of democracy, decentralization and power sharing. The external impulse for action does in no way contradict the "bottom-up peacebuilding logic" that Borja Paladini Adell (2012, 50) so rightfully emphasizes.

The reality in many conflict-affected countries is that there is a significant presence and power of international actors engaged in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and transformation. This implies a certain risk of transforming local actors into puppets for a liberal peace agenda, as Oliver Richmond (2012, 25) highlights. This risk also applies to the concept of peace infrastructures, which is often externally driven and in many cases would not exist without the advocacy and technical and financial support of the UN and others. In fact, all of the peacebuilding initiatives in Kyrgyzstan mentioned above are supported financially and technically by international actors. This form of cooperation and assistance has the potential to stimulate frequent communication between international donors and actors on the national, provincial and local level, and foster a constant exchange of ideas about peacebuilding, local needs and perceptions.

---

2 The assessment is based on the author's conversation with representatives of international governmental organisations, national NGOs and independent researchers in Kyrgyzstan in spring 2012.

3 See http://map.inkg.info/.

Kumar and De La Haye address the external actors of conflict resolution when they describe peace infrastructures as "hybrid peacemaking", which can support a country to "complement external mediation targeted at the primary parties with internal negotiations that bring together actors at different levels of the society and polity, thus broadening the base for peace" (Kumar and De La Haye 2011, 14). Similarly, the external dimension *within* peace infrastructure is not negligible. External actors may "bridge the real or perceived gaps between international norms and practices on the one hand, and existing internal mechanisms for conflict management on the other" (ibid., 13). Support and technical assistance are in many ways essential for successful conflict transformation and are something that conflict-affected states have to manage.

The Challenge of Coordination

Recognizing how important external actors can be in stimulating and supporting peacebuilding activities, it is equally noteworthy that the sheer number of external actors present in conflict-affected states frequently exceeds their own or the host state's capacity to meaningfully coordinate the different efforts. External help is needed, yet a lack of coordination makes peacebuilding less effective than it could be.

Kyrgyzstan has become an attractive playing field for inter-governmental and international non-governmental organisations in the field of peacebuilding. It is the only Central Asian country that does not deny its internal conflicts and that seeks to deal with them rather than ignore them. From the international actors' perspective, a presence in the region is obviously valuable, and donors have made money available in response to tensions escalating in a very volatile context. International organisations flooded in after the country opened up after the 2005 Tulip Revolution, and even more so after the ethnic violence of 2010. It has been a long time since the government in Bishkek had a firm overview of what is happening. However, a governmental lead is needed to channel aid and articulate common goals for conflict prevention.

A case in point is the struggle to build mediation capacity. While in office, former President Roza Otunbaeva (2010-2011) expressed an interest in building national mediation capacity based on the idea of "insider mediators" (Mason 2009). Various organisations became involved in providing training and setting up and supporting local conflict management structures, but without sharing a common understanding of what mediation is and what it can achieve. While some organisations, in line with a peace infrastructure approach, favour a government-mandated national strategy and nationally coordinated efforts for peacebuilding and conflict resolution, others prioritise capacity building at the grassroots level. The latter are hesitant about linking programmes and initiatives and institutionalising conflict resolution, emphasising decentralised local knowledge and tradition instead. Trainers and donors have found it difficult to strike a balance between neutral third-party mediation and conflict resolution according to local cultural traditions. Traditional conflict resolution in Kyrgyzstan is essentially based upon the judgement of community elders and religious leaders, who are not necessarily neutral and impartial. It is closer to arbitration than mediation. Due to the elders' rather conservative outlook, there is also a risk that in cases of social conflict they would not sufficiently respect the rights of women and children.

At this stage, it remains unclear how Western approaches of dispute resolution, and in particular mediation, can be integrated with local traditions of conflict resolution.[4] There is no consensus on what mediation in Kyrgyzstan can and cannot achieve. Further, not enough thinking has taken place on a standard way of assessing cases of conflict (i.e. whether they are amenable to mediation or not). A shared understanding of those issues by all stakeholders is crucial to prevent duplication, confusion and competition. A sense of complementarity and a willingness to create synergies among the international actors is missing, chiefly due to a lack of common understanding and competing views on matters of substance. This lack of coordination

---

4 There are positive examples, such as Timor-Leste, where dialogue teams consisting of local mediators practiced a form of community dialogue mediation, combining formal mediation techniques with traditional methods of resolving disputes.

has expressed itself in absurd situations such as when organisations took turns in training community leaders in mediation without sharing a common understanding of the approach, meaning participants had to unlearn content in the second training that they had learnt in the first.

Coordination as an Integral Part of the Peace Infrastructure

Peace infrastructures may provide tools and enable the government to take a lead on, and organise, international aid in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in a situation where the government is otherwise overwhelmed. The infrastructure may provide a network of institutions and lines of communication, managed and supervised by the government. Peace infrastructure can potentially play a powerful role in bringing all actors together and integrating their efforts for a shared set of objectives. Such infrastructure would not only avoid duplication but also link different efforts in a meaningful way, connecting different levels (national, regional and local) and areas (thematic and geographical).

In countries where peace infrastructures have been built, they have sometimes included a peace ministry or governmental department to deal with coordination. In Kenya, which has an elaborate peace infrastructure in place, the National Secretariat for Conflict Management and Peacebuilding has been equipped with a mandate to coordinate peacebuilding and conflict management interventions in the country. In Nepal, a Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction has been established to be the "focal point of governmental, non-governmental and international institutions/organizations pertaining to peace establishment and conflict management" (Government of Nepal 2012). In Kyrgyzstan, however, the government has not taken full ownership of the concept and the national advisory committee has not materialised yet. It might be timely to think about different coordinating bodies that are closely linked to the government and/or the President's Office, where the Department for Ethnic Development, Religious Policy, and Public Relations is already located.

Despite this institutional gap, international actors have made attempts at better coordination. In mid-2011, the Mediation Projects Coordination Committee (MPCC) was born, a result of a suggestion by the UN Mediation Standby Team experts, UN Department of Political Affairs and UNDP. The MPCC is a forum for governmental and non-governmental, local and international actors that have projects in the field of mediation. Though a good start, it is insufficient in its current form. In order to have an impact it needs buy-in from other international organisations and bilateral donors and the government. While the government's support is very significant and potentially powerful, the hesitancy the MPCC is facing is a strong indicator of a process that does not enjoy across-the-board support. While all actors involved in peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan feel the need for more coordination and a need to better exploit synergies, an attitude of competition prevails. Ideally such an initiative needs to come from a Kyrgyz actor.[5]

Future Opportunities

It is too early to derive many lessons from Kyrgyzstan's peace infrastructure. From a bystander's perspective, the current efforts seem to be made "against all odds" – despite a lack of true understanding of the concept by both Kyrgyz stakeholders and parts of the international community, and without the support of some key actors. In this context, concerted efforts are hard to pursue. What is needed is more creativity on how to coordinate actors within the peace infrastructure, which requires first and foremost buy-in from a larger number of actors, and especially government ownership. This can be achieved only by better communicating what infrastructures for peace are and what they aim to achieve. From the example of Kyrgyzstan, we can clearly see that one of the major challenges faced in setting up peace infrastructure

---

5 In an attempt to learn and adapt, a national NGO took the lead in pushing coordination and is now chairing the meetings. Such coordination – albeit very selectively focused on mediation and geographically narrow by virtue of its meetings in the Kyrgyz capital – is a new way to explore inclusive and quasi-systematic communication and collaboration.

is that it is perceived as an UN-driven concept. While many more regional and other governmental and non-governmental organisations agree on the necessity to foster conflict prevention and mainstream conflict sensitivity, the centralised-approach and the ostensible "UN ownership" of the concept encounters resistance from inside the international community.

With international and local actors understanding that their programmes can be part of a bigger picture, the Kyrgyz Government can channel efforts to support:

≡ Comprehensive dialogue initiatives on the national level;

≡ A systematised approach to building insider mediation capacity on a national level, be it through a roster, stand-by team of experts, or other, and linking this capacity to the mediation capacity already built on the community level;

≡ The mainstreaming of conflict prevention in government policies and in society through education;

≡ The use and revitalisation of traditional conflict resolution capacity in a constructive way, for instance highlighting the role of Islam – the religion shared by the major conflicting ethnicities in Kyrgyzstan – and the integration of such traditional local conflict resolution mechanisms with external approaches.

The international dimension is a necessary part of the equation regarding post-conflict transformation and conflict prevention. Peace infrastructures need to be used more for the coordination of activities – be they local, national or international. The peace infrastructures approach constitutes an opportunity for better coordination of international, external aid and a chance for governments to channel and manage diverse peacebuilding efforts. In this light, peace infrastructures can be reframed for governments of conflict-affected states as a means of coordination and communication-for-action.

About the Author

Silvia Danielak worked on peace infrastructures and multi-track mediation in the framework of the Mercator Fellowship on International Affairs that she held in 2011/12. She worked with the HD Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva, UNDP Kyrgyzstan and UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery in New York. She holds an MA in Security Studies from the Institute for Political Studies in Paris (Sciences Po Paris), and studied at Maastricht University, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and Harvard Kennedy School. Since early 2013 she has been working as an advisor at the GIZ African Union Office in Addis Ababa.

References

Government of Nepal 2012. Functions of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction. www.peace.gov.np/mandates-18-en.html [Accessed 21 August 2012].

Hopp-Nishanka, Ulrike 2012. Giving Peace an Address – Reflections on the Potential and Challenges of Creating Peace Infrastructures, in: Barbara Unger, Stina Lundström, Katrin Planta and Beatrix Austin (eds.). Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 10. Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2-19.

Kumar, Chetan and Jos De la Haye 2011. Hybrid Peacemaking: Building National "Infrastructures for Peace", in: Global Governance (18), 13–21.

Mason, Simon 2009. Insider Mediators – Exploring their Key Role in Informal Peace Processes. Berlin: Berghof Foundation for Peace Support.

Paladini Adell, Borja 2012. From Peacebuilding and Human Development Coalitions to Peace Infrastructure in Colombia, in: Barbara Unger, Stina Lundström, Katrin Planta and Beatrix Austin (eds.). Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 10. Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 44-52.

Richmond, Oliver P. 2012. Missing Links – Peace Infrastructures and Peace Formation, in: Barbara Unger, Stina Lundström, Katrin Planta and Beatrix Austin (eds.). Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 10. Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 21-29.

Siebert, Hannes 2012. National Peace and Dialogue Structures – Strengthening the Immune System from Within instead of Prescribing Antibiotics, in: Barbara Unger, Stina Lundström, Katrin Planta and Beatrix Austin (eds.). Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 10. Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 30-41.

UN Secretary-General 2006. Progress Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Report of the Secretary-General, 18 July. www.unrol.org/files/progressreportpreventionofarmedconflict.pdf.