



Internal Reflective After-Action Review

Reducing Violent Religious Extremism and Preventing Conflict in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia 2013-2016

**Search for Common Ground
Kyrgyzstan**

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April 2016

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank SFCG Kyrgyzstan, led by its Country Director Mr Keneshbek Sainazarov, for providing me with the opportunity to carry out the final review of this project, one that carries huge significance in the peace and stability of the region. I am also thankful to Ms Rahat Ismanbaeva and Aizharkyn Aishakhunova for their support during the preparation, review design and data collection and transcribing. I also would like to thank other SFCG Staff for their support throughout the review process, as well as the SFCG Driver, Kanat, who drove from many parts of the city during the entire period. I am further thankful to Ms Guikaiyr Odolbekova for her spontaneous translation from Russian to English as well as transcribing the interview notes. I am also thankful to all the CWG members, youth and women participants of various activates, CALC members, and state officials, Kazyis and Deputy Kazyis for availing their time to speak with the review team. Additionally, I am thankful to the British Embassy staff, Mr. Jamie Broadbank and Ms. Nurgul Temirbekova.

My Sincere thanks also goes to Jonathan White, ILT Short-term Consultant, who was standing by to comment and edit on the draft evaluation report. Last but not least, I would like to thank Michael Shipler, SFCG Asia Regional Director, and Vanessa Corlazzoli, Director Of DM&E, for providing suggestions and helping improve the report. A final peer review by Jessica Sjolander and editorial support from Atlee Chait is highly appreciated.

Shiva K Dhungana
April 2016
Kathmandu

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CA	Central Asia
CALC	Central Asia leadership Council
CWG	Consultative Working Group
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DM&E	Design, Monitoring and Evaluation
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
ICG	Inter-Institutional Consultative group
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
KIIs	Key Informants' Interviews
LEA	Law Enforcement Agencies
MOIA	Ministry of interior Administration
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RISS	Research Institute of Strategic Studies
SCRA	State Commission on Religious Affairs
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SPEA	State Penalty execution Agency
USIP	US Institute of Peace
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic

Executive Summary

Context:

In the last few years, Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries (especially Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) have constantly endured threats of religious radicalization and violent extremism. Many reports suggest that youth and women are being manipulated and recruited by radical groups to commit acts of violence both within their respective countries as well as beyond their borders in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. From Kyrgyzstan alone, as many as 500 men and women are reported to have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq, according to Government data. However, according to informal estimates, that number could be three times larger than this. They are attracted by the promise of a lucrative financial offer, among others. Such a growing inclination towards radicalization and extremism has also been fueled by the authoritarian political regime, marginalization and discrimination, and targeted violence against specific minority groups. Until a few years ago, the state authorities, security agencies, and religious leaders had rejected the existence of radicalization and violent extremism in the region, thus creating a haven for the radical groups. However, in the last few years, the state authorities, religious leaders, security agencies and civil society represented by independent experts and academics, have been realizing the gravity of the problem facing Kyrgyzstan and the larger region.

The Project:

Considering the growing problem of radicalization towards violent extremism, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Kyrgyzstan has been implementing the project ‘Reducing Violent Religious Extremism and Promoting Peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia’. Funded by UK Government, the project started in 1 April 2015 and completed its first yearly cycle in 31 March 2016, with the possibility of an extension for next 2-3 years. The project is the continuation of a similar project funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) of the UK Government and implemented by SFCG during the period of 2013-2015 in Kyrgyzstan. The project aimed at “increasing collaboration across various dividing lines through common ground policy making, religious tolerance, and community resilience”. In order to achieve this aim, the project has three outputs: i) Increased constructive responses and common ground policymaking in reducing religious extremism and promoting peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia; ii) Improved capacities in reducing radicalization and spreading of religious extremist ideology in prisons of Kyrgyzstan; and iii) Strengthened community resilience to religious violence for promoting tolerance and social cohesion in selected communities of Central Asian countries.

The project constituted three major activity streams: i) Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia level dialogue, research and policy intervention; ii) Targeted intervention in Kyrgyzstan prisons, and iii) community level intervention in Kyrgyzstan. While the Kyrgyzstan component of the project included all three activity streams, the Central Asia component specifically implemented activities belonging to stream 1. Due to implementation and contextual challenges, not all planned activities were executed. As a result, these activities, which included the prison component from stream 2 and the media component from stream 3, are largely excluded from this review. Upon request from the donor, however, the review does include a brief descriptive reflection of the prison component.

Review Objectives and Methods:

The review was guided by two objectives: i) Assess how the project has contributed in creating an enabling environment for the prevention of violent extremism in the Central Asian region and ii) Identify lessons learned and opportunities created for future engagement in Countering violent extremism (CVE) in Kyrgyzstan and the region. The review was solely based on qualitative interviews, both KIIs and FGDs, with project participants and project staff of both SFCG and its partners.

SFCG's Asia DM&E Specialist carried out the review with the help of two SFCG Kyrgyzstan Staff as research assistants and one translator. The review took place from the third week of February to the first week of March 2016. Many of the interviews were conducted by SFCG's Kyrgyzstan DM&E Coordinator in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan while others were carried out by the Lead Reviewer. The review process met with many challenges because of the limited preparation time and translation and language issues. Other challenges included the reluctance of respondents, such as hesitation from certain law enforcement officials in the South to being interviewed, the departure of the DM&E Coordinator for her learning visit to Sri Lanka mid-way through the data collection, and lack of the availability of many documents in English, especially the baseline, white papers, and 16 of the research papers carried out in the last 2 years.

While some of the activities under the Kyrgyzstan component were implemented for slightly more than two years, the Central Asia component was only implemented for the last nine months. Additionally, some of the activities under the Kyrgyzstan component were only implemented for the 2015-2016 project cycle. Since the project was designed for a three year period, many activities had follow up activities planned for implementation over the remaining two years. Thus, barring some exceptions such as the operationalization of the Consultative Working Group (CWG), community level interactions and capacity building events, all other activities were solely implemented during the first year and this review did not look for any major results from the process. Rather, the review took a reflective approach and recounted what major outputs or progress towards results were visible during the time, and how they could be strengthened in the future in order to create a conducive environment for reducing violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

Key Findings:

Despite the challenges encountered, the project has made some significant strides towards achieving the three outcomes set out in the project design. Overall, the project has helped to build awareness among participants and communities on issues around radicalization, extremism, and the psychology of joining extremist groups. The project has also built relationships among key stakeholders as well as between the local community and law enforcement agencies, religious leaders, and key stakeholders. By creating a level playing field among diverse groups of stakeholders, the project has provided exposure to women and youth. The dialogue platform generated by this project in Kyrgyzstan and in Central Asia has immense value for the future of this region.

Some of the **major achievements and lessons learned** are highlighted below.

- The project has been hailed by all stakeholders interviewed as a timely intervention considering the growing influences of radicalization and extremism in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. The

respondents also acknowledge SFCG for making a breakthrough in this field and being able to garner the support of government agencies.

- There is unanimity among all stakeholders interviewed that SFCG has pioneered CVE work in Kyrgyzstan and has taken a step forward to root its feet in challenging circumstances in three other countries. It was commonly said that people were not even willing to openly discussing issues around religious and violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan before the start of this project. SFCG not only initiated this work in the country and the region, but it also successfully established credibility in this field with government actors, religious leaders, and other stakeholders. Having achieved this feat in such a challenging and sensitive political dynamics in the region, SFCG earned the admiration of highly skeptical state machineries and varying systems of governance.
- The CWG has emerged as a strong informal platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue between state authorities, security agencies, religious leaders/administrators, independent experts, and women leaders. It has been a forum for discussion, brainstorming, research, and sharing among those stakeholders on the issue of violent extremism. Though significant strides have been made as these discussions would not have been possible several years ago, the challenge moving forward is around how to sustain this initiative in the post-project period.
- The CWG as a dialogue platform has facilitated a symbolic collaboration among security agencies, religious leaders, and women religious leaders by using each other's expertise in their programmes. This was not possible a few years back.
- The community level activities have helped develop (perceived) awareness and understanding among members of the community, especially women and youth, about Islam, the message of the Quran, and many other dimensions of radicalization and extremism including the dynamics of those choosing to join the war in Iraq and Syria. This is a very important development in a society otherwise struggling to cope with the challenges brought by the growing presence of radicalization and extremism. Furthermore, a major contribution of the project is its work towards building understanding, trust, and relationships between the community and law enforcement officials, which had otherwise been very low as it was in the past.
- The project initiative has altogether produced 16 research papers on issues of serious contention within Kyrgyzstan and the larger region. These papers have received support from expert groups and government authorities with some specific examples of government authorities and security agencies adopting specific recommendations made by these research papers. However, weak coordination and communication with the donor on the value added by these research efforts, as well as the lack of timely translation of those documents into English preventing them from being shared with the donor for their reference and review, has diluted the value of this work. A well-articulated and stakeholder specific dissemination strategy including these research works, the video documentary explaining counter-narratives of violence produced out of the 'Quran Reading Contest' and the white papers would have helped to highlight the contribution made by these research components.

- The prison component and its activities are considered to be important, having the potential for far reaching effects in countering violent extremism in the country and the region. However, some lapses in the design phase, including the lack of receiving a Memorandum of Understanding with prison authorities and the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MOIA) as well as not getting buy-in from the potential state agencies brought significant challenges. The lack of prison specific conflict analysis during the baseline study on the potential vulnerability of human right violations caused significant problems for this component of the project and turned out to be a missed opportunity. This is a lesson learned for the future.
- All the dialogue forums organized at CA level have been able to produce significant outputs which could have an important role in promoting regional collaboration and developing joint strategies for CVE in the region. The beauty of this component is that it has mobilized and started a wider conversation among all possible stakeholders, including state agencies, security agencies, women leaders, youth leaders, regional experts, academics, and civil society. However, it has yet to produce specific, objectively verifiable results at outcome level. Looking to the future, SFCG needs to harness this movement through a series of follow up activities aimed at producing farther reaching meaningful dialogue. One of the missing links in this activity is the lack of strategy employed towards incorporating the outputs produced from these forums as a tool for CVE for the future.

Major Recommendations:

Some of the major recommendations furnished by the review team are:

- SFCG needs to start preparing an exit strategy from its role as a facilitator and convener of CWG in Kyrgyzstan in order to promote CWG's independence and ensuring its sustainability once the project initiative comes to an end.
- SFCG needs to develop strategic actions to reach a larger group of people, especially women and youth. Until now, the reach of the project activities have been to a limited number of people. Considering the gravity of the problem, should SFCG's aim be to cause a societal level change, a larger population needs to be reached.
- SFCG needs to communicate with the donor about the value added by its research and policy work as well as disseminate those products based on a concrete stakeholder specific dissemination strategy with timely translation in English.
- SFCG needs to pay attention in disbursing micro-project grants on time and complete activities before the review takes place so that the results can be documented effectively.
- SFCG needs to review its prison work and associated challenges in a changing context and devise a strategy on how it could still continue this component without jeopardizing the human rights of the individuals participating in the center.
- SFCG needs to ensure that a thorough conflict analysis is conducted on a regular basis regarding all themes and activity streams of its projects due to shifting dynamics and contexts. This is particularly important in such a sensitive area as prisons, particularly located in a resistive political context.

- SFCG should continue to build relationships with government and security agencies in Kyrgyzstan and in other CA countries in order to effectively implement its activities and collaborate with them in this process. Ensuring MOUs are signed may prevent future implementation problems should the political or administrative circumstances change.
- SFCG should adopt a utilization focused approach for some of the important outputs produced out of the Central Asia dialogue/forums/meetings and think strategically in advance how it wants to utilize those products towards creating an environment for countering violent extremism in the region. There needs to be a specific strategy in promoting the CA Youth Declaration, Ulema Council Resolution, CALC Recommendations, among others, as tools for positive mobilization of respective stakeholders in order to mobilize them to contribute collectively and cause multiplier effect in promoting peace and social harmony.
- SFCG has been able to engage renowned experts from the four participating countries and continuing to engage them will not only assist in devising a better CVE strategy for the region but also help expand this field as a whole.

Chapter-One: Introduction

1.1: Context:

Over the last few years, extremist violence has become an emerging threat to peace and stability in Kyrgyzstan as well as the entire Central Asia (CA) region. Regional dynamics have shifted dramatically since the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), enabling the importation of new and potentially dangerous ideologies. In the post-USSR era, there has been growing interest as well as emphasis on spreading Islam as a religion in the region. People were deprived of the open religious practices during the USSR regime and the majority of Muslim in the rural areas either had little knowledge and understanding of Islam as a religion, its spirit, and teachings of the Quran, or were wrongly informed about the religion and its role in society. With the disintegration of the USSR, the region emerged almost overnight from under the rule of a repressive regime, one where freedom of religious practice was curtailed or strictly controlled by the State and people had never had the opportunity to think, discuss or practice Islamic principles and beliefs.

In post-Soviet Central Asia, where many have responded to 70 years of atheism by embracing religion, many of the radical groups' uncompromising Islamic message has gained considerable acceptance¹. The new political regimes (of different nature) which emerged in the Central Asian Countries did not know how to handle and manage the religious dynamics causing many radical and extremist groups to exploit this transition and manipulate people in the name of religion. With the rising presence of radical/extremist groups within the countries as well as their growing influence in the wider region coupled with the lack of concrete state policy, structure, action, and direction from the respective States, chaos and confusion has arisen regarding interpretation and understanding of Islam. Further tension has been caused by the contrasting ideologies between those who value the soviet legacy of secularism, and the emerging generation which sees Islam (regardless of their understanding of Islam as interpreted by outsiders) as a core part of its identity – including political identity. Furthermore, the polarizing influences of ethnic nationalists and uneducated and often unaccredited religious leaders, particularly from (so-called Islamic) radical groups, is worrisome for women whose status has regressed towards marginalization over the past two decades². Extremists groups such as Hizb Ut-Tahrir³, the fundamental section of Salafism⁴, Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)⁵ and other radical (so-

¹ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/176-women-and-radicalisation-in-kyrgyzstan.aspx>

² Zen, Jacob and Kathleen Kuehnast, 2014. Preventing violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan, United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

³ Hizb at-Tahrir; Party of Liberation) is an international, pan-Islamic political organization, which describes its "ideology as Islam", and its aim as the re-establishment of "the Islamic Khilafah (Caliphate)" or Islamic state.

⁴ Salafis are fundamentalists who believe in a return to the original ways of Islam. The word 'Salafi' comes from the Arabic phrase, 'as-salaf as-saliheen', which refers to the first three generations of Muslims (starting with the Companions of the Prophet), otherwise known as the Pious Predecessors.

⁵ The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), is a militant Islamist group formed in 1998 by the Islamic ideologue Tahir Yuldashev, and former Soviet paratrooper Juma Namangani—both ethnic Uzbeks from the Fergana Valley.

called) Islamic groups are further contributing to spread radical ideas among the general population. They have taken advantage of vulnerability and disenfranchisement to recruit new members, especially youth and women, and have been further empowered by the perceived discrimination from law enforcement, corruption in politics, bias in media, and social exclusion. This is perhaps most pronounced in the Fergana Valley, where deep tensions remaining from the 2010 conflict underscore the widespread poverty and insecurity, creating an environment in which radical groups thrive. Dissatisfied youth, particularly ethnic Uzbeks, in Kyrgyzstan who suffered during the 2010 ethnic violence and lost their near and dear ones, have become more likely to join religious extremists group not only within Kyrgyzstan, but also to ISIS in Syria.

The governments of the CA Republics have sought to build legal frameworks to accommodate religious diversity while restricting the spread of extremism, however, these policies have actually exacerbated interreligious or secular-religious tensions by furthering adversarial relationships rather than encouraging dialogue, cooperation, and engagement with religious leaders. Increased adversarial relationships have in turn led to mutual exclusion, avoidance, and suspicion. With these important voices excluded, there is an absence of information collection and sharing on religious extremism, and very little promotion of peace among civil society leaders, scholars, and religious and state institutions in CA. Lacking a broad response strategy, several States have resorted to mass arrest and imprisonment of accused extremists, thus further demonizing the police and anti-terrorist department in the eyes of the general population, especially among youth and women.

Furthermore, the increasing anti-state feelings among people, especially the minority and/or marginalized populations in each country has provided a safe haven for the radical groups from the region as well as from outside to open their secret recruitment center across the country. This has enabled radical ideological groups to draw upon existing political systems and turn prisons into breeding grounds for radicalism. Prison facilities and staff are ill equipped to address this situation. Meanwhile, reports suggest that social exclusion and discrimination continue to fuel radicalization at the local level, especially among youth. Media coverage based on distortion, rumors, and dubious evidence only increases community tension.

The real and potential threats posed by radicalism in CA are clear. A growing number of extremists from the region have been trained in combat, joined jihadist networks, and travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight for the Islamic State. An official estimate states that at least 500 Kyrgyz youth are currently fighting with ISIS in Syria. However, the unofficial estimate says the number could be three times larger. A USIP report claims that as of 2013, nearly 10 percent of Hizb ut-Tahrir's estimated 40,000 fighters in Kyrgyzstan are women and that the group offered financial stipends for unemployed women and women with multiple children with absentee husbands. The situation in other countries, especially in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, is considered to be worse than Kyrgyzstan. The capacity of the CA States to monitor extremism today is insufficient, raising serious doubts about their ability to address a future crisis should these militarized groups

This group is said to be supported by different regional actors and radical leaders to discredit the more popular and liberal Hanafi scholars. This is effectively operating and recruiting youth from the Fergana valley, especially Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

return to CA. Right now, there is a window of opportunity to intervene before religious extremism can get a foothold in CA. Relatively little work has been done to date to research the threat of radicalism and provide response recommendations. Cases in Iraq and Syria, with the emergence of the ISIS, Boko Haram in North East Nigeria, and continued violence acts by the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan illustrate the brutality that can result from unchecked extremism. These examples serve as a warning to CA countries and their governments.

The review interviews indicate that the emergence of radicalization and extremism is a growing trend in Kyrgyzstan as well as in Central Asia. This has been particularly true in Kyrgyzstan after the 2010 incidence of ethnic violence⁶ and subsequent feeling of marginalization, deprivation, and insecurity among the minority groups. During the violence, at least 450 people (mostly Uzbeks) were brutally killed. It is believed that after the June 2010 violence, subsequent feelings of revenge fueled the already present feelings of insecurity and marginalization which prompted several hundred young Uzbeks from Osh and other parts of the south to travel to northern Afghanistan and southern Waziristan (Pakistan) for military training with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and other radical Islamist groups. A series of high-profile police raids and clashes in those regions have added to these suspicions. The risk of radicalization certainly exists, and there are indications that Islamist groups have already benefited from the aftermath of the events of June 2010⁷. Despite such reports and government claims, there is no authentic data available on how many youth from Uzbek communities have actually joined such military trainings and how many have returned to their countries.

This situation and sense of insecurity has been exploited by radical groups to date and there is a growing trend among youth and women towards involvement in radical groups, not only in extremist acts within their own country, but also to travel secretly to countries like Syria to fight for ISIS. It has been reported that women and girls are also recruited with the promise of financial rewards and marriages to ‘Jihadis’ in Syria. Women, especially those living in rural or conservative areas where traditional gender norms prevail, turn to Hijab to find meaning in their restricted social roles⁸. Many people believe that the factors including religious manipulation, a promise of a lucrative income, revenge fighting against ‘western anti-Muslim forces’ through ISIS, and the chance to escape the insecurity within their own countries play major roles in the increasing trend of youth and women’s participation in extremists groups. Additionally, lack of awareness among the general population in rural areas about the spirit of Islam, as well as their inability to distinguish between radical ideas and the Islamic spirit has further contributed to growing challenges of radicalization and extremism in Kyrgyzstan and the region.

⁶ For detailed description and analysis of 2010 ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan, please refer to International Crisis Group’s Asia Report NO 222 dated 29 Mar 2012 and titled “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South”. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/222-kyrgyzstan-widening-ethnic-divisions-in-the-south.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ ICG, 2009. Women and Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan, Asia Report N°1763 Sep 2009. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/176-women-and-radicalisation-in-kyrgyzstan.aspx>

1.2 Introduction of the Project

Since April 2015, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Kyrgyzstan has been implementing the project ‘Reducing Violent Religious Extremism and Promoting Peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia’ with the funding support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of UK Government. The project intended to contribute towards reducing violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. It started on 1 April 2015 and completed its first cycle of year one in 31 March 2016, with possibility of extension for the following 2-3 years. The project is the continuation of a similar project funded by FCO and implemented by SFCG during 2013-2015 in Kyrgyzstan. The project aimed at “increasing collaboration across various dividing lines through common ground policy making, religious tolerance, and community resilience”. In order to support the aim, the project has three outputs:

1. Output 1. Increased constructive responses and common ground policymaking in reducing religious extremism and promoting peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia;
2. Output 2. Improved capacities in reducing radicalization and spreading of religious extremist ideology in prisons of Kyrgyzstan
3. Output 3. Strengthened community resilience to religious violence for promoting tolerance and social cohesion in selected communities of Central Asian countries.

The project employed a multi-pronged approach consisting of three components that built on each other to contribute to reducing violent religious extremism and promoting peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

Component 1: National Level Policy Interventions

1.1. Collaborative Dialogues among and between Members of Consultative Working Groups (CWG) for Kyrgyzstan and CA. SFCG facilitated the collaboration of religious authorities involved in the First CA Ulema Forum conducted in Kazakhstan in October 2015 in order to improve the dialogue platform stability for individual Muftiyates of Central Asian countries with their Ulema Councils. With this in mind SFCG convened Muftiyates and Ulema Councils of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for a bi-annual round table to develop a common understanding of the state of violent extremism in the name of Islam in the region and come out with strategic recommendations as well as a commitment to minimize it. Expanding the CWG model operating in Kyrgyzstan to the regional level, SFCG planned to convene key stakeholders from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan in a regional CWG with policy recommendations identified by the group. This component also included comprehensive research gathering, the dissemination strategy on *Religious Extremism and the State of Peace in CA (Four reports - from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)*, and collaborative diplomacy and advocacy through the establishment of Central Asian Leadership Council (CALC) with its 12 prominent members from CA.

Component 2: Targeted Interventions in Prisons

Addressing radicalisation in prisons requires that prison officials understand extremism and have the ability to recognise early warning signs. Therefore, in Kyrgyzstan, SFCG planned to establish a 20-member Inter-institutional Consultative Group (ICG) comprising of prison and law enforcement authorities and civil society and religious leaders. It aimed at the capacity building for prison officials and others who interact with detainees on disengagement from violence as well as preparation for successful reintegration post-release. SFCG planned to create or adapt from existing training of trainer modules on conflict transformation and mediation in prisons, supporting self-sustainability among detainees, and prison management. SFCG also planned to provide psychosocial rehabilitation counselling to detainees and families to better prepare them to oppose extremist narratives through personal development inside and outside prison by establishing two rehabilitation and reintegration centers in Bishkek and Osh. It further planned to establish a free hot line Call-Centre within the National Rehabilitation and Prevention Centers to provide psychosocial support to persons in danger of becoming recruited by radical religious movements and tips for parents and family members influenced by extremist groups. SFCG also planned to expand this work to Kazakhstan based on the lesson learned from pilot work in Kyrgyzstan.

Component 3: Local Level Community Interventions

The third component included media and civil society engagement, both key people (such as state authorities, religious leaders/administrators, academics, and civil society leaders) as well as other stakeholders (such as the general public, including women and youth). To bolster the media's role in promoting social cohesion and tolerance in Kyrgyzstan, SFCG organized training on Common Ground Journalism and behaviour change communication to mainstream media personal. The project also included media advocacy through a media production, including a script writing section for the TV series 'The Team' during the first year. The project also facilitated community engagement of security agencies, especially the 10th Unit of the Ministry of Interior. Expanding the programme's promotion of tolerance to other key stakeholders, SFCG conducted a Central Asian Forum of Muslim Women, Central Asia Youth Forum, community dialogues between Central Asian youth (following in the Social Cohesion activities by the trained youth in each of the Central Asian countries).

The project implemented most of the activities in Kyrgyzstan as a continuation of the activities from the previous project cycle, whereas all the activities involving participants from the four Central Asia countries started in the last year of project cycle. Following are the lists of activities implemented in Kyrgyzstan and CA countries.

Kyrgyzstan	Consultative Working Group Community level social cohesion work (IQ Challenge, Quran Reading Contest and video documentary production. Food fair, 10 th Unit online interactions, Seminars, Workshops) Prison Work Media Component (Training, Curriculum development and Script writing) Research/While paper/vision paper/policy paper and dissemination
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	Youth Initiatives
Central Asian Countries (Activities organized in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan only)	Central Asia Ulema Forum Central Asia Leadership Forum Central Asia Youth Forum Central Asia Forum for Religious Women Leaders Central Asia Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) Forum CA youth initiatives Research and dissemination/ CA Matrix of Threat

Theory of Change

The project articulated three theories of change (TOC) basically representing the three programme components:

- *If* there are strong relationships and collaboration between state and non-state institutions/actors, *then* the likelihood of violent and repressive responses to the threat of terrorism decreases, *thereby* decreasing the grievances of extremist groups against the State.
- *If* the key actors work collaboratively to prevent violence and address local-level conflict issues, *then* it will be harder for extremist groups to recruit young people.
- *If* at-risk or vulnerable individuals are exposed to positive narratives about multi-ethnic, multi-religious relationships, *then* they are less likely to be drawn into violent extremist ideologies.

As the TOCs indicate, the project focuses on capacity building and strengthening of cooperation between the states and civil society. As a result of the project, the following three major outputs are desired out of the project intervention.

- Output 1.** Increased constructive responses and common ground policymaking in reducing religious extremism and promoting peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia;
- Output 2.** Improved capacities in reducing radicalization and spreading of religious extremist ideology in prisons of Kyrgyzstan
- Output 3.** Strengthened community resilience to religious violence for promoting tolerance and social cohesion in communities of Central Asian countries.

1.3: After Action Review objectives

The primary objective of this internal review is to reflect on the results achieved by the Kyrgyzstan component of the project over the last two and a half years (in general) and by the CA component in the last (approximately) one year. Considering the less than one year timeframe of the current cycle of the project, this review focuses on identifying the indicative changes and opportunities created for future build-up to the work of CVE in Kyrgyzstan and

Central Asia. Hence, the evaluator did not focus on measuring successes or failures (as it is premature to draw such conclusions). Rather, the assessment takes an appreciative approach to explore how the project is making headway in addressing the issue of radicalization and violent extremism in the region and what organizations like SFCG and others can do to further strengthen this work in the future.

The objectives of the after action review are:

- Assess how the project has contributed in creating an enabling environment for the prevention of violent extremism in the Central Asian region.
- Identify the lesson learned and opportunities created for future engagement in the CVE work in Kyrgyzstan and the region.

1.4: Review Team and Review methodology

The review team led by Institutional Learning Team's DM&E Asia Specialist included SFCG Kyrgyzstan's DM&E Specialist (partially as she left for Sri Lanka mid-way through the review process), Aizharkyn Asialanova from SFCG Kyrgyzstan's DM&E Department, and a locally hired translator, Gulkaiyr Odolbekova. Because of the time constraints, visa issues and challenges for a non-Kyrgyz person to interview law enforcement officials in Bishkek and the South, almost half of the total interviews were carried out by SFCG Kyrgyzstan, some before the arrival of the Lead evaluator in Kyrgyzstan. The interviews conducted by SFCG Kyrgyzstan's Team were directly done in Russian and the interview transcripts in English were made available to the lead evaluator almost two weeks after his departure from the country.

Furthermore, all the interviews involving respondents from the other three countries (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan) were conducted by the SFCG Kyrgyzstan team.

The review was purely qualitative in nature and included the conducting of Key Informants' Interviews (KIIs) with key project stakeholders, partners, and SFCG staff, as well as a few Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with selected groups of women and youth in Osh, Jalalabad, and Batken. Some of the leading stakeholders interviewed were members of the Consultative Working group (CWG), Representatives of the Antiterrorism Centre of the State Committee on National Security, representatives of 10 Unit of the MOIA, Muftiyate, Kazyats, youth participants of the Central Asia youth forum, participants of the Central Asia Women's Forum, participants of the Central Asia Leadership Council (CALC), and Independent experts. The participants of the FGDs included youth and women who participated in different activities implemented by the project, such as seminars, interactions, 10th Unit Online programmes, Quran reading competitions, Food fairs, and IQ challenges among others.

The review used purposive sampling of the project participants for interviews and FGDs and participants were selected with help from the SFCG DM&E Team. The respondents for the Skype interviews and the interviews conducted in Russian were chosen and interviewed by the SFCG team in Kyrgyzstan, with some being held prior to the Evaluators' arrival in the country and a few after his arrival.

All the interviews and FGDs were guided by an interview checklist to ensure that as much data as possible was collected from the project participants. Please refer to Annex 1 for the interview and the FGDs checklist corresponding to the different stakeholders. A total of 48 participants were interviewed and five FGDs were conducted

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Review

The review was planned within a very short period of time. Due to the time, travel, and language constraints, the interviews were split between the SFCG DM&E Specialist and the Lead evaluator. Since almost half of the interviews and FGDs were done by the Local DM&E Specialist without the presence of the Lead evaluator, the evaluator had to depend on those interview notes alone in regards to those interviews. Furthermore, because of the evaluator's inability to understand or speak Russian or the Kyrgyz language, the lead evaluator had to depend on the translation provided by the three other members of the team mentioned above. Lots of information and data were lost in translation.

The review carried out on-site interviews in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan while interviews were done with only few participants in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan through telephone or skype (with poor connectivity).

Some of the interviews planned with different stakeholders and expert members were either shortened or cancelled as there were either not available/not willing to talk or fell sick.

Geographically, the review made good ground coverage in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the review was limited to a few online interviews.

The review was also limited in regards to coverage of the review objectives. According to the original review plan, the review fully covered the objective 1/component one (national level policy interventions), partially covered the objective 3/component 3 (community level interventions) and did not work cover the objective 2/component 2 (targeted intervention in prison). The final report does include some reflective analysis of the Prison component, however, because of a last minute request from the British Embassy in Bishkek during the lead evaluator's interview with the British Embassy Conflict advisor and project focal point. The limited work done in this component does not merit the evaluability of the component in any circumstances.

The decision for not including the prison component in the review was taken because the activities planned for the component were 'paused' as advised by the donor. The decision was also caused because of the lack of permission for the SFCG team and the Review team to get an access to the prison and its inmates for interviews by the prison authority. This narrowed the scope of the review limiting the ability to assess the project in its entirety. Similarly, the media sub-components were also not included in the review process as there had only been script writing during this project year with no other activities having taken place so far.

Despite some of the activities under Kyrgyzstan components being implemented for the last two and a half years, many other activities under the same component and the entire Central Asia component were actually only in existence for a 9 months period. Considering that many of the project activities were only implemented for very short periods of time, while this project aims to deal with issues long deep-rooted in the CA society, it is too early to carry out our review looking into effectiveness and impact. Thus, this review took a reflective approach to explore progress towards the results and draw important lessons learned for the future. This report should not be read within the framework of a conventional review approach or held to the standard review criteria.

Chapter-Two: After Action Review Findings

2.1 Major findings

Output 1	Partially Achieved Indicative results visible	Increased constructive responses and common ground policymaking in reducing religious extremism and promoting peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia
Output 2	Not covered by the review Importance of this component highlighted	Improved capacities in reducing radicalization and spreading of religious extremist ideology in prisons of Kyrgyzstan
Output 3	Partially achieved/ Strong community demand and recognition of the importance of this component	Strengthened community resilience to religious violence for promoting tolerance and social cohesion in communities of Central Asian countries

2.1.1 A Timely Intervention

According to all the stakeholders interviewed and the observation and analysis of the review team, the project has been a timely intervention in the context of Central Asia, not to mention in Kyrgyzstan. The research based analysis written by various Think Tanks such as the International Crisis Group (ICG)⁹, US Institute of Peace (USIP)¹⁰, Chatham House¹¹ and Open Society Foundations¹², among others¹³, clearly explain the vulnerability of the region as a breeding ground for manipulation of vulnerable populations towards radicalization and extremism and subsequently towards terrorism. The project participants interviewed during this reflective project review emphasized that the entire region is highly vulnerable to the manipulation of its largely Muslim community towards so-called Jihad¹⁴ from the radical organizations. All of the participants interviewed from Kyrgyzstan, in particular, voiced concern regarding Kyrgyzstan's comparative 'democratic' freedom and its role in providing safe havens for the radical groups to manipulate women and youth as well as breeding grounds for recruitment efforts by extremist groups preparing militias to fight in different parts of the world. The respondents largely

⁹ ICG, 2015. Kyrgyzstan: An Uncertain Trajectory Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°76. Bishkek/Brussels, 30 September 2015.

¹⁰ Zen, Jacob and Kathleen Kuehnast, 2014. Preventing violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan, United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

¹¹ Heathershaw, John and David W. Montgomery 2014. The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics. Russia Eurasia Programme Chatham House, November 2015.

¹² Graubner, Cornelius, 2011. Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence, Open society Foundations, Eurasia Programme, March 2011.

¹³ Omelicheva, Mariya Y. Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia, International Political Science Review, 2010 31(2): 167-186

¹⁴ Almost every single person interviewed did not agree with the interpretation of 'Jihad' by the radical organizations and expressed their worry on how the radical groups are brainwashing young women and women to fight for extremists groups within their country as well as outside such as Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Afghanistan.

believed that SFCG's formation of the Consultative Working Group (CWG), work with the Muftiyates, effort in building relationships between security agencies and religious leaders, promotion of community engagement of the 10th Department, and their corresponding community interactions with women and youth were timely and important initiatives which the respondents would benefit from the expansion and sustainability of in the future.

One of the members of the National Security Agency said, *“Because of the project initiatives, different groups are ready to discuss issues around religious extremism. SFCG started to work on this issue at the right time. Violent extremism and terrorism are under our noses. If we don't work against it, we will lose, as extremists are also advancing in their work rapidly and aggressively.”*

One of the members of Central Asia Leadership Council (CALC) and former Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan highlighted the vulnerability of Kyrgyz Society when saying that extremism did not come from Afghanistan or anywhere in the world, rather it grew up here and spread its wings in Central Asian countries due to the prevalence of democracy and liberal society within the political system. Not only he, but many other independent experts and CWG members believe that democracy provides freedom and space to discuss ideas openly which has allowed for the spreading of radical ideas. Another independent expert said that the 2010 ethnic violence in South, which killed at least 450 people, mostly Uzbeks, also created a conducive environment for manipulation and recruitment by radical/extremist groups among youth from the region, particularly from the minority communities, exploiting their frustration and feelings of marginalization within their own country. He also claimed that they found a source of power and platform to vent frustration and anger through joining the radical/extremist groups. The people interviewed in other Central Asia Countries also echoed the relevance of this project in their respective countries. A Tajik expert interviewed said, ‘We have gone through the civil war triggered by religious motive. We have been experienced the phenomenon of religious radicalization more than other CA countries. Probably, we are also better equipped on how to combat this. However, the level of radicalization is quite high. There has to be some consolidated efforts among all concerned in combating the challenges of radicalization and this project has come in an opportune time’.

2.1.2 Pioneering work in Kyrgyzstan and the CA region:

The project's contribution towards creating an effective intervention in addressing violent extremism in the region has been regarded highly by diverse stakeholders. SFCG has been credited for pioneering the work in Kyrgyzstan initially and then expanding in the wider CA region. SFCG has been recognized for pioneering such challenging work in the area during a time when people were reluctant to even talk about violent religious extremism and major stakeholders, such as Government authorities, security agencies, police, and religious leaders, were not even willing to accept that violent extremism existed in their countries or the region. This feat in particular was highlighted during the review interviews by the British Embassy representatives, the representatives of the National Security Agency, the 10th Unit of MOIA, The

Deputy Muftiy of Bishkek, the Kazyi of Jalal-Abad and Deputy Kazyi of Batken, and members of the CALC and CWGs.

Furthermore, the interview with the CWG stakeholders the members of the National Security Committee, 10th Unit of the MOIA, and the Independent Experts in particular, revealed that SFCG and its project initiative had gotten serious recognition from Government authorities and security agencies as well-respected work aimed at reducing Islamic radicalization/extremism and promoting peace and harmony in Kyrgyzstan. SFCG does, however, need to work on further relationship building with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prison Authorities to convince them that despite being a US-based organization with projects drawing funding from the British government, SFCG is highly committed to promoting peace and development in Kyrgyzstan and the region. Up until now, SFCG has not been working with government authorities in other CA countries. Through Kyrgyzstan's example it has been proven that this coordination and collaboration is helpful in strategy building and to establish credibility, and that it should be pursued in the other CA countries. While taking into consideration the varying level of political as well as religious sensitivity in each of the countries, a slow and steady process of engaging with these stakeholder groups seems to be a plausible goal in bringing them onboard as momentum continues to be generated in response to the project initiatives.

2.1.3 CWG as a Dialogue Platform among Key Stakeholders

The Consultative Working Group (CWG)¹⁵ was established in October 2013 to provide a platform and forum for discussing pressing issues around CVE by bringing relevant stakeholders from the government, security agencies, religious leaders and administrators, independent experts, and civil society¹⁶ leaders to the table. The formation of CWG was a slow process and took four months (June –October 2013) to complete. Considering the sensitivity of the issue and lack of existence of prior relationship and trust between proposed members, a methodical but worthwhile process was engaged to convince them to agree to share a platform. The CWG is an informal platform of key people in Kyrgyzstan which meets every quarter to discuss issues of contention concerning religions, peace, radicalization, and extremism prevalent within the country. The CWG has been a very good independent platform for these key stakeholders to meet, discuss, share, and exchange ideas and opinions openly without any reservations.

Mametbek Myrzabaev, independent expert member of CWG says, *“In my opinion, CWG is so far the key project in Kyrgyz Republic. Everyone knows and talks about this project, even in*

¹⁵ The composition of CWG is as follows: 1 Member of Parliament of the Jogorku Kenesh; 2 staff of the Defense Council; 2 representatives of the Office of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic; 2 officers of the 10th Department of the Ministry of Interior; 3 representatives of the Spiritual Administration of Muslim communities of Kyrgyzstan; 1 officer of the National Security Committee; 1 officer of the National Security Committee of the Antiterrorist Center; 3 theologians. Ethnic and gender factors were given serious consideration in forming the CWG (7 women and 16 men).

¹⁶ Although there was a series confusion among people that who constitutes civil society. People even claimed that there is no civil society in Kyrgyzstan. However, for the purpose of this review, NGOs and other similar organizations have been included as a civil society group.

Astana (Kazakhstan) people know about the existence of CWG and its work. State authorities and security agencies have also actively recognized the importance of this platform and are interacting with diverse stakeholders because of this platform. This already speaks of the effectiveness of this project.”

He further added; “Before 2013 religious people/leaders and people in general were afraid to talk about extremism and had a negative perception of extremism prevention. They did not want to acknowledge the project activities and concept. Now religious leaders know about extremism prevention activities and have started to participate in them. I consider this to be the main achievement of this project. Compared to three years ago there is more key people from Government, security sector, religious and civil society are involved in this drive to counter violent extremism”.

The project has been able to establish a level of trust, cooperation, and collaboration among the state authorities and the religions leaders/administrators, which was termed by the CWG members as the ‘model of state-religious relations in countering violent extremism’. The state institutions, specifically those from security institutions participating in the CWG, have opened themselves up to “partnership and collaboration” (albeit in a cautious and calculate manner to maintain their institutional secrecy and interest) in joint efforts to protect national interests and engage civil society and the media. Greater collaboration has been achieved between and among CWG members, promoting better understanding of CVE work and collectively contributing to the prevention of radicalization.

Over the last 30 months or so, the CWG has provided practical recommendations for the National Concept on Religious Affairs for 2014-2020. CWG members collectively and in collaboration with SFCG have presented White Papers outlining their recommendations on the state and civil society’s cooperation in reducing extremism and terrorism in the Kyrgyz Republic. SFCG has been publishing these White Papers on an annual basis since 2014. The publication reflects the influence that the project has gained, and suggests methods and mechanisms to further address the issues related to prevention of extremism and terrorism in the country. According to SFCG Kyrgyzstan’s compilation, the examples of recommendations applied by the state agencies include: i) Developed curriculum and formed Institute for the training of personnel for Muftiyate management¹⁷ (in response to the recommendation of establishing information and education center at Muftiyate to develop and define the scope of training programmes for each stage, educational and scientific literature, guidelines, requirements for intermediate exam testing); ii) Starting from early 2015, imams and heads of educational centers are required to pass certification under the auspices of the Defense Council¹⁸ (in response to the recommendation to conduct widespread inventory of educational religious institutions, and carry out certification of existing clergy, imams by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims, among others).

¹⁷ URL: <http://www.24.kg/obschestvo/30569/>

¹⁸ <http://nusra.info/7437/chistka-imamov-kazahstana-attestatsiyu-dumk-ne-smogli-projti-500-svyashhennosluzhitelej/>



Another achievement of the project is to build relationship and recognition of each other's expertise and needs, and initiate some 'Symbolic' exchange (which the participants refer to as collaboration). Every single CWG member interviewed by the review team highlighted that before this forum was created they did not even imagine people from the National Security committee, 10th unit of MOIA, State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA), Muftiyate, academics, and NGO representatives, coming together in a common platform to discuss, debate, and find solutions to issues concerning radicalization, extremism, and terrorism.

Highlighting the important role CWG is playing, one of the members of the Security Agencies said, *"The more CWG activities we do, the more problems we resolve. The project activities, especially the platform provided by the CWG is very effective in facilitating discussions that we cannot do in other platforms. We discuss relevant issues and come up with decisions and we take action. We know our issues."* This clearly justifies the importance the security agencies place on the outcome of CWG meetings and the discussions taking place at those meetings. He further added that they take those discussions, analyses, and suggestions from different stakeholders and implement them in their work while also taking them into consideration when making strategic decisions. He was, however, reluctant to share details on what decisions exactly were utilized in making their strategic decisions.

At the beginning there were some challenges encountered in the formation of this now integral CWG. When SFCG was working towards establishing the CWG in mid-2013, the representatives of the security agencies, including the 10th unit, as well as the Government authorities and religious leaders were not willing to accept the fact the challenge of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism existed. SFCG had to do rounds of individual meeting with different stakeholders to convince them through evidence and explanations before they recognized these fundamental challenges in the country and agreed to be members of the CWG. However, when it was formally created in August 2013, some members of the security agencies were not convinced that a female religious leader, who ran an NGO working for religious women, should be included as a member of the CWG. It was revealed during the interview that the security agencies had a perceived belief that women who wear headscarves and work for religious people are 'extremist' and 'do not qualify' to be part of this group. It took two months to overcome this resistance and it was only achieved on October 2015, the first meeting of the CWG. In the last two years since then many things have changed. For example, now the security agencies recognize the same woman member of the CWG as one of the leading experts on radicalization, extremism and women in Kyrgyzstan. Such a perception shift was caused by the regular interaction and exchanges and dialogue between them. The female member of CWG says *"earlier they opposed me to be the member of CWG and now they invite me as an expert speaker in the programmes they organize. I was also invited as one of the key speaker in the meeting of anti-terrorism units of Central Asia countries."* Such a specific example of shift in perception, trust, recognition, and knowledge exchange was made possible because of the platform provided by the CWG.

In order to establish the project's success, SFCG's Research Analyst said, *"Of course, when we first started this project, it was hard to establish dialogue between state security agencies and*

individual experts, between security agencies and Mutakalim, a NGO of religious women leaders. There were many stereotypes and a lot of distrust. We had to sit down with each stakeholder separately and explain individual roles of each stakeholder. So, even though the project started in August 2013, we were able to organize the first CWG meeting only in October 2013. Then we also decided to create a research group from CWG members. It was important for us to see these people working together. And our first steps, first meetings were successful.”

The review team asked the same question to various CWG member to verify the claim made by SFCG and it was unanimously verified by those who were part of the CWG from the beginning. An Independent Expert member said, “For example, during the first meeting with religious representatives under this project there was a lot of resistance. Representatives of religious groups said that they don’t want to work on this project because there is not extremism in Islam. They were not ready to talk about it. Now they acknowledge the presence of this issue and have become more involved.”

Despite a lot of appreciation of the CWG, the review team asked the members of the CWG and other stakeholders about the future of this platform and its sustainability issues. Most of them are optimistic about its future and feel and believe this should be continued even after the project is finished. They expressed their willingness to continue this initiative but could not explain how exactly they want to take this forward. Out of the eight CWG members interviewed, six of them said that they will continue to meet and discuss either on a one-on-one basis or as a group whenever possible. Two members presented a cautious response and said that they would like to be a part of the group but are not sure whether it will continue to function at its current status in the absence of a facilitating organization. No one had outright feelings that the platform would cease to exist in the post-project period and instead expressed to their willingness to play a part in its continuation.

There was some reservation from at least two CWG members representing civil society groups that the CWG meetings, at times, are dominated by the representatives of the security agencies causing the meeting to get carried away with their agendas. They advised that SFCG could take a stronger leadership role in the CWG and provide a level playing field for all of the members regardless of their institutional affiliation. One of the representatives of the security agencies kind of corroborated this fact by saying that SFCG should inform and collaborate with them for every activity they do. He also expressed his polite displeasure of SFCG for implementing some of the activities in the South without informing them. The evaluation observed that those initiatives have no need for representatives of security agencies to be involved in the process directly and that SFCG prefers to take a route of intervention implementations without active engagement from security forces. In light of this, such concerns are particularly important as the project activities should strictly adhere to the principles of conflict sensitivity.

2.1.4 Improved relationships between community and the 10th Department of MOIA:

One of the project achievements is the implementation of programme activities, called 10th Department on-line programme, organized jointly by SFCG and the 10th unit of the MOIA in four communities in Northern Kyrgyzstan which are considered to be the most highly vulnerable

to ISIS recruitment, reported by the programme team and subsequently corroborated by independent programmes organized by the 10th Unit in the three oblasts of Southern Kyrgyzstan. In these face to face programmes, Department 10 officials described the situation on violent extremism and radicalization across the country, presented statistics and cases on recruitments and the recruiters, urged people to be vigilant and cautious, and talked about measures of prevention and countering religious radicalization within communities. The Deputy Head of the Department 10 personally attended all of the meetings and met with local community representatives, religious leaders, Atyncha (women religious leaders), and youth, face to face. The joint programme as well as the subsequent programme organized by 10th Unit served three purposes. First, it helped improve relationships between the department officials and members of the community, especially youth and women. The women and youth participants of FGDs who attended the 10th Department programme in Osh and Batken said that before the programme they had a different image of the police officials of the 10th Unit. They never imagined that they would be able to speak to/with them and discuss issues with them. The women participants of the FGDs particularly thanked the project for giving them the opportunity to participate in such programmes and help build relationships with the police. The Head of the 10th Unit personally attended a few events and even shared his personal mobile number with the participants asking them to call him if they wanted to talk or needed any support. This was particularly noteworthy in building community trust towards the 10th Department. Though this was a symbolic gesture, many people were taken by surprise and welcomed this as a friendliness extended by the entire department towards them. Women and youth, in particular, shifted their perception of police in response to this and other similar incidents. As a result of this effort from the 10th Unit, a police official shared that some youth now closely work with them to identify radical/extremist content posted on various social media platforms to delete or block them from public viewing as well as counter-narrate through social media.

Secondly, the programmes helped raise awareness within the local communities about various aspects of radicalization. Prior to the programme the communities expressed confusion regarding the differences between radicalization, extremism, and terrorism. They did not know the consequences of joining the radical groups for the so-called Jihad, the meaning of the word Jihad (went by the (mis)interpreted meaning, holy war against liberal Muslims and Non-Muslims especially the western world, of Jihad used by the (radical) groups), and did not know the fate of those who joined the radical groups such as ISIS and to fight with them abroad against the “enemy”. The programme organized by the 10th unit was an eye opening experience for the community members as they became privy to new information such as the real meaning of Jihad (as explained by the religious experts based on Quran), the spirit of Islam, the recruitment statistics, the fate of those recruited and their plights, and the measures being taken to prevent radicalization and recruitment in the communities.

Thirdly, this programme provided the 10th Department officials with the opportunity to understand local community dynamics through interacting with the local people to hear their viewpoints, the challenges they are facing in relation to religious practices, radicalization, and extremism, and to really understand their hardships. The officials of the 10th department interviewed during the review said that they would continue to organize similar events to take

places in increasing numbers of locations in the future. This is a clear indication that the project initiatives are moving towards sustainability. One of the representatives of the 10th Department of MOIA said, *“Upon the request of CWG experts we conducted an event called 10th unit communication programme. The 10th unit is our unit that works on terrorism issues. We held this event in all regions. These were specific events at which representatives of different organizations participated. At these events we raised different issues. We had accumulated a lot of information and materials and use them to in our work with the community. We are still continuing this work. We increased the trust of society towards the 10th unit. After conducting these events we started to generate our own ideas that we can now present to our countries. We have our own techniques on how to improve and increase trust towards law enforcement agencies. We developed them ourselves and can share.”* This claim of the 10th Unit was also indicated by the women and youth reinforcing that the community based interactions facilitated by the 10th Unit have helped build trust and a relationship between law enforcement agencies and the community, especially women and youth.

2.1.5 Research and policy work Important but not fully exploited

The research and policy work centered around preventing radicalization and violent extremism is important work in the region, however, it lacks strategic dissemination and application. SFCG, within the framework of the project over the last two and a half years, has conducted 16 researches (Please see annex for the list of research topics) altogether on issues surrounding religious and violent extremism in the region. The 11 researches carried out during the first grant period covered the issues faced by Kyrgyzstan, while the five researches carried out in the current grant period covered issues from four CA Countries, including two for Kyrgyzstan and one each from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. According to SFCG staff, they published and distributed these research papers to their stakeholder free of charge. They translated them into Russian, English and Kyrgyz languages depending on the target audiences. SFCG also disseminated some of the materials to educational centers, for example the center on religious affairs and the Institute of Islamic studies, Muftiyate libraries, and to Madrasas. The review team, however, could not get access to any research report published in English during the evaluation. English copies of two research works entitled “Central Asia amid Global Threats” and “Hizb ut-Tahrir” in Kyrgyzstan: Conditions and Trends were shared with the lead evaluator after the first draft was completed. Furthermore, the policy work around prison work could not be completed because of the donor’s request to pause the entire component. The details of the challenges faced by prison component has been explained in section 2.2.

The research findings were presented in various meetings and forums locally as well as internationally by the researchers themselves and the SFCG policy analyst. It was reported that the research recommendations are being used by state agencies and the feedback is positive. For example, Tatiana Dronzina and Bakyt Dubanaev’s research on ‘Motives and reasons for people to participate in war activities in Syria in Iraq’ and research on Hizb ut-Tahrir and other prohibited organizations- carried out by Nurgul Esenamanova with Roman Veitsel - are the most popular among state agencies. It was reported that even the Presidential Administration is using information from these researches for their presentations and recommends their use to others,

though these claims could not be independently verified. A document compiled by SFCG shows that the recommendations produced by the research on Highb-ut-Tahrir, the Defense Council recommended the opening of a hotline and Rehabilitation Center in Bishkek and Osh¹⁹. Similarly, SFCG reported that the government established the Research Institute on Islamic Studies²⁰ as recommended by the research on “Mechanisms of interaction of state agencies and Islamic organizations in the prevention of extremism in Kyrgyzstan”. Please refer to **Annex 7** for the SFCG compilation of State implementation of the recommendations furnished by the research papers and white papers carried out as part of the project intervention.

SFCG’s Policy Analyst visited Astana, Brussels, Vienna, and Abu Dhabi to present these research works at conferences. It was reported by SFCG that Prof Alexey Malashenko, who is the chair of the Carnegie Moscow Center’s Religion, Society, and Security Programme highly appreciated the research work done by SFCG. He said, (quoted through SFCG Country Director) “SFCG’s research is laying strong platform in doing research in the field. Rest of the organizations are five years behind the work of SFCG. This research provides roadmap for the next five years for all of us. SFCG Kyrgyzstan’s research project should be research template while it comes to doing research in extremism and terrorism. The findings and revelations are giving pathways for next five years of research work in the region”. The review was not in a position to independently verify this evidence as it was coming from a secondary source.

There is some indication of action taken by concerned authorities after the publication of some of the research papers. There was a shift in government policy after the research of Tatiana Drondina was published. One of the respondents said, *“After the publication of her research, there was a lot of discussion around the issue of people’s participation in war in foreign countries and the pre-occupied mentality that only Uzbek youth are participating in those was challenged and counter narratives were produced. Even we start to observe the change in attitude of government officials’ towards some ethnic groups start to shift, especially Uzbeks. Before people thought that only Uzbeks participated in war activities and the research showed that Kyrgyz people also participate. Earlier mass media obviously linked Uzbeks while writing people joining radical groups to fight war in Syria and Iraq. Now mass media also shifted their attitude and do not directly link Uzbek community when reporting on war activities in Syria and Iraq”*. Another researcher, who did research on Muftiyate, said, *“There has been some changes within Muftiyate organizational structure and revised educational curriculum in line with the recommendations made by her.”* Another researcher, who carried out research on increasing extremist ideologies within prisons in Kyrgyzstan said, *“The national Security Agency told me that they have taken the recommendations and revised their work strategies in relation to dealing with extremists and prisoners. However, they did not disclose what strategic changes they made for security reason”*. This was also verified by the representative interviewed during the review who also told that they cannot disclose such information for security reasons. The review team did not get any information of the contribution of other research on any aspect of the drive in countering violent extremism.

¹⁹ <http://www.24.kg/obschestvo/30564/>

²⁰ <http://inozpress.kg/news/view/id/41767>; <https://www.facebook.com/islamovedenie>

The review noticed the differentiating perspectives regarding the importance of the research between SFCG and the donor. The Conflict Advisor and the project focal point interviewed at British Embassy believed that the projects have included too many research issues while SFCG believes that they actually need to expand the research area with additional funding support provided by the donors for this particular work. The Senior Analyst of SFCG said, “To be honest, if the project is to continue, one of my recommendations is to enlarge the research area and give opportunity to increase the budget for this component.” It seems that there has not been enough communication between SFCG and the donor on the research and their practical and strategic importance as well as application. SFCG indirectly confesses that they have not been able to communicate and convince the donor about how important these research works are and how they want to use it to strategically influence and create an intellectual dialogue around multiple issues of contention. He further said, “If donors would allow and provide funding, we could have done few more research right now as we are receiving many requests from state agencies (from MOIA, state committee on religious affairs and Special Forces) to help them to carry out research on many issues as there is dearth of literatures and data in this area in the region.” SFCG claimed that some of the research papers are drawing attention of government agencies. For example, after they have seen a small analytical research on Hizb-ut Tahrir and Salafism, the presidential administration and some other state agencies are repeatedly asking SFCG to conduct another country wide research on Tablighi Jamaat²¹.

On the other hand, the British Embassy representatives believe that there has been many research outputs written in Russian but not translated into English and are thus struggling to justify the policy relevance of these research works. The review team noticed that SFCG’s primary challenge in demonstrating the value of the research is the lack of a proper dissemination strategy and utilization focused approach of the research. No dissemination and utilization strategy was developed and any sharing or dissemination of those research papers to government authorities, security agencies, and other stakeholders were done on an ad-hoc basis. Some of the outputs were disseminated simply through posting on a Facebook page, the Institute of Islamic Studies’ website, and organizing one-off press cafés. The importance of the research was also verified by the fact that the government authorities want more research and data done to base their decision making off of. With the lack of a proper dissemination strategy and strategically planned follow up activities to utilize the research as a dialogue tool around the issues explored by the research, the effectiveness and reach of the research efforts remains minimal as a policy influence tool.

The researcher who wrote the research paper on Salafism said that following it’s submission SFCG asked him to discuss the findings in some of their forums. Beyond that, he is not aware of

²¹ Tablighi Jammat is an Islamic religious movement based on the principle of the "Work of the Prophets" inviting to God in the manner of Muhammad. The movement was started in 1926 by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi in India, which was the dream of his teacher Moulana Rasheed Ahmad Gangohi. It primarily aims at Tablighi spiritual reformation by working at the grass roots level, reaching out to Muslims across social and economic spectra to bring them in line with the groups understanding of Islam. They are trained missionaries who have dedicated much of their lives to spreading Islam across the globe.

what SFCG did with this research and whether it is published or not. This indicates a lack of sustained engagement with the researcher on the issue.

Another achievement CWG facilitated by SFCG is the establishment of the Research Institute of Islamic Studies (RIIS) in Bishkek, as an independent research organization. The RIIS has established itself as a secure platform for conducting research and producing publications on Islamic Studies, and serves as a center that provides data and recommendations for all relevant state stakeholders, including the security sector. There has been some collaboration between the Institute and the CWG on a regular basis. Due to lack of sufficient funding to carry out research on issues of contention, the Institute is not functioning as effectively as expected. Since the institute was established with the CWG initiatives through SFCG support, with strong academic leadership this institute has the potential to be the facilitating platform for the sustained CWG and continued research in the field of extremism and terrorism in the future. If the RIIS leadership explores the avenues for self-dependency from financial perspective, this institute could become an influential go-to platform for state and non-state actors in Kyrgyzstan as well as the region.

2.1.6 The Youth Initiatives have a promise

The youth initiatives have yet to produce results but have developed enthusiasm among a few youth who participated in our training and other activities. SFCG provided a seed grant of USD200 for the youth projects submitted by youth participants at the training in Kyrgyzstan. The youth groups are developing different types of initiatives such as training, media products, interactions, and seminars. The review had the opportunity to watch a few video documentaries prepared by youth groups featuring locally famous celebrity role models who talked about importance of collaboration, peace, and harmony in the society. While viewing the documentary, the review found them carrying quite impressive positive messages for youth presented powerfully and believe that through strategic and wide dissemination they have the potential to create a positive vibe among youth in the country. However, due to the delay in releasing funds for those projects from SFCG, they are yet to formally implement those initiatives. They reported that there was a long gap between the actual project activities and the youth initiatives they are implementing and there was no follow up activities.

2.1.7 Production of meaningful counter narratives on Quran's message on non-violence

The video created out of Quran Reading Competition among women and girls is an important output but not utilized as a tool for promoting non-violence and peace. SFCG's work on engaging women and girls in a Quran reading contest and subsequent 2-3 minute long video documentary produced out of this contest is praiseworthy as they carried evidence-based counter narratives of various Surahs of the Quran. The documentary includes a small clip of each girl reciting selected Surahs of the Quran which condemn violence, murder, and injustice. Additionally it features an Imam who explains those Surahs from the Quran in Kyrgyz helping to produce counter narratives explaining that Quran and Islam never supported or accepted violence. These video documentaries could be an important tool to propagate counter narratives

among youth, however they remain unused due to either lack of a well thought out dissemination strategy or lack of realization of the immense potential these products carry. They have been posted on the SFCG Staff Facebook page and the website of the Institute of Islamic Studies but have very low hits. This proves to be a missed opportunity to reach out to a large number of the population and deliver a message of peace and justice.

2.1.8 Building trust and relationship through the community engagement events

These events have been a powerful tool to increase community understanding, build relationships between key leaders and community people, especially women and youth, and provided a level playing field for participants regardless of their social identity. This component contained a number of (project initiated as well as locally organized) activities such as the IQ challenge, community-security sector engagement for dialogue, food-fair, seminars/interactions, and town-hall meetings. These activities were highly appreciated as they provided an opportunity for a diverse group of people to come to a platform and play, discuss, compete, challenge, and get to know each other better. Such activities are prominent in a society where there is a huge gender gap, class division, social hierarchy, and power-based authority. The respondents, especially women and youth, said that such activities helped overcome the prejudice among each other, minimized the hierarchy, increased recognition of youth and women as equal partners in the community, and provided a level playing field for those women and youth who did not have that opportunity.

The women participants of FGDs in both Batken and Jalalabad said it was such a good feeling they competing with Imams, law enforcement officials, Kazyis, and government officials in IQ challenges, and were cooking together with those same people in the food fair. This provided a rare opportunity for them and made a huge difference. The women participants of the FGD, who also participated in the CA Women's Forum, said, *"We proved that women also have knowledge on Kyrgyz constitution and laws. On one hand, we developed confidence within ourselves, on the other, we also built relationship with those stakeholders, with whom we did not even think of taking to earlier"*. One woman in Batken FGD said; *"Education starts at home with women. If we are uneducated or did not know anything, our family becomes uneducated too. This project helped built our knowledge, understanding about religion, radicalization and extremism and we are able to differentiate what is good and what is not. This is helping us to teach our children and observe their activities accordingly"*.

When the review team asked how the project activities helped their relationships with religious leaders, one woman said, *"Earlier we did not even think of visiting office of Kaziyat, (the Religious Administrator at Oblast level), speak to them or discuss with them. However, after participating in few activities organized by the projects having interacted with them, we have experienced their behavior changed drastically towards us. The result is todays we are sitting in a Kaziyat's office and having meeting with you."* As soon as she finished saying this, the entire group of women burst into laughter, sowing their approval of the statement and expressing their joy to celebrate their new found access to this previously inaccessible structural territory. As an evaluator, this made so much symbolic meaning to me. This is major contribution of the project

in empowering women and giving them wider exposure in society. This change in behavior may not be directly linked to peacebuilding or countering violent extremism, but a step towards preparing women and providing them a larger role in society towards countering violent extremism.

The activities, such as the youth IQ Challenge, has provided avenues for youth and women to explore further the constitutional and legal provisions regarding religion and religious practices, other state laws and policies on radicalization and violence extremism, the content of the Quran, and many other similar contemporary issues around religion and conflict dynamics. The youth participants interviewed said that they felt motivated by the fact that they could compete with the religious leaders and law enforcement officials. Some of the youth groups even came out as winner in those competitions and those who could not win the competition got motivated to do even better in the future and have started going to Mosque to learn more about Quran, as well as started organizing group discussions and readings on various legal frameworks and constitutional provisions around religion, fundamental rights and other issues. One of the youth participants from the IQ challenge from Talas Region said, *“This IQ challenge stimulated other groups to gain knowledge. It was really good to bring all stakeholders together in a competition on equal footing. When we did not win the competition, we felt challenged that we did not have enough knowledge on law, history and religion. Before taking part in the IQ Challenge we had a group of 10 youth and we used to visit the office of the Islamic organization to learn about Islam. After the competition, we thought more youth should get involved in learning about Islam. We talked to many youth and we increased our group from 10 to 30 and we visit the organization once a week to discuss about Islam, and History with Theological expert and traditional education expert.”* Another youth claimed that, *“youth who joined the religious learning groups have become more tolerant and respectful towards other”*. Though there is no evidence to vindicate this claim from the participants, but his belief and opinion definitely matters as it come from his personal experience.

Another youth said, *“Before the IQ challenge, we understood Jihad in negative reference. However, during the preparation, competition, as follow up discussion with experts, we understood that Jihad has a positive meaning and it means being positive and respecting parents and elders, and being peaceful. Jihad also means transforming oneself from being lazy to active, educated and wise”*. These references presented by the participants indicate a shift towards building positivity among youth and other participants and open a new avenue for collaboration between those stakeholders who did not communicate prior to these community level initiatives.

The participants from Talaas also said, *“The interaction with government authorities during the community level activities brought us closer to them and establish communication channel. Later, in December 2015, we collaborated with local government authorities in Talaas to organized a campaign against alcohol and tobacco consumption which we thought leads to youth engagement in violent activities, starting from personal fight to organized crime/violence. We even convinced local cafes and shops to put those anti-alcohol and anti-tobacco stickers in their outlets. This spread a positive message among community people, especially youth and people still talk about those campaigns”*. This may not be directly contributing in countering

violent extremism or addressing radicalization, but definitely contributes towards building a principled understanding of Islam as well as increasing positivity of target youth groups.

In a nutshell, the few activities organized by the project initiatives and some follow up activities jointly organized by different stakeholders at the local level have been able to help build self-confidence among women and youth, providing them a sense of increased social status and recognition in society helping to motivate them to positively contribute in promoting positive messages about Islam and its non-violent principles. This is definitely a positive step towards bringing women and youth towards inclusion in the societal mainstream and promoting their constructive engagement. It has also help bridge the intergenerational as well as inter-gender gap prevailing in a traditional society and open up the adult male power brokers to accept the youth and women as partners in development.

The interviews with Kazyats, Muftiyate and Imams showed that there is growing advocacy for “Traditional Islam” among religious leaders/administrators, which indirectly communicates being more ‘religious’ (compared to being more liberal), following religious practices regularly, and promoting religious satire (not imposition) among the rural population. The conversations with different respondents revealed that there is a contrast and contradiction in the society (particularly Kyrgyzstan), which might polarize people in two poles: liberal and religious. The concept of Islam does not promote radicalization among its followers. The conversation revealed that there is ‘grey’ area in this concept, however, which could be manipulated and misinterpreted by radical and extremist groups as an opportunity to court youth and women for their vested interest.

2.1.9 Shifting Attitudes and behaviors of Law enforcement agencies (LEA) towards religious people.

There was a crisis of confidence among LEA as well as security agencies towards religious people, especially males and females who follow the rules of traditional Islamic attire. This was demonstrated by the fact that there was resistance from the representatives of the security agencies at the beginning against the female representative of the religious women’s group to becoming a member of CWG. Similarly, many respondents reported that LEA officials used to behave with skepticism towards religious people, considering that they carry fundamental value and are vulnerable to radicalization and extremism. This has shifted over the last three years and people are not suspected of being extremist just because of their attire or any other identity associated with traditional Islam. One of the CWG members said, *“The officials of the 10th unit have been more cautious about how they deal with people and how they identify radical or extremist actors. They do not randomly suspect and arrest people unless they have stronger grounds to do so.”* This is not a confession from the LEA officials rather an observation based statement of a CWG member, which has enough interaction with LEA officials during the course of this project period. People believe that this project and continuous engagement with LEA has brought positive shift in their attitude and behavior.

2.2 Prison work: A missed opportunity

Despite being one of the three project components, the prison work stream faced multiple challenges and three major activities of the component could not be implemented. SFCG brings to the table a long experience of working with prison authorities and prison inmates in other countries such as Indonesia²²²³ and Morocco²⁴. It has achieved significant results in building capacity of prison authorities in dealing with imprisoned extremists and convicted terrorists, building life skills for the prisoners, as well as creating a community environment conducive for prisoner reintegration. In this context SFCG was motivated by the fact that it could bring value added in preventing recidivism in prisons in Kyrgyzstan as well as support reintegration of former extremists into their communities and society writ large. The prison component was included in the project not only with SFCG interest to work on this field, but also from the request of the 10th Unit of the Ministry of Interior Administration (MOIA). According to the SFCG Country Director, the 10th Unit told SFCG that “there was plenty of spill over in the prison and it was beginning to become breeding ground for the violent extremism as these people in the prison were manipulating religion with criminality and want SFCG to do some work in prison.” He further said, *“We talked with prison authorities and got positive nod from them to start the programme in the prison. As result SFCG planned capacity building for staff as well as inmates.”*

While trying to implement the prison component, SFCG faced denial in three waves: first in May when a senior management changed in the SPS, second when it was denied the “instruction” from the intelligence service to SPS in August-September (in line with a terrorism act in Bishkek), and in November when there was a prison break.

Everything seemed to be going well until the Senior Management in prison changed and SFCG was denied access to the prison effective 10 Dec 2015 (Q3). The new management in the prison started a non-cooperation strategy with SFCG citing security and sensitivity reasons resulting in postponement of all activities planned for the prison component. Additionally, according to the project team, the deteriorating Kyrgyzstan-US relationship²⁵ had negative implication on government officials working with a US-registered organization. Moreover, the escape of 9 convicted terrorist prisoners from Chouï Prison No 50 on October 2015 caused the prison authorities to impose additional security measures and reduced not only SFCG access to the prison but also of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which had been working in the Prison for the last 14 years. A one month long comprehensive combing operation was carried out by the security forces and some of the escaped prisoners were shot dead by the forces.

²² M. Iqbal Ahnaf, 2013. NGO-Security Service Engagement to Stem Human Rights Abuses in Indonesia. Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS), Graduate School, Gadjah Mada University. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/INA_MT_Dec13_SFCG_Indo_Mid-Term_Evaluation_Report_DRL_D88.pdf

²³ Reducing Recidivism: A Process for Effective Disengagement of High-Risk Prisoners in Indonesia. MT Evaluation. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/INA_MT_Dec13_SCGF_NZL_MTR_Report_Revisi.pdf

²⁴ <https://www.sfcg.org/conflict-transformation-and-modernization-in-morocco-prisons>

²⁵ The Kyrgyzstan Government denounced US-KYZ cooperation agreement on 22 July 2015.

SFCG planned the inter-Institution Consultative Working Group (ICG) to bring together representatives from 21 State institutions to discuss targeted interventions in prisons. The first quarterly meeting of the Inter-Institutional Consultative Working Group (ICG) was conducted in July 30, 2015. Due to the lack of preparation and thorough planning, SFCG encountered challenges in holding meetings with these different state institutions and the group became inactive after one meeting only. Although 21 institutions met only one time, there have been follow up instances where a few members (not more than 10 at once), part of the ICG, have met informally.

When MOIA requested SFCG to do some work in prisons SFCG did not foresee any challenges and did not seek to get a formal MOU to work on such sensitive issues or a stage to sign a MoU with the prison authorities during the design of the project. In the meantime, SFCG tried to send an official letter to initiate the process for signing an MOU with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (which generally takes four months) but did not receive any response from the MOFA until the date of the review. Kanat Mambetov, SFCG Programme Coordinator said that despite SFCG managing to have a meeting with the International Department of State Penalty Execution Agency (SPEA), responsible for dealing on MOUs with international NGOs and agencies, they never received a positive response other than saying that they are looking after it. An early MOU would have helped build ownership of the project activities with the prison authorities and made it difficult for the prison authorities to renege on the arrangement. Despite all these challenges, SFCG managed to get access to two pages of the Prison newsletter for publishing project content related to religious extremism and violence and to reach out to the prisoners through the newsletter. Despite appreciation from the donor as well as other stakeholders, such as CWG members, on the content of the newsletter, the review could not trace any specific results coming out of the newsletter content.

The review team was told that the prison component was also affected by the introduction of the Foreign Agent Law, Non-profit Law, and US-Kyrgyzstan bilateral agreement denouncement, which negatively affected the implementation of the prison component for security reasons. There is a strained relationship between prison authorities and MOIA officials as well as Security agencies; even the officials from the MOIA are not sometimes given entry into the prison. Due to denouncement of US-Kyrgyzstan bilateral agreement on 22 July 2015, SFCG-Kyrgyzstan was negatively affected because SFCG is registered in Kyrgyzstan as the representative office of Search for Common Ground in Washington DC. It took some time to go through with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in the country to explain the fact that although the SFCG office is registered as the representative office, programme decisions are made locally, and its programming is locally rooted and driven and should not be subjected to restrictions resulting from the denounced bilateral agreement. Also, SFCG's office in Kyrgyzstan does not have funding that falls under the bilateral agreement. As the result of communication and dialogue with stakeholders and SFCG HQ, it is decided to initiate re-branding of SFCG programmes.

SFCG also organized International Platform for De-radicalization in Central Asia in which the prison authorities, representatives of Anti-terrorism Departments, Ministry of Interior Affairs

(MOIA), State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) and independent experts from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan participated. The meeting produced a Communiqué, which furnished recommendations to CA governments on how to deal with violent extremism. This is further explained on the CA component section.

SFCG also invited senior officials from the De-radicalization Centre of Kazakhstan, which was partnering with civil society in de-radicalization work, to the International Platform. While SFCG was facing challenges because of lack of entry permission into the prisons, SFCG brought together the Public Unity of Progressive Women (PUPW) 'Mutakalim', a NGO run by women religious leaders, to discuss on how to engage civil society in prison work. When SFCG realized that the prison work would not go ahead, they revised their strategy to carry out training on only women prison.

SFCG's Kyrgyzstan team, in partnership with the Muttakalim, conducted the first round of training sessions on tolerance and conflict sensitivity within Islam, including the CVE issues, for 317 detainees (out of whom 18 are on a probation payroll) of the women prison located in Steptoe village. After having conducted first round of training for all 300 women and following up with a second round of training for 60 women prisoners, the Conflict Advisor of the British Embassy requested a pause on the entirety of the prison component citing potential of human rights violations of the people approaching the (proposed) rehabilitation center as there was high chance that the security agencies access their names and contacts from the record book of rehabilitation centre.. However, the first round of training conducted by Muttakalim was highly appreciated by the prisoner women. Jamal-Ajy, the Head of Muttakalim retold the story of a woman prisoner who found a new meaning of life after participating in the training, though the review could not verify this claim independently and could not get access to interview any of the women participants in the training. However, Kanat Mambetov, programme, Coordinator of SFCG explained, *"We used to train them between 9am-11 am for the prisoners every day. One day we were late in reaching the prison and we could only start the training at 11.30. However, By 12 Noon, it was already lunch time, while we were only 30 minutes into our training. At 12 noon, we were supposed to finish the training to break for lunch. However, the inmates were so interested in the training that they decided to forgo the lunch and, instead, continue the training for next two hours. This proves how much they were enjoying the entraining and learning from it"*.

Due to the fact that the initial three set of activities were not being implemented in the Prison component for the reason explained above, SFCG has searched for other areas to get access to prison work. Thus, SFCG negotiated with the British Embassy in Bishkek to revise the programme and open a Prevention and Rehabilitation Centre for detainees convicted for violent extremism and terrorism and their families, and victims under the umbrella of State Committee on National Security. SFCG also negotiated with the State Prison Service and State Committee on National Security to collaborate with the operation of the prevention and rehabilitation Centre. Additionally, SFCG negotiated to open a reintegration center for women prisoners to build their capacity of economic empowerment post-release. When SFCG was about to open the center, it was requested by the British Embassy to go through the requirements for Overseas

Security and Justice Assessment (OSJA). In light of discussions with the OSJA, it was revealed that the establishment of a rehabilitation center, specifically, could pose potential risks to human rights compliance, and SFCG's intervention to the prison service, in general. The donor thought that we did not have enough protection mechanisms to safeguard the personal safety of those who would be reaching us in the center. Principally, SFCG was not in position NOT to disclose the identity of the caller once the security agencies ask for details of the callers. As a result, the idea of launching rehabilitation and de-radicalization centers was paused. Despite the donor asking SFCG to pause the activities, there was no hope for continuing the activity unless drastic change took place within the prison administration. A ray of hope emerged when the deputy of head of the National Security committee was appointed as the Head of Prison Administration on early March 2016.

2.3 CA Component

The lack of collaboration and the very limited diplomatic relations among the countries in the Central Asia Region is an enabling factor for violent extremist groups to take hold. This is further complicated by the complex and, often, restricted political environment, which limits the active engagement and contribution of civil society groups in countering radical ideals. Global experience with insurgent groups of all kinds suggests that a failure of governments to work together to address shared threats in combination with weak relationships between citizens and state authorities are both key factors that enable armed conflict. In this context, the project interventions targeting the four Central Asian Countries are highly relevant in promoting cross border collaboration between government agencies as well as civil society organizations in promoting dialogue, interactions and collaboration as an entry point in countering the larger challenges of religious and violent extremism in the region. The shared platform this project is providing to state agencies, including law enforcement agencies and security agencies, religious leaders, civil society groups including women and youth and independent experts from all four countries has opened up a door for a discourse in collectively and strategically countering violent extremism in the countries and the region. The exchanges and sharing between stakeholders from countries like Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, to stakeholders from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan carries immense meaning in addressing the challenges of religious and violent extremism in the region in the long run.

The activities under CA component were mostly interactive forums and dialogue among different groups of Stakeholders. Since this component started merely nine months ago and despite having follow up plans for the coming years, most of the activities did not have time to organize proper follow up mechanisms for this project cycle. Principally speaking, this component does not merit a thorough analysis, as it does not pass the evaluability assessment. The following section present a reflective account of those activities and some analysis based on participants perception on those events and evaluators' interpretative analysis based on the country context and the challenges faced by the region because of the rapidly growing radicalization and extremism. The activities under this component were Central Asia Leadership Council meeting (also called meeting of the Experts of Central Asia), Central Asia Youth Forum (held in Kyrgyzstan), Central Asia Ulema Forum (held in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), Central

Asian Forum of Women Religious Leaders (held in Kyrgyzstan), and Central Asia Forum of Anti-terrorist agencies (held in Kyrgyzstan).

Major output of the projects are:

The Central Asia Ulema Forum is an important meeting organized to bring all the Ulemas of the CA countries, considering the very little opportunity for those Ulemas to come together and discuss a very sensitive issue of violent extremism and its linkage to the dominant religion in the region. The objective of the Forum was to establish a dialogue between the prominent religious scholars and leaders (Muftiys and the Ulemas) of Central Asia on countering religious radicalization leading to violent extremism. The importance of the meeting was highlighted by the CWG members and the CALC members (interviewed) who were part of the meeting. The Forum, organized on 30 October 2015 in Almaty, initiated a collaboration with the Association of the Centers of Religion Research and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan. This is the first ever event participated by the top religious leaders, the Muftiys of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, that they sat together since 2007 (according to the information from the Mufiyate of Kazakhstan) to discuss common issues and treats.

One of the key achievements of the Ulema Forum is the fact that the key religious leaders of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) shared their thoughts, concerns and challenges on countering religious radicalization leading to violent extremism in their respective countries and discussed possible avenues for cooperation on this issue within the entire region. Another major achievement of the Forum was the drafting and agreeing on the Central Asia Ulema Resolution, which appealed to the people of the region drawing some saying from Prophet Mohammed, which condemns murder, violence and injustice. The resolution encouraged young people to refrain from radicalization and joining radical extremist groups, including joining the radical groups fighting in hostilities in the Middle East. Also, the religious leaders have proposed following set of recommendations for further collaboration.

- Collect the list of books left from the ancestors and teaching according to the principles of *Hanafi Mashab of Matirudi aqida*, to be used at the Islamic Universities and madrasahs across the Central Asia;
- Develop a unique religious educational programme for Central Asian Islamic universities and schools on the basis of the writings of the ancient ancestors, Islam scientists narrating traditional Islam specific to the region;
- Grow up religious leaders as *Imam abun Masul Matrudi*, who could unite all Muslims of Central Asia during the period of *fitnah* and confusion;
- Visit of Central Asian imams with *hutba* reading in the form of rotation across Central Asia;
- Proclaim 2016 year as a year of Imam Abu Hanifa as a sign of the unity of Central Asia;
- Convene Ulema, Muftis and scholars of Central Asia in the form of the given Forum in one of the next country members next year.

This was published in Russian to ensure every reader in the region understands it. This was a joint effort of the Ulemas of three participating countries (other than Uzbekistan) to show their

commitment to reduce radicalization in the region. The resolution was disseminated through Facebook and SFCG website, in the lack of a clearly spelled out dissemination strategy and target stakeholders and how to reach them.

Central Asia leadership Council (CALC) was formed to initiate Track II Diplomacy in contributing towards reducing violent extremism in the region. The CALC meeting, held on 26-27 November in Almaty, Kazakhstan, was an initiative that provided opportunity for SFCG to collaborate with the Kazakh Institute for Strategic Studies, under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This collaboration towards reducing violent extremism in the region is already an achievement in itself, as it brought academic experts, religious leaders and government authorities from the regions together for the first time to discuss the challenges of violent extremism in the region and discuss strategy to overcome this. The representatives of the institutes of strategic studies of Central Asian countries i.e. Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and other regional experts discussed the issues of regional security, the situation in Afghanistan and the Middle East, and its potential impact on the security in the respective countries of the region. The CA level meetings were closed to media due to the sensitive nature of the discussion. The experts also raised a number of issues, such as the role and place of Central Asia in the global geopolitics, the Afghan factor and Central Asia, the threat of ISIS as a raising threat or a myth, influence of the Syrian crisis on Afghanistan and the Central Asia, influence and the role of international actors in the Near East. The group produced vision papers for each of the countries and wrote five research papers which are yet to be finalized. Unfortunately the research outputs could have much impact on the project activities as they are still in the process of getting finalized and the English version is yet to be published. Another potential output of the CALC is the proposed ‘Matrix of Threat’, which maps the possible threat of the violent extremism in each of the countries and the region, which the selected CALC member from each country are writing. At the time of this review of the project, the Matrix of threat document has not been completed. Similarly, the white papers published by the CALC have not been well disseminated to maximize its relevance to context.

The CALC meeting also saw the presentation of the findings of the five research papers conducted under this component and discussion were held. The CALC members interviewed said that the research work are insightful and bring value to the mission of countering violent extremism by expanding the knowledge base on the various aspect of the dynamics and threat of the violent extremism in respective countries. However, the evaluator could not get access to those papers in English as they are still being finalized.

The participant of the meeting from four CA countries agreed following major actions for future collaboration.

- The Institute on Strategic Inter-regional Studies of Uzbekistan will make recommendations on cooperation with the countries of Central Asia through cultural, spiritual spheres. This recommendation will also submit a recommendation on how to mobilize and engage the clergy of Uzbekistan in preventing violent extremism in the region.

- The Center of Strategic Studies of Tajikistan committed for further collaboration and proposed to conduct the next meeting of CALC in Dushanbe, subject to availability of funding.
- The Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies proposed conducting a regional research on CVE work to furnish recommendations to counter violent extremism in the region. It also proposed to widen the coverage of the research to Turkey and Russia as migrants and their involvement in the conflict zones in the Middle East have a bearing in the radical and extremist in the region in the future.
- The experts proposed to establish a permanent working group of experts and consider financial support for their work; The Working Group will work in online mode, and develop an action plan, a programme of meetings, the concept of meetings and release results.

The immediate impact of the initiative and commitment of the CALC members and institutions completely rested in the follow up actions to convert those commitments and proposals into action. However, the follow up action were envisioned for the years following the end of the project, and due to uncertainty of whether the project would receive further funding, the proposed actions have been limited to paper only until now, with a hope that they could be implemented in the future. The CALC members emphasized that the one -off gatherings and discussions will not improve the regional or local ability to respond to the challenges of violent extremism. However, they agreed that the meeting was a good platform for improving collaboration between the experts on CA level and improving their understanding of the current situation on CVE in the CA.

The Central Asian Youth Forum (CAYF) was held on October 22-23, 2015, bringing together prominent young leaders and activists from four Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The objective of the Forum was to establish and strengthen links between young leaders in Central Asia around the issue of youth engagement in preventing/countering violent extremism and radicalization, and creating an interactive platform for effective collaboration between the youth of Central Asian countries in peace-building and security in the region. The interview carried out with participating youth revealed that the activity has been able to build link and sustain it (till the time of data collection) among the participants through Facebook and WhatsApp. Almost every single youth interviewed said that they are regularly connecting with others through these social media tools and exchanging ideas, opinion, information and alerts. They also share ideas around programming and help each other using virtual methods.

The forum was organized in two formats. The first part consisted of orientation to the youth by prominent experts in the field of violent extremism and the second part was the dialogue among youth participants and drafting a Central Asian Youth Declaration. The forum was able to provide awareness and knowledge to young participants on various aspects of radicalization, extremism and violent extremism through the prominent experts of the region. One of the CALC members, who also contributed as a resource person in the forum said that the expert speaker from Uzbekistan is one of the most prominent and authentic person in the region while speaking

of the problem of Violent extremism in the region. All the youth participants during the interview said the forum not only helped them learn new knowledge on radicalization and violent extremism, it also helped them to know youth from other countries and develop an informal network through social media which they are maintaining till date. They are using WhatsApp as an effective tool in keeping in touch with them and share resources and information among each other.

The youth explained that the forum helped them to learn about the state of violent extremism in each of the country as well as in the region, the psychology behind the recruitment drive and how youth and women are manipulated for recruitment and the security matrix of the region in relation to growing radicalization and extremism. The pretest and post test data shows that 63% (out of total 36) of participants have improved knowledge on topic of violent extremism while 49% learned of Central-Asia's best practices on peacebuilding and preventing conflicts. Also, 40% demonstrated improved knowledge on psychology and methods of recruiting young people into terrorist organizations and how to avoid being recruited.

It helped them to understand the dynamics and think strategically how they can avoid getting influenced by those radical groups. More than four months after the Forum, young participants still remember some of the knowledge and information they learned, especially around psychosocial reasons for youth and women to joined extremist groups, different radical organizations operating in CA countries and experts' suggestions how to avoid being influenced by radical/extremist groups.

One of the major outputs of the Forum was the development of a Central Asian Declaration which incorporated the key messages from the Amman Declaration, issued at the Youth and Peace building Summit in Jordan, and the statements adopted at Youth and CVE Summit in New York City, USA. However, the evaluation team found that the youth could not take ownership of the declaration as it was driven by the organizers (as guided by the Amman Declaration of which the participants were unaware) rather than coming out of the participants. Further, there was no follow up activities planned to disseminate the declaration widely among youth across the entire region and not a single youth participants interviewed did mention the declaration during the interview. This is a major lesson learned that SFCG needs to make sure in the future that any outputs produced through the participants in any platform should have strong ownership rather than coming out of the organizers. Even after that, there was ample opportunity for SFCG to develop a dissemination strategy and use this document as a discussion and awareness-building tool among youth from all four countries through their local partners – a further lesson for implementation of future projects.

By the end of the Forum, five initiatives have been supported to be implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, on peace-building and security in the region. Young leaders have also contributed to identifying key perspectives and challenges in Central Asia and opportunities for engaging youth in CVE. However, there was management challenge of disbursing the budget for selected youth initiatives and the project were yet to be implemented during the time of review. SFCG team explained that it took more than two months for them to

hire a lawyer who could oversee the contract with youth groups from three other countries and from Kyrgyzstan.

The Central Asia Forum for Muslim Women Leaders was another dialogue platform organized as part of the Central Asia Leadership Dialogue to activate different sections of CA society in countering violent extremism. This forum provided opportunity to women leaders from four central Asian Countries to know each other, interact with each other and enhance their knowledge and understanding on radicalization and violent extremism facing their countries as well as the region. The forum discussed the challenges face by women in Central Asia and potential threat of women's manipulation and recruitment by various radical and extremist groups and came out with a resolution as a collective commitment to counter the challenge facing them (see annex 4). The review team managed to speak to some of the women participants of the forum and they said it was an important meeting that brought together women from all four countries into a single platform to share their knowledge, experiences a challenges and discuss how to overcome or manage them.

A follow up meeting was planned in Dushanbe in Tajikistan, but the deteriorating political situation in Tajikistan and imprisonment (and potential disappearance) of the women belonging to Islamic Party of Tajikistan, who represented in the forum from Tajikistan caused the Tajik team to withdraw its status as host and the forum has not taken place again. The Kazakh team never showed interest in hosting the second forum. The participants from Kyrgyzstan, in the leadership of the Muttakalim, are willing to host the second forum, subject to availability of funding, which they have not been promised so far. The review team did not get any significant results or indications towards achieving results from the women forum because of the lack of follow up activities and inability of many of the women participants to continue the network through social media as done by the youth participants. It is important to note that perception based results of any activities do not last long in the absence of follow up activities, despite of their noble objective. Similar fate has met with the dialogue initiative among Muslim women leaders in the region.

The Anti-Terrorism Forum of CA countries for National Security Service agencies brought together the Anti-terrorism Units of National Security Services, prominent Islamic scholars and the Spiritual Administration of the Muslim Communities of the given countries, along with Anti-terrorism Department of NSA, law enforcement officials and MOIA officials, Representative of State Council on Religious Affairs (SCRA) and independent thematic experts were brought together in Astana, Kazakhstan. The objective of the forum was to share how the state authorities are working and what are the measures they have been applying in addressing the issue of radicalizations and extremism and how they are dealing with the extremist groups and individuals. According to SFCG, it was an attempt to establish a CWG at the CA regional level. However, it did not work out well due to a number of disagreement among the participating stakeholders. So, at the end it ended up being like a forum

Despite not agreeing to form a CA CWG, It was the first time these groups came together in a single platform and was considered important step towards building collaboration for addressing

violent extremism in the region. There was a joint Communique issued at the end of the meeting that expressed commitment for further collaboration in the future. It was one-off event and there has not been any follow up activities within the short period of time, and hence no specific results could be documented. However, there few examples which shows the Prosecutor general of Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyzstan are quite impressed with the meeting.

For example, the SFCG team reported that the Prosecutor General of Kyrgyzstan reached out to Julia Desinenko, one of the experts in Kazakhstan who facilitated the process of the meeting, and expressed his willingness to organize a similar activity in Kyrgyzstan. The Ministry of Law officials also reached out to Julia, as she was the lead face of the meeting, and told her that they are also interested to continue such dialogue and sharing and how they can be part of this. However, the communication could not take a concrete shape as the project was coming to a closure and there was uncertainty of availability of funding for such events. As an example of the appreciation of the SFCG Initiative, the prosecutor general of Kazakhstan sent a nicely framed token of appreciation letter to SFCG Kyrgyzstan. These small examples do not demonstrate any specific results, but rather point towards growing interest of the State agencies to be part of these activities and support the SFCG Initiative. It shows that there is growing urgency among the State agencies to devise strategies for addressing violent extremism and they are willing to cooperate with civil society groups and other agencies towards countering VE.

Chapter-Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

The project on ‘Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Peace in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia’ is a promising initiative considering the challenging and varied level of authoritative political regimes and growing influence of violent extremism in the region. The project is trying to address a deep-rooted problem that has been linked to very sentiment of religion and its manipulation to fulfil the vested interest of a certain group of people that are trying to use violence in the name of religion and exercise power through violent approach. SFCG started this Initiative in Kyrgyzstan two and a half years ago and in rest of the Central Asia merely nine months ago. The review has taken into consideration the gravity of the problem and its deep rooted nature as well as the length of the project.

The Kyrgyzstan component of the project has started to give some indicative results while the Central Asia component is implemented for too short period to expect any results, but has come out with some good initiatives and significant outputs which could be used as tools for promoting peace and harmony as well as regional level collaboration in the near future. Thus, this review looks into what are the initiatives the project this started and what hold for the future of these initiatives.

Considering the sensitivity of the issue, implementation challenges caused by the lack of cooperation by some section of the State Agencies, Prison Authorities and not-so-welcoming response from the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) caused by the denouncement of US-Kyrgyzstan Partnership Agreement in 22 July 2015, introduction of Foreign Agent Law and Non-profit Law, the results achieved by the project are worth mentioning. However, this project is not without challenges and lesson learned for the future, which SFCG needs to pay attention while designing and implementing similar activities in the future.

The Kyrgyzstan component established a sustained a dialogue platform in the form of Consultative Working Group (CWG). It brought stakeholders from state and non-state actors together into a platform to discuss the challenges faced by violent extremism, which the state agencies, security agencies and the religious leaders were not even willing to accept that such challenge exists in the country. The CWG has provided them a shared platform that provides opportunity for shared understanding of the issue of violent extremism and collaboration to address the challenge. It has resulted into increased trust, understanding and cooperation between security sector, women, state agencies and religious leaders to jointly work towards increased public awareness of the issue of radicalization, violent extremism, and Islamic principles in a society which was struggling to the legacy of 70 years of state guided atheism and misleading interpretation of religion to spread radicalization. This project has hit hard on those pain points of Kyrgyz society. Of the challenges of the CWG it is an informal platform and there has not been enough discussion in the last two and a half years that how SFCG plans to leave the CWG, when

it moves itself out of the facilitating role and what could be the sustainability strategy of the platform.

The project has contributed in increased interaction and trust among law enforcement agencies (LEA), and the community, especially the women and youth, who were having crisis of confidence of each other. The project has not only contributed in improved relationship but also shifted attitude and behavior of security people towards religious people, especially youth and women. However, the activities are limited and lack saturation to reach out more people through strategic programming. Further to this, the project activities, especially the community level events have been able to provide level playing field among security agencies, religious leaders, religious administrators and common people, especially women and youth, which was not considered possible before the implementation of the project.

Similarly, the project's contribution on exploring various aspects of Islam, radicalization, extremism, through various research is a good initiative. However, these research works are complement by formally articulated stakeholder specific dissemination strategy (ies) to make them more impactful and create a larger conversation among concerned stakeholders to generate multiplier effect at national to local level.

The Central Asia component has been implemented for the last nine months and yet has been able to generate regional level multi-stakeholder discussion and collaborative engagement to deal with the growing challenges of extremism in the region. Various platform and forums organized simultaneously mobilized different stakeholders such as state agencies, law enforcement agencies/anti-terrorism units, independent experts, religious leaders, women and youth to discuss same agenda and try to devise strategy and options to collectively address the challenge from their respective platforms.

The Central Asia Component of the project in the last few months has organized important breakthrough initiatives and produced important collaborative outputs that might have far reaching consequences in the future in dealing with the challenges of violent extremism in the region. These outputs need to be disseminated strategically and use them as advocacy and awareness tools for promoting spirit of Islam, non-violence and message of peace among large population, especially the vulnerable groups from minority groups, women and youth. SFCG, however, has not lost the opportunity to build on those products and a strategic action plan on how to make the Quran reading Video documentary, Youth declaration, Ulema Council Resolution, CALC Regional Communique and other recommendations and needs to be exploited their value in next phase of programme design.

In summary, the project has initiated number of indicative results and strategic outputs that needs to be continued in future programme design and the gain achieved in this project cycle needs to be harnessed strategic application of those outputs and continuous engagement of the stakeholders involved. With saturation of the activities to reach out to larger geography and demography, it has potential to contribute in countering violent extremism and promoting peace and harmony in the region.

3.2 Recommendations

While the project has achieved many positive results over the last two and a half years, there has been areas that the team could do better in the days to come. The review team appreciates and acknowledges all the good work done by the project and provides following recommendations to make this initiatives even more effective in creating conducive environment for reducing radicalization and extremism in Kyrgyzstan and the CA region.

- The CWG as a multi-stakeholder platform has received high recognition and appreciation from all quarters of society. However, there is lack of clarity and strategic thinking on the future of the CWG as a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue and its sustainability. SFCG needs to start developing an exit strategy from its role as a facilitator and convener to promote the CWG's independence so that it does not cease to function once the project initiative comes to an end.
- A concern raised by some of the CWG members is the issue around the challenges brought by the power dynamics within the CWG. SFCG needs to adapt a cautious approach in maintaining power dynamics within the groups and ensure a level-playing field for all the members of CWG. This will ensure that the members do not lose interest in CWG. A self-reflection of CWG management over the last two and a half years might be helpful for SFCG.
- Considering the initial success of the community-based activities organized by SFCG and few independent activities organized by 10th Unit, SFCG needs to develop strategic actions that reaches large mass of people, especially women and youth. SFCG may need to rethink strategic tools that might have a larger impact in mass mobilization and generating awareness among large population at once.
- The significant challenges posed by the issue of violent activities and its growing influence demands long-term commitment as well as geographical saturation in order to bring societal change in denouncing violence.
- Social media, especially WhatsApp is quite popular among youth and SFCG needs to exploit this platform for reaching out to more and more youth and women as a communication tool as well as disseminating counter narratives and positive social messages.
- The review found that there is lack of follow up activities to maintain or sustain the impact of different activities. It should be noted that one-off activities cannot bring desired change or sustain the immediate change observed in participants' knowledge, attitude or behavior unless they are constantly engaged through follow up activities and mechanism. Thus, it is important that SFCG pay attention in devising follow up activities that are interlinked with initial set of activities so that no activity remains stand alone in the whole project cycle.
- The review found that there is no sense of ownership of the youth declaration among the youth participants of the CA Youth Forum. It is important that SFCG develops specific strategy in developing a sense of ownership among participants while producing project

outputs or organizing activities, so that they can continue to learn from those documents and apply them in their work. The youth declaration could be a strong dialogue and discussion point of entry if disseminated strategically among the vulnerable youth population across the country.

- There has been a ‘disconnect’ between the donor and SFCG on the importance and utilization of the research papers. This is largely due to lack of frequent communication between these two organizations on the progress, use and dissemination of the document and their timely translation of these research papers in English. SFCG needs to work closely with donor to demonstrate the value for money of our research work and their application as a tool for policy advocacy. SFCG should be able to demonstrate how we are adding value through our research and how the research is disseminated. A timely translation of those documents into English and submission to the donor with proper dissemination and utilization plan may be of great help in overcoming this disconnect.
- The significant delay in fund release from SFCG (for whatever reason it may be) for Micro-projects developed out of youth forums and meetings caused the youth to lose momentum. It is important that SFCG distributes micro-project grants to concerned stakeholders in appropriate time to produce meaningful results. It is also recommended that the project activates be complete at least one month before the project review so that review could capture holistic results.
- Despite denouncing radicalization and fundamentalism, there is growing advocacy for “traditional” Islam, especially among religious leaders and religious administrators, who were also part of the project activities. However SFCG and state authorities may need to be cautious on how extremist group might miss-interpret the meaning of Traditional Islam and use this for promoting radicalization, among youth people, especially girls and women.
- SFCG’s work with women has been a tool for women empowerment and their exposure outside of their houses. The next phase should pay attention in bringing peacebuilding lens in this activity by promoting their role in building and molding the young generation of men and women.
- There has been confusion as to who constitutes civil society in Kyrgyzstan. Many people struggled to articulate this. Most of the respondents even said that there is no civil society in Central Asia. SFCG should work towards institutionalizing the concept of civil society through CWG, CALC and other platform to develop them as a positive force in dealing with radicalization and Violent Extremism.
- Considering the importance of prison work, SFCG needs to review its prison work and associated challenges in a changing context and devise strategy how we could still continue this component without jeopardizing the human rights of the individuals under discussion. A potential areas of work could be developing strategy for reintegration of prisoners post-release, by supporting them for life skills development and preparing the host community for accepting them in the society.
- It is important to carry out a conflict analysis before envisioning a programme intervention, especially of such sensitive area in a resistive political context. This was particularly evident from the challenges faced by the prison work.

- SFCG should continue to build relationship with government agencies and security agencies in Kyrgyzstan and in other CA countries to communicate its impartial culture so that its US-based identity does not jeopardize its efforts in the region. Efforts should be made to building relationship with the Ministry of External Affairs, State Penalty Execution Agency/Prison Authority, State Commission of Religious Affairs (SCRA), which were less supportive to SFCG and its work.
- SFCG should adopt a utilization focused approach for the important outputs produced out of the Central Asia dialogue/forums/meetings and think strategically in advance how it wants to utilize those products towards creating an environment for countering violent extremism in the region. There needs to be a specific strategy in promoting the CA Youth Declaration as a tool for positive mobilization of youth. The Children and Youth Department within SFCG, which demonstrated exceptional leadership leading towards the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, could provide valuable advice towards this. Similarly, SFCG needs to develop specific strategies to utilize the Ulema Council Resolution, and CALC recommendations in order to mobilize the leadership from these platforms to contribute collectively and cause multiplier effect in promoting peace and social harmony
- In order to strengthen SFCG's work in the CA countries, it needs to build relationships with government authorities in those region so that our efforts are not looked skeptically by them.
- SFCG has made a significant achievement starting the CA components tends and collaborating with different stakeholders (including the Government agency in Kazakhstan) and needs to continuously engage them in dialogue, sharing and learning in order to sustain the breakthrough provided by this initiative. SFCG has been able to draw renowned experts from these countries and engaging them continuously will help this field groan and devise better CVE strategy for the region.

Annexes:

Annex 1: List of Research Topics and other Publications

- I. Strengthening Capacity to Prevent Violent Extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic – 11 research topics (available in Russian and English):
 - Models of State-Islam Relations in Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Norway, and Israel: Lessons to be Learned;
 - The Muftiyate as an Institute of the Muslim Community and its Potential for Building Interfaith Dialogue in Kyrgyzstan;
 - Interaction Mechanisms of State Structures and Islamic Organizations in Preventing Extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic;
 - Teaching Pluralism in Conflict Resolution through Central Asian Religious Traditions;
 - Assessing the Possibility of Building a Kyrgyz Theological School;
 - The Role of Imams in Conflict Prevention;
 - Assessing the Role of Imams in Conflict Resolution;
 - Problems within the Interaction between Law-Enforcement Authorities and Religious Organizations in Countering Religious Extremism: National and Public Security;
 - Strategies for Combating Violent Extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic;
 - The Psychological and Social Portrait of an Extremist and Terrorist;
 - The Typology of Thought and the Steps of an Extremist: Internal Reasons for Radicalization and Protest;
- I. Baseline Assessment Report in the framework of the “Strengthening Capacity to Prevent Violent Extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic” project (available in Russian and English);
- II. Kyrgyzstani fighters in foreign terrorist organizations (available in Russian);
- III. Strategic Matrix – Islam 2040 (available in Russian and English);
- IV. Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic State Policy in the religious sphere for 2014-2020 (available in Kyrgyz and Russian);
- V. Tutorial guidance "Regulatory legal procedure of registration of religious organizations (objects) and the examination of religious materials (available in Kyrgyz and Russian);
- VI. A white Book outlining the recommendations for streaming the CVE work in Kyrgyzstan to be conducted in collaboration with the state agencies and the religious society was produced and presented at the Dialogue on Faith and the State (available in Kyrgyz, Russian and English);
- VII. Publication on the Central Asian Forum of Muslim Women «Paradise is at the feet of the mother» (available in Russian);
- IX. Publication on the Central Asian Ulema Forum "Harmony and creativity - the traditional foundation of Islam in Central Asia" (available in Russian);
- VIII. “Salafism in Kyrgyzstan: threats and opportunities” (available in Kyrgyz and Russian);
- IX. Tutorial guidance for secondary school students “The State and Religion’ (available in Kyrgyz and Russian);
- X. “The perception of the population of the Kyrgyz Republic to the ideology of violent extremism and evaluation of the public politics to counter extremism” (available in Russian)

- XI. White Book of recommendations and proposals based on activities held by International non-profit Organization “Search for common ground” within programme “Religion and Peace-Building” (available in Kyrgyz, Russian and English);
- XII. Handbook for imams (available in Kyrgyz and Russian);
- XIII. Collection of Friday Prayers for imams (available in Kyrgyz);
- XIV. Central Asia amid Global Threats (available in Kyrgyz, Russian and English):
 - Kazakhstan – “Role of religious factor in the process of nation building in the Republic of Kazakhstan: constructive and destructive aspects” ;
 - Kyrgyzstan - “Hizb ut-Tahrir” in Kyrgyzstan: conditions and trends (Field study);
 - Tajikistan – “Role of women in religious radicalization in Tajikistan”;
 - Uzbekistan – “Islamization of social and political spaces of Uzbekistan: the contest, forms, and perspectives”.

Annex 2: Central Asian Ulema Forum Resolution

Resolution
Central Asian Ulema Forum
«Harmony and creativity - the traditional basis of Islam in Central Asia»

Islam against extremism and terrorism

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا إِلهٌ عَلَيْنَا وَآصْدَاقِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ

With the name of Allah Gracious and Merciful.
Praise to Allah - Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings to Honorable Prophet Muhammad, his family and Sahaabah!

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالْعَصْرَ (الْأَمْ) نَسْأَلُكَ الْخَيْرَ مِنْكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ (٣)

With the name of Allah Gracious and Merciful.

"I swear by the late afternoon time that people are suffering, except those who believe and do righteous deeds, enjoined on each other truth, and charged each other patience!"

Islam is a religion of high culture and civilization based on universal values. Islamic culture and civilization throughout the fifteen centuries calls all mankind, regardless of nationality and descent, to the kindness, mercy, generosity and justice. Islam for centuries around the world proves that it is the source of science, education and civilization. Islam is against violence and evil, on the other hand promotes the idea of goodness and mercy. The Holy Quran says:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَبِالْمَعِينِ عِظْ أَقْرَبَ حَسَنَةً وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

"Invoke the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and bring the dispute with them in the best way"²⁶.

Also, the last prophet of the Almighty Creator Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sent down to the earth in order to establish peace and harmony on the earth. This is said in the Holy Quran:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

«(Oh, Muhammed!) We have sent you only as a mercy to the worlds»²⁷.

²⁶Sura «an-Nahl», 125 ayat.

²⁷Sura «an-Anbia», ayat 107.

These values of Islam today has a special role and become an integral part of the world culture. Recently, Muslims around the world are mostly concerned with the issues of extremism and terrorism. Extremism and terrorism do not recognize any religious or human values. Extremism and terrorism in their scale, speed, spread, and the threat of violence have become one of the pressing issues of modern society. The saddest thing is that the religion of Islam, which calls for a friendliness, peace and harmony, as well as tolerance for other beliefs, extremists portray in a negative way, create an image of hatred, threatening and dangerous religion. Thus, not only inter-religious harmony collapses, but also discord is sowed among Muslims. These false believers, who hide behind Islam, in order to achieve their goals, distort the meaning and adjust for their beliefs verses of the Koran and Hadith. Also, their criminal actions they associate with "jihad", which has a sacred meaning in Islam. However, there is no relationship of extremism and terrorism with Islam. This proof is the fact that Muslims even when greeting each other they wish peace. When greeting Muslims pronounce the words "Assalamu alaikum", meaning "health and peace to you the Almighty!"

Today extremism and terrorism, which is imposed to Islam threatens international security. Members of terrorist groups composed of religious illiterates who do not know even the basic tenets of Islam. The terrorist actions of these extremists completely contradict the Sharia. Almighty Allah commanded the Muslims not to go beyond what is permitted. Allah has forbidden bloodshed, injustice and meanness

In the Holy Quran Almighty Allah commands:

مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَأَفِ كَظِيمًا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

«Whoever kills a person not for murder or for spreading mischief in the land, this is as if he had killed all the people, and whoever saves the life of a man, this is as if he saves the life of all people....»²⁸.

وَلَا تَفْسُدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا

Also, in the next verse it is sternly said: "Do not spread ungodliness on the earth, after it is put in order." And who is not loved for disturbance in the society is described as follows:

وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

«They will to spread ungodliness on the earth, but Allah does not love those who spread ungodliness»²⁹.

Suicide bombers, who are armed with grenades and explosives that are killing innocent people consider themselves to be "jihadists". In fact, suicide is considered to be a major sin in Islam. This is what Almighty Allah says:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا

«Do not kill yourself (each other), as Allah have mercy on you»³⁰.

We, the participants of the Ulema Forum of Central Asia, accept the given Resolution, that will become a base for the issue of fatwas in the territory of Central Asia:

²⁸Sura «al-Maida», ayat 32.

²⁹Sura «al-Maida», ayat 64

³⁰Sura «Nisa», ayat 29.

- The Holy Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him), which are considered to be the sources of Islamic values, strictly prohibits suicide and the murder of innocent people;
- According to the Sharia killing people not implicated in the war during the war is considered to be haram;
- Islam promotes peace and tranquility in the world. Terrorist actions are completely contrary to these principles of Islam;
- Extremist actions that are hidden behind Islam - are deliberate acts against Islam.

October 30, 2015. Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Annex 3: Central Asia Youth Declaration



Central Asian Initiatives Declaration

Adopted in Central Asian Forum, Kyrgyzstan, October 22-23, 2015
Youth – Peacebuilding and Security in Central Asia Stan for Peace

Preamble

Today the question of violent extremism is the threat to the world and Central Asia is not an exception. The Syrian conflict and the events in the south-eastern Afghanistan threaten peace and security in the region.

First Central Asian Youth Forum “Youth – Peacebuilding and Security” STAN for PEACE aims to create an interactive platform of dialogue between the youth of the Central Asian countries to pre-empt and prevent violent extremism and promote peace in the region.

Recognizing that today more than ever, the issues of peace and security in the region require special attention and joint efforts to counter violent extremism;

Recognizing that one of the causes of radicalization is a low level of education, both secular and religious; We must note the lack of critical thinking skills among the population of the participating countries of the forum. This leads to the marginalization and non-involvement of society in decision-making, as well as the depressing socio-economic situation makes us vulnerable to engage in destructive groups.

We, the youth of the participating countries in the forum "Youth - peacebuilding and security in Central Asia» STAN for PEACE, express our desire to contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Central Asian region.

This declaration is based on the results of the Global Youth Forum in Amman (August 21, 2015, Jordan) and the Youth Summit in New York (September 28, 2015, USA). The declaration is developed by the youth of Central Asia. It is the result of the consultation process and the volume of work on the consolidation of all young people of the region.

Youth Participation and Leadership in peace and security in Central Asia

Today, young people are not adequately involved in the decision-making processes related to security issues in the Central Asian region, at both country and regional levels.

We, the participants of the Central Asian Youth Forum «STAN for PEACE», are realizing that the youth plays a key role in the promotion of peace and security, offer the following recommendations:

- To strengthen the work on the interaction of the youth of the Central Asian region for peace-building and security in the region;

- To build trust between youth representatives, government agencies, international organizations, experts, the media, civil society organizations, religious communities through the creation of a dialogue platform uniting all of these groups;
- To initiate the creation of the youth wing of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the countries - participants of the forum;
- To carry out maintenance work in the educational and specialized institutions aimed at preventing and countering radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism;
- To include the programmes of disciplines relating to the history of interpretation of the world's religions, as well as a programme for critical thinking into the educational programme;
- To carry out initiatives among children and young people to enhance the role of the Family and education institutions, as well as to strengthen the moral and spiritual values;
- To assist the media to provide a versatile and objective coverage of this topic by developing their knowledge and skills.

Prevention of violent extremism by the Youth of Central

To strive for the development of the human rights institution, prevent recruitment of peers to the destructive organizations, as well as peacebuilding in Central Asia;

- To provide all possible assistance in the rehabilitation of persons - victims of recruiters of the extremist and terrorist groups;
- Actively use success stories aimed at countering violent extremism, as well as stories about the future that we want for ourselves, society and the world as a whole;
- To spread our vision and ideas about the world in which there is no place for war and violence through the media and any other sources of information dissemination;
- Actively use social media and other online resources to promote the ideas described in this Declaration;
- To support women and youth led associations by the international organizations, NGOs and government agencies;

Gender balance

- Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes.

Principles

All the efforts undertaken in the framework of this declaration shall be in accordance with international law and national legislation of the countries participating in the forum. At the same time, it is not allowed any form of discrimination based on gender, ethnic, racial and religious grounds.

- We intend to make every effort to maintain peace in the region and the world as a whole, as well as comply with all points of the Declaration to achieve its objectives.

We call on all progressive forces in Central Asia to accede to our Declaration and actively strive for its realization.

Annex 4: Central Asian Forum for Muslim Women Resolution

Resolution
Central Asian Forum of Muslim Women
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
21 August 2015

We, the participants of Muslim women forum of Central Asian countries which aims to strengthen cooperation between communities of Muslim women of Central Asian countries and governmental authorities to counter manifestations of violent extremism and reduce the attractiveness of the ideology of extremism among women, together with experts and religious scholars from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan:

- Taking into account the evolving situation in the Central Asian region;
- Considering the threat of "Daish" (ISIS) in the Middle East
- Realizing the importance of preventing the participation of women from the countries of Central Asia in the ranks of "Daish."

We address to all women and state authorities of Central Asia and encourage to join our resolution: Woman in Central Asia has an invaluable role in the upbringing of children in the family and has a great potential in anticipation of penetration of the ideology of radicalism in the view of the young generation. Islam in Central Asia, always treats women with respect and trembling, she had a special place of honor in the education of growing generation of Muslims.

We believe that the main reason for women's involvement in extremist and terrorist organizations is the lack of public awareness, as well as the low level of cooperation between state authorities and civil society in the prevention of extremism.

At the forum the most topical issues concerning the interaction of women's communities with public authorities, the wearing of religious attributes in public places, the potential and opportunities of Muslim women in anticipation of violent manifestations of extremism in the Central Asian region were discussed. Participants of forum offered practical advice and suggestions for all interested parties as follows:

1. Violent extremism cannot be defeated only by force, it requires a large-scale cooperation between government and civil society organizations in combating the ideology of extremism and terrorism;
2. It requires mutual legal and social assistance to the families of convicts, because ignorance and isolation of families of those convicted for terrorism and extremism leads to greater radicalization of the family and relatives of the convicts;
3. To open centers of social and psychological assistance for children and families convicted of extremism and terrorism within mosques;
4. Arrange the Central Asian internet portal "Expert consulting center in facilitation" to the most urgent issues concerning theology and religious studies;
5. Establish a permanent working committee from among the Forum participants to communicate and address issues of prevention of violent extremism and radicalism, which will provide a platform for activities involving Muslim women of Central Asian countries;
6. Public authorities, together with civil society must review the possibility of changes and additions to national legislation on the promotion and amnesty of voluntary coming home people from places of combat actions in the Middle East;

7. Spiritual Administration of Muslims and government of Religious Affairs in cooperation with civil society activists must strengthen the work on prevention and education among the population on issues countering the ideology of violent
8. extremism;
9. Public authorities, together with international organizations must consider the organization of rehabilitation center and hotline for the formation of the plan for preventive measures in countering violent extremism and radicalization;
10. To develop and open a blog in social network for Muslim women that will reflect the most pressing issues, exchange of experience and consultations.

Annex 5: Communiqué Issued by the Forum on Cooperation of Central Asian Countries to Counter Violent Extremism

COMMUNIQUE

Forum "Cooperation of Central Asian countries to counter violent extremism"

Representatives of the state institutions of Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan held forum "Cooperation of Central Asian countries to counter violent extremism" on September 28, 2015 in Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan.

Forum participants discussed identification of challenges and threats in Central Asian region, opportunities and prospects for international cooperation in countering violent extremism.

Participants of the meeting noted that in recent years efforts have been made to strengthen the previously established and operational integrated system of joint measures undertaken by law enforcement and other competent authorities of the countries of Central Asia in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

As a result of the meeting, the participants of the working meeting recognized the need to:

- 1) Improve forms of cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of Central Asian countries to identify and combat all manifestations of terrorist and extremist organizations;
- 2) strengthen preventive works with non-governmental human rights organizations in order to combat terrorism and extremism in various target audiences;
- 3) Enhance possibilities for exchange of experiences in new techniques and advanced scientific and technical achievements in relevant sphere, as well as thematic information-analytical, organizational materials to combat extremism and terrorism in the Internet;
- 4) Ensure regular interaction between government, law enforcement agencies and independent experts in the fight against extremism and terrorism.

Working meeting has been held in a friendly environment, in a spirit of mutual understanding, trust and constructive cooperation. Participants expressed gratitude to the leadership of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Association of Centers on Religions Studies for organization, hospitality and a high level of the Forum.

The Republic of Kazakhstan
The Republic of Kyrgyzstan
The Republic of Tajikistan

Annex 6: List of People Interviewed

Omitted from the report for sensitivity reason.

Annex 7: SFCG compilation of policy implementation of research recommendations

The results of the following analytical research conducted from August 2013 to March 2016 were reflected in the State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic:

№	Analytical research title	Recommendations	Implemented by the state
<i>Recommendations put into practice in 2013 – 2014</i>			
1.	Models of State Islamic relations of Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Norway, Israel: examples for Kyrgyzstan	Strengthening the role of the state agencies in regulating the activities of Islamic organizations to ensure the protection of public order, spiritual security, territorial integrity and constitutional order from religious extremism	Issued the decision of the Defense Council dated February 7, 2017 “On the State Policy in Religious Sphere” ³¹
2.	Studying the Muftiyate as an institution of the Muslim community as well as its capacity for interreligious dialogue in Kyrgyzstan	To provide transparency of the Muftiyate’s activities by the means of the website	Improved website www.muftiyat.kg
3.	Mechanisms of interaction of state agencies and Islamic organizations in the prevention of extremism in Kyrgyzstan	Organization of ongoing monitoring of print mass-media and electronic mass media, including Internet resources, to identify materials promoting extremist ideas	Introduced the law on blocking the websites distributing ideas of terrorism and extremism ³²
4.	Mechanisms of interaction of state agencies and Islamic organizations in the prevention of extremism in Kyrgyzstan	Establishment of the Research Institute on Islamic Studies	Established the Research Institute on Islamic Studies ³³
5.	Assessment of opportunities to establish Kyrgyz theological school	Introduction of secular subjects in religious schools as well as to provide staff and funding	Adopted multistage system of Islamic education ³⁴
6.	Problems of collaboration between law enforcement agencies and religious organizations in countering religious extremism: the state and public security	To develop the concept of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and religious organizations	Accepted the concept and on its basis MIA work with religious organizations ³⁵
7.	Psychological and social	To arrange rehabilitation	Opened a rehabilitation

³¹ www.religion.gov.kg

³² <http://www.24.kg/vlast/28809/>

³³ <http://inozpress.kg/news/view/id/41767>; <https://www.facebook.com/islamovedenie>

³⁴ <http://www.muftiyat.kg/ky/node/118>

³⁵ Утвержден отдельным приказом министра внутренних дел Кыргызской республики от 2014 года

	portrait of extremist and terrorist	measures for detainees convicted of terrorism and extremism	center and hotline at the state level ³⁶
<i>Recommendations put into practice in 2014 – 2015</i>			
8.	“White Book” a collection of recommendations and proposals as a result of the project of 2013-2015	To establish informational, educational center at Muftiyat on the developing and defining the scope of training programmes for each stage, educational and scientific literature, guidelines, requirements for intermediate exam testing	Developed curriculum and formed Institute for the training of personnel for Muftiyat management ³⁷
9.	White Book” a collection of recommendations and proposals as a result of the project of 2013-2015	To Spiritual Administration of Muslims: to conduct widespread inventory of educational religious institutions, and carry out certification of existing clergy, imams	From 2015 imams and heads of educational centers pass certification under the auspices of the Defense Council ³⁸
10.	White Book” a collection of recommendations and proposals as a result of the project of 2013-2015	To develop a programme for the rehabilitation of the consequences of extremism	Opened a rehabilitation center and hotline at the state level ³⁹
11.	Strategic Matrix «Islam – 2040»	To take under control constructions of mosques	Issued a special and closed decision of the Government and the construction of mosques and Muftiyat namazkana being stopped across the country ⁴⁰
12.	Strategic Matrix «Islam – 2040»	Issues related to the organization of the Hajj and the debt relief of the Muftiyat to the Social Fund. Number of employees of Muftiyat were prosecuted.	Parliament approved the law to write off the debts for Muftiyat Hajj to the Social Fund ⁴¹
13.	"Hizb ut-Tahrir" in Kyrgyzstan: state and development trends	To establish a rehabilitation center for returning extremists to law-abiding life in the	By the decision of the Defense Council, opened hotline and Rehabilitation

³⁶ <http://www.24.kg/obschestvo/30564/>

³⁷ URL: <http://www.24.kg/obschestvo/30569/>

³⁸ <http://nusra.info/7437/chistka-imamov-kazahstana-attestatsiyu-dumk-ne-smogli-projti-500-svyashhennosluzhitelej/> Case Study template and instruction

³⁹ <http://www.24.kg/obschestvo/30564/>

⁴⁰ <http://extranews.kg/?p=5970>

⁴¹ <http://kyrtag.kg/news/parlament-razreshil-spisat-muftiyatu-26-mln-somov-dolga-pered-sotsfondom/>

	(Field study)	community. Involve relevant specialists. Create subsequent database of extremism and its ideology in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the methodology for the rehabilitation of the members of these organizations	Center in Bishkek and Osh ⁴²
14.	"Hizb ut-Tahrir" in Kyrgyzstan: state and development trends (Field study)	To study the possibility of allocating funds for salaries of imams from the state budget of the Kyrgyz Republic.	According to the decision of the Defense Council Yiman Foundation allocates special grants for imam of the mosques since 2015 ⁴³
15.	Kyrgyzstani fighters in foreign terrorist organizations	To send official representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State committee on National Security to Turkey, Syria, Iraq, so that they can assist the citizens who went to look for their family members and stop them from entering Syria.	<p>"Department 10 online" in Anatolia!</p> <p>Department 10 of the MIA conducting active promotional and preventive measures among Kyrgyz youth abroad students. The meetings to discuss the problems of radicalization and extremism and internet patrols were conducted in Turkey, including the provinces of the Turkish-Syrian border, particularly in the city of Gaziantep.</p> <p>Similar activities will be conducted on the other day in Ankara, Istanbul, with the participation of thousands of Kyrgyz students and the diplomatic mission⁴⁴.</p>

⁴² <http://www.24.kg/obschestvo/30564/>

⁴³ <http://rus.azattyk.org/content/news/27009315.html>

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=10001118432631&fref=ts>

Annex 8: Interview Checklists

Note: These were guiding questions and were adapted depending on the participants, their exposure and other during the interview/

Questions for independent experts

1. How do you assess the religious dynamics around violence extremism in Kyrgyzstan (or Central Asia)? How religion is used/interpreted (both positively and negatively) in relations to conflict and violence?
2. What are the challenges faced in preventing violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan/CA region?
3. How is religion used/interpreted (both positively and negatively) in relations to conflict and violence?
4. In your opinion, how the violent extremism in the region has impacted women and youth?
5. What is your role as a civil society leader/academic in countering violence extremism or promoting peace?
6. What is your view in the work done by the project in overcoming the challenges faced by VE? How did you get involved in SFCG's project intervention? What role did you play? In your opinion, what results the project activities and subsequent initiatives generated towards preventing violent extremism/religious violence?
7. Has your participation in the project activities (in any capacities) brought any specific changes in the way you look into the role of religion in your society? If yes, how do you see it now? As a government official, do you feel comfortable participating in the project? Has it helped you gain new knowledge?
8. Do you believe that the project initiative has helped build relationships between state authorities (including security agencies) and religious leaders and other stakeholders? Do you believe that there is increased communication, respect and trust among these stakeholders? If yes, How? Do you observe/notice any indication of shifting relationship between State authorities and religious leaders as well as civil society organizations and religious leaders? Personally, has it helped you to build relationship and trust with other stakeholders?
9. Do you believe that the project has promoted collaboration between religious leaders and government authorities including security agencies, and other civil society organizations towards countering VE? If yes, could you elaborate with examples? Have you personally collaborated with any individual or organizations (either State or Non-state sectors)?
10. How has the project contributed in improving relationships within community (between majority and minority and interethnic, inter religious) and between the community (again both minority and majority) and the state agencies, especially the security agencies and their personnel? If you have observed/seen such improvements, can you elaborate with examples? Have the initiatives are ample enough to bring such changes? Or what else could be done or needs to be done?
11. Has the forums and meetings organized by the project successful in providing independent platform to promote sustained dialogue among diverse stakeholders to discuss and initiate actions

to counter VE? Have there been any independent initiatives started as a result of the project initiatives? If yes, could you please elaborate with concrete examples and explain what has been the result of such initiatives?

12. Have there been any constructive responses from participating stakeholders, especially religious leaders as a result of the influence of the project initiatives?
13. In your opinion, how has the government authorities and security agencies have responded to the project initiatives? How do you see their participation and response towards the Non-state initiative to prevent VE? Are they positive enough? What can be done additionally to have a better buy-in from the government agencies and officials?
14. Has the project initiatives contributed, in any way, institutional or personal shift in the way the security officials deal with the issues around VE? Can you elaborate more on this?
15. Do you see the potential of the project initiatives such as the CWG, CALC and other initiatives to continue to operate even after the project? If not what needs to be done to make them operate independently?
16. Do you think the Non-state actors/CSO/NGOs work on CVE or promoting religion as a peacebuilding tool has the potential to promote religious tolerance in the region? If, yes, How? If NO why? Do you think such efforts will be effective in preventing radicalization (de-radicalizing) vulnerable groups such as youth and women? Why do you think so?
17. What do you think is the power of CS initiative in preventing CVE in the Country/region? As a religious leader, how do you analyze their involvement in CVE?
18. Do you have specific suggestions for the project team and other similar stakeholders who want to work for preventing VE? What opportunities it has created? How can this work be taken forward?
19. What are the strength and weaknesses of the project? What are the areas the government may want to collaborate with civil society in Countering VE?

Questions for Religious Leaders

1. How do you assess the religious dynamics around violence extremism in Kyrgyzstan (or Central Asia)? How religion is used/interpreted (both positively and negatively) in relations to conflict and violence?
2. What are the challenges faced in preventing violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan/CA region?
3. How is religion used/interpreted (both positively and negatively) in relations to conflict and violence?
4. In your opinion, how the violent extremism in the region has impacted women and youth?
5. What is your role as a religious leader in countering violence extremism or promoting peace? How can religious leaders like you and many others can play a positive role in preventing radicalization of young women and girls?
6. What is your view in the work done by the project in overcoming the challenges faced by VE? How did you get involved in SFCG's project intervention? What role did you play? In your opinion, what results the project activities and subsequent initiatives generated towards preventing violent extremism/religious violence?

7. Has your participation in the project activities (in any capacities) brought any specific changes in the way you look into the role of religion in your society? If yes, how do you see it now? As a government official, do you feel comfortable participating in the project: has it helped you gain new knowledge?
8. Do you believe that the project initiative has helped build relationships between state authorities (including security agencies) and religious leaders and other stakeholders? Do you believe that there is increased communication, respect and trust among these stakeholders? If yes, How? Do you observe/notice any indication of shifting relationship between State authorities and religious leaders as well as civil society organizations and religious leaders? Personally, has it helped you to build relationship and trust with other stakeholders?
9. Do you believe that the project has promoted collaboration between religious leaders and government authorities including security agencies, and other civil society organizations towards countering VE? If yes, could you elaborate with examples? Have you personally collaborated with any individual or organizations (either State or Non-state sectors)?
10. How has the project contributed in improving relationships within community (between majority and minority and interethnic, inter religious) and between the community (again both minority and majority) and the state agencies, especially the security agencies and their personnel? If you have observed/seen such improvements, can you elaborate with examples? Have the initiatives are ample enough to bring such changes? Or what else could be done or needs to be done?
11. Has the forums and meetings organized by the project successful in providing independent platform to promote sustained dialogue among diverse stakeholders to discuss and initiate actions to counter VE? Have there been any independent initiatives started as a result of the project initiatives? If yes, could you please elaborate with concrete examples and explain what has been the result of such initiatives?
12. Have there been any constructive responses from participating stakeholders, especially religious leaders as a result of the influence of the project initiatives?
13. In your opinion, how has the government authorities and security agencies have responded to the project initiatives? How do you see their participation and response towards the Non-state initiative to prevent VE? Are they positive enough? What can be done additionally to have a better buy-in from the government agencies and officials?
14. Has the project initiatives contributed, in any way, institutional or personal shift in the way the security officials deal with the issues around VE? Can you elaborate more on this?
15. Do you see the potential of the project initiatives such as the CWG, CALC and other initiatives to continue to operate even after the project? If not what needs to be done to make them operate independently?
16. Do you think the Non-state actors/CSO/NGOs work on CVE or promoting religion as a peacebuilding tool has the potential to promote religious tolerance in the region? If, yes, How? If NO why? Do you think such efforts will be effective in preventing radicalization (de-radicalizing) vulnerable groups such as youth and women? Why do you think so?
17. What do you think is the power of CS initiative in preventing CVE in the Country/region? As a religious leader, how do you analyze their involvement in CVE?

18. Do you have specific suggestions for the project team and other similar stakeholders who want to work for preventing VE? What opportunities it has created? How can this work be taken forward?
19. What are the strength and weaknesses of the project? What are the areas the government may want to collaborate with civil society in Countering VE?

Questions for members of state agencies/Security agencies

1. What is your role as state officials in relations to CVE? How can you effectively contribute in preventing VE in your jurisdiction?
2. How do you assess the religious dynamics around violence extremism in Kyrgyzstan (or Central Asia)? How religion is used/interpreted (both positively and negatively) in relations to conflict and violence?
3. What are the challenges faced in preventing violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan/CA region?
4. In your understanding, how the violent extremism in the region has impacted women and youth?
5. What is your view in the work done by the project in overcoming the challenges faced by VE? How did you get involved in SFCG's project intervention? What role did you play? In your opinion, what results the project activities and subsequent initiatives generated towards preventing violent extremism/religious violence?
6. Has your participation in the project activities (in any capacities) brought any specific changes in the way you look into the role of religion in your society? If yes, how do you see it now? As a government official, do you feel comfortable participating in the project: has it helped you gain new knowledge?
7. Do you believe that the project initiative has helped build relationships between state authorities (including security agencies) and religious leaders and other stakeholders? Do you believe that there is increased communication, respect and trust among these stakeholders? If yes, How? Do you observe/notice any indication of shifting relationship between State authorities and religious leaders as well as civil society organizations and religious leaders? Personally, has it helped you to build relationship and trust with other stakeholders
8. Do you believe that the project has promoted collaboration between religious leaders and government authorities including security agencies, and other civil society organizations towards countering VE? If yes, could you elaborate with examples? Have you personally collaborated with any individual or organizations (either State or Non-state sectors)?
9. How has the project contributed in improving relationships within community (between majority and minority and interethnic, inter religious) and between the community (again both minority and majority) and the state agencies, especially the security agencies and their personnel? If you have observed/seen such improvements, can you elaborate with examples? Have the initiatives are ample enough to bring such changes? Or what else could be done or needs to be done?
10. Has the forums and meetings organized by the project successful in providing independent platform to promote sustained dialogue among diverse stakeholders to discuss and initiate actions to counter VE? Have there been any independent initiatives started as a result of the project

initiatives? If yes, could you please elaborate with concrete examples and explain what has been the result of such initiatives?

11. Have there been any constructive responses from participating stakeholders, especially religious leaders as a result of the influence of the project initiatives?
12. How has the State agencies have responded to the project initiatives? How do you see their participation and response towards the Non-state initiative to prevent VE? Are they positive enough? What can be done additionally to have a better buy-in from the government agencies and officials?
13. Has the project initiatives contributed, in any way, institutional or personal shift in the way you deal with the issues around VE? Can you elaborate more on this?
14. Do you see the potential of the project initiatives such as the CWG, CALC and other initiatives to continue to operate even after the project? If not what needs to be done to make them operate independently?
15. Do you think the Non-state actors/CSO/NGOs work on CVE or promoting religion as a peacebuilding tool has the potential to promote religious tolerance in the region? If, yes, How? If NO why? Do you think such efforts will be effective in preventing radicalization (de-radicalizing) vulnerable groups such as youth and women? Why do you think so?
16. What do you think is the power of CS initiative in preventing CVE in the Country/region? As a religious leader, how do you analyze their involvement in CVE?
17. Are you willing to collaborate with SFCG and similar organizations in such projects in the future? How can they effectively collaborate with Government agencies? What needs to be improved?
18. Do you have specific suggestions for the project team and other similar stakeholders who want to work for preventing VE? What opportunities it has created? How can this work be taken forward?
19. What are the strength and weaknesses of the project? What are the areas the government may want to collaborate with civil society in Countering VE?

Questions for women religious leaders

1. How do you assess the religious dynamics around violence extremism in Kyrgyzstan (or Central Asia)?
2. What are the challenges faced in preventing violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan/CA region? How the violent extremism has impacted women and youth?
3. How is religion used/interpreted (both positively and negatively) in relations to conflict and violence?
4. What is your role as a religious leader in countering violence extremism or promoting peace? How can religious leaders like you and many others can play a positive role in preventing radicalization of young women and girls?
5. How did you get involved in SFCG's project intervention? What role did you play? In your opinion, what results the project activities and subsequent initiatives generated towards preventing violent extremism/religious violence?

6. Has your participation in the project activities (in any capacities) brought any specific changes in the way you look into the role of religion in your society? If yes, how do you see it now?
7. Do you believe that the project initiative has helped build relationship between state authorities (including security agencies) and women and other stakeholders? Do you believe that there is increased communication, respect and trust among these stakeholders? If yes, How? Do you observe/notice any indication of shifting relationship between State authorities and women leaders (and women in general) as well as civil society organizations and women leaders?
8. Do you believe that the project has promoted collaboration between women religious leaders and government authorities including security agencies, and other civil society organizations towards countering VE? If yes, could you elaborate with examples? Have you personally collaborated with any individual or organizations (either State or Non-state sectors)?
9. How has the project contributed in improving relationships within community (between majority and minority and interethnic, inter religious) and between the community (again both minority and majority) and the state agencies, especially the security agencies and their personnel? If you have observed/seen such improvements, can you elaborate with examples? Have the initiatives are ample enough to bring such changes? Or what else could be done or needs to be done?
10. Has the forums and meetings organized by the project successful in providing independent platform to promote sustained dialogue among diverse stakeholders to discuss and initiate actions to counter VE? Have there been any independent initiatives started as a result of the project initiatives? If yes, could you please elaborate with concrete examples and explain what has been the result of such initiatives?
11. How can such organizations better work to prevent women's radicalization?
12. Have there been any constructive responses from participating stakeholders, especially women religious leaders as a result of the influence of the project initiatives? If yes, what have you done?
13. In your opinion, how has the government authorities and security agencies have responded to the project initiatives? How do you see their participation and response towards the Non-state initiative to prevent VE? Are they positive enough? What can be done additionally to have a better buy-in from the government agencies and officials?
14. Do you see the potential of the project initiatives such as the CWG, CALC meeting and other initiatives to continue to operate even after the project? If not what needs to be done to make them operate independently?
15. Do you think the Non-state actors/CSO/NGOs work on CVE or promoting religion as a peacebuilding tool has the potential to promote religious tolerance in the region? If, yes, How? If NO why? Do you think such efforts will be effective in preventing radicalization (de-radicalizing) vulnerable groups such as youth and women? Why do you think so?
16. What do you think is the power of CS initiative in preventing CVE in the Country/region?
17. Has the project initiatives been able to create a 'Conversation' around CVE in Kyrgyzstan and the CA region? Can you elaborate your response?
18. Do you have specific suggestions for the project team and other similar stakeholders who want to work for preventing VE?

Questions for Youth participants of Stan4Peace Forum

1. Could you please introduce yourself? How did you get involved in the project? What was your role as project participant? Did you do anything specific as a result of your participation the project activities? If, yes, could you kindly elaborate?
2. What do you think about the Youth Forum held in Kyrgyzstan in October 2015? What are your major take away from the Workshop?
3. Did the activity and other subsequent events help, in anyway, to divert their interest of youth from fundamentalism and intolerance to religious tolerance and peaceful means?
4. How the forum and its proceedings did affected you and your thinking? Did it provided you with new knowledge or new message? If yes, what are they?
5. Has the workshop been able to create any new dialogue and conversation among youth/youth organizations in Kazakhstan and with youth from other countries sin the region? Have you continued to communicate with forum participants over the last few months? If yes, how are you communicating with them?
6. What was the major outcome of the Workshop? Was there any plan of action at the end of the workshop? What is the status of the outcomes of the workshop? Has there any progress made to positive mobilization of youth in your country/region/community?
7. Have you, in anyway, collaborated with Government authorities or civil society/social organizations, including religious organizations to initiate actions to prevent violent extremism? If yes, which agencies/organizations do you interact with? How do you interact and how often?
8. Have you been sharing and exchanging information and ideas on countering violent extremism with each other? If, yes, through what types of medium? How do you sustain this?
9. Have you initiated any joint activities in collaboration with youth or other participants after the workshop? If yes, what types of activities you have done so far? What was its outcome?
10. Has the forum opened up any opportunities for preventing youth engagement in VE in your country or region? If so, how? Or what are those opportunities?
11. Do you think, civil society organizations can contribute in reducing the VE in your country/community? If yes, how shall these organizations should work? How can they work effectively with youth?
12. How do you analyze the prevalence of VE in your country? How has it impacted to Youth? Both boys and girls?
13. What could be the effective strategies to work for the preventing youth involvement in VE? What can be done additionally other than what the project has done?
14. Do you have any specific suggestions to the project team?