FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Protect to Prevent: Enabling Central Asians to Protect Religious Freedom as a Preventative Approach to Addressing Violent Extremism

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ACRONYMS:
SFCG, Search - Search for Common Ground
PVE - Prevention of violent extremism
ToC – Theory of Change
MSWG - Multi-stakeholders working group
CSO - Civil society organizations
FGD - Focus group discussion
CVE - Countering violent extremism
FoRB - Freedom of religious beliefs
UBOP - Department for Combating Organized Crime
MIF - Ministry of Internal affairs
KAP survey - Knowledge, Attitude and Practice survey
AROK - Association of Religious Organizations in Kazakhstan
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the evaluation findings of the project Protect to Prevent: Enabling Central Asians to Protect Religious Freedom as a Preventative Approach to Addressing Violent Extremism implemented by the Search for Common Ground (Search) Central Asia, in partnership with IDEA Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan), Center for Human Rights Protection Kylым Shamy (Kyrgyzstan), Marifatnoki (Tajikistan) and Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Kazakhstan). The project has applied a dual level approach to effectively respond to violent extremism in a whole-of-society manner; targeting both state and inter-state level, and community level in 6 target locations, two in each country: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The action’s overall aim was to prevent radicalization that leads to violence by strengthening society’s capacity (state and non-state actors) to reduce discrimination on religious grounds in Central Asia.

The evaluation was performed by an independent evaluator between February-April 2022 using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods and on principles of action research. The analysis consisted of a review of project related documents and external policy and research papers related to religious radicalization in four target countries. Then, a total of 57 key informant interviews with various stakeholders were conducted and a questionnaire was shared among young participants in three target countries, which was completed by 19 respondents from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The overall purpose of the evaluation was to

The project was evaluated against four broad criteria: relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Findings under each of these are presented below:

Relevance

The evaluation found the project to be highly relevant: all interviewed stakeholders agreed that, also thanks to participatory research and needs assessment, which served as a robust foundation, the project responded to different dynamics and needs of both state actors and youth in each target context.

Active participation and interest of the main country stakeholders in the project is an evidence that it is responsive to specific country needs and attentive to voices articulated by different actors engaged. The project helped to unlock the unexpressed potential and opportunities. Thus, in Tajikistan it was new experience of interaction with the academic and expert community, in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan the single platform for both experts and state bodies allowed to discuss new strategic policy documents in a more participatory and reflective way. The peer-to-peer approach employed by the project proved to be an effective method for engaging state actors, experts and religious organizations.

Since the Central Asian countries involved in the project have their own specificities in terms of freedom of religion and, in general, in communication between state authorities and civil society, including religious organizations, each country has identified its priorities for discussion.

The project has also put strong emphasis on the importance of youth leadership in PVE and was geared towards facilitating interactions between youth and local authorities and accompanying them in designing and launching youth-led research and campaigns/initiatives. It responded to youth needs not only by increasing engagement in PVE, but also by developing their self-confidence, communication and leadership skills, which are particularly useful to them as they start playing an increasing role in their respective communities.
The project was overall inclusive in terms of state and CSO actors however there is space to connect the first and the second components to be in line with dual approach through mutually reinforcing interventions. While logically it would have been more effective to ensure the interaction of experts, representatives of state bodies and young people to discuss issues of tolerance, freedom of religion, prevention of radicalization, extremism, thereby bringing young people to a higher level of understanding of the existing problems. Importantly, despite delays, difficulties and uncertainty, the project managed to remain relevant and to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and contextual shifts and implementing partners showed good resilience and resourcefulness.

Effectiveness
Overall, findings concerning effectiveness are generally positive. The effectiveness has been measured against the following three indicators (a) increased trust and cooperation, (b) increased understanding and exposure to best practices and (c) strengthened capacity for the application of grievance mechanisms.

The most positive achievements are the increased trust and willingness of government officials, experts, and religious organizations to come together and discuss issues related to religious radicalization and discrimination at regional platforms (most of interviewed stakeholders from three target countries assessed level of trust and collaboration as medium). Although development trends in four countries differ considerably, some common positive signs include increased interaction and collaboration between state, experts and religious organizations where the state learn to delegate both to solve certain issues, develop documents, and evaluate legislation to CSOs. The circle of experts and government agencies seeking to cooperate with civil society is expanding. Government agencies independently initiate problematic issues for broad discussion. Uzbekistan went further and set up the group to carry out a similar project on their own, using the knowledge they gained.

Despite the above significant break-through, trust is present to a greater extent at the personal rather than institutional level. At the institutional level, there is some distrust of state bodies due to general political instability, regular rotation of personnel, and changes in attitudes toward the non-governmental sector. Therefore, this aspect requires further attention of the SFCG in future programming.

Although the very notion of best practices caused some controversy among the beneficiaries, the stakeholders found some tools to be replicable. Thus Guidelines for Religious Expertise developed in Kyrgyzstan was positively received in Tajikistan, where it was adapted to the local context with the participation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UBOP (Department for Combating Crime), and 20 copies were given to interested government agencies.

Different understanding of the content of the concept of "freedom of religion" and "measures to counter extremism" in Central Asian countries also does not allow for a full exchange of available practices of countering and preventing extremism. Nevertheless, the regional meetings allowed project participants to discuss challenges and share information about their domestic experiences.

The duration of the project was not enough to strengthen the capacity of local government authorities and CSOs for the application of grievance mechanisms to reduce religious discrimination. The Handbook on Grievance Resolution Mechanisms was co-created with the participation of experts and local authorities but only as an advisory tool and is not institutionalized for use.

Importantly, the youth component was fully youth-led: young people were given research, debating and advocacy skills and support to come up with ideas based on research findings and implement
Trainings were designed to be action-oriented and encourage youth to put in practice their newly acquired skills and understanding of issues of discrimination and religious violence through their counter-initiatives and campaigns. This approach has been highly motivating for young participants. This strategy also meant that activities were effectively tailored and adapted to target locations and local stakeholders: there was no one-size-fits-all solution. Lastly, as a strategy, the project created platforms for partnerships between youth, religious and community leaders, and law enforcement. However, the participants, trainers and coordinators noted that the planned and conducted community talks had no tangible effect and were rather formal, which once again showed that the local authorities and community leaders do not perceive young people as equal partners in solving local problems. Nevertheless, for the youth it was an experience to collect data, to organize field work and to present findings to the broad public. Despite the fact that the project expected participants to interact with religious institutions, LSGs, religious leaders and decision-makers, during the project implementation, communication and interaction were mainly built with varying degrees of success with city halls and schools, where debate tournaments were held. In addition, the very topics of the tournaments held were not related to issues of religious freedom and radicalization. To a certain extent, these issues were given in a generalized way, or within the framework of other topics, such as human rights.

The interviews also reveal an increased level of tolerance and non-discriminatory attitudes toward others, particularly in the area of gender, among the trained young leaders.

Impact
The project had varying degrees of impact on stakeholders. In Kyrgyzstan, the project strengthened the existing cooperation between state bodies and civil society, though with still low participation of religious organizations. In Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan it laid the foundation for further cooperation, showing how effective such interaction can be based on equal partnership, trust, transparency and openness. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, experts, thanks to the project, are engaged in active interaction with governmental institutions, but officials consider religious organizations primarily as target groups rather than equal partners.

As for youth, all the project activities found a positive response from the participants, who developed skills in debating, searching for and critically understanding information, and constructive communication on both a personal and public level. The project definitely had an impact on the participants, especially the leadership group. Seventeen of the 19 online respondents indicated that they were able to build good relationships with others and become successful because of the project. 8 believe that they have become more tolerant of people professing a religion different from theirs. During the implementation of the project participants had to interact with the authorities and educational institutions, which helped them to test their skills in practice.

Sustainability
In Kyrgyzstan, state agencies began to independently initiate the creation of working groups with the involvement of civil society representatives on religious issues. For example, when adopting the Concept of State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere for 2021-2026, state agencies acted as organizers of a dialogue platform.

In Tajikistan, experts were involved in creating regional consultative groups and creating a regulatory framework for their functioning. The experts developed the Regulation on the creation of advisory groups. The draft was agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the document is currently being legally evaluated by the General Prosecutor’s Office. Moreover, according to the experts, their contribution to the development of the National Strategy of Counteraction to Extremism and Terrorism and the Action Plan for 2021 can be estimated at 40%.
According to the project participants, they are willing to continue increasing their capacity in FoRB, CVE; their personal connections and communication will remain, which will allow them to participate in joint work if necessary. However, most of the project results have not yet gone through the process of institutionalization. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the developed guidance on grievance redress mechanisms has not yet become mandatory for use on the ground. In Kazakhstan, out of 17 recommendations to the legislation regulating religious issues developed as a result of the project, only two were taken into account by the state authorities.

As for youth, they formed groups of the participants from Central Asia with messengers (WhatsApp and Telegram), giving them the opportunity to exchange information constantly and cooperate; in the four cities of Aktobe, Shymkent, Karakul and Tokmok participants organized debate clubs, in which play from 10-15 to 40 or more participants; they are independently organizing debate tournaments and trainings (Human rights, project application, how to be enrolled to top university etc.) for those who were not involved in the project.

Political will, political stability, and consistent implementation of religious policy are also affecting sustainability. In Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, virtually all decisions are driven by political will. In Kyrgyzstan, political instability, frequent personnel reshuffles, weak institutional memory, increasing pressure on freedom of speech, and growing religiosity among the population pose threats to maintaining project outcomes.

Evaluation findings are summarized in line with OECD/DAC criteria below:

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<th>Scoring overview:</th>
<th>green (good)</th>
<th>orange (problems)</th>
<th>Red (serious deficiencies)</th>
<th>Unable to assess</th>
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Recommendations

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1 Grading reference table for criteria and monitoring questions

**Good/very good**
The situation is considered satisfactory, but there may be room for improvement. Recommendations are useful, but not vital to the project or programme.

**Problems identified and small improvements needed**
There are issues which need to be addressed, otherwise the global performance of the project or programme may be negatively affected. Necessary improvements do not however require a major revision of the intervention logic and implementation arrangements.

**Serious problems identified and major adjustments needed**
There are deficiencies which are so serious that, if not addressed, they may lead to failure of the project or programme. Major adjustments and revision of the intervention logic and/or implementation arrangements are necessary.
All relevant staff and stakeholders should be engaged in the design phase, to incorporate their expertise and experience, and to anticipate and mitigate against potential challenges before they arise.

It is necessary to expand the circle of stakeholders, not limited to the usual partners; to involve in the dialogue people and organizations that have not previously been involved in the dialogue.

In order to institutionalize the results and ensure their sustainability, a lobbying mechanism at the decision-making level needs to be thought through. In this regard, it is necessary to involve Parliament and the Government, to strengthen advocacy among decision-makers and those who have influence in society.

Consistency in combining the work at the legislative level and the implementation of decisions made in practice is required. In particular, in the work with young people it is necessary to unite them in dialogue platforms with experts, representatives of state bodies, religious organizations in order to deepen understanding of existing problems and development of joint solutions. This will ensure the success of the dual, mutually reinforcing approach declared in the project and reflected in the ToC.

Comprehensive, systematic work is needed at the local level, with the study of the life of local communities, leaders, LSGs, religious movements, and local organizations and using a creative, interactive approach to form an understanding of the role and importance of young people as equal partners as well as to expand knowledge and understanding of religious freedom, tolerance, human rights, prevention of extremism among young people and local communities.

In order to strengthen regional cooperation, deep work is needed to develop a categorical and conceptual framework, with a clear distinction between theology and religious studies, a clear content of the concepts of "freedom of religion," "tolerance," "human rights," "social security," "extremism," and so on. All stakeholders should be involved in this work.

To promote the transformational effect at the regional level, joint regional events with live direct communication and interaction between participants, with a request for further joint projects are needed.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE EVALUATION

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT
The project was designed by the Search for Common Ground (Search) and implemented in partnership with the following organizations from target CA countries: IDEA Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan), Center for Human Rights Protection Kylym Shamy (Kyrgyzstan), Marifatnoki (Tajikistan) and Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Kazakhstan). The presence of various partners with specific expertise, particularly in youth empowerment, PVE and human rights protection allowed to bring together various perspectives on FoRB and its challenges.

The project was implemented in 6 target locations, two in each country: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The overarching goal of the project was to prevent radicalization that leads to violence by strengthening society’s capacity (state and non-state actors) to reduce discrimination on religious grounds in Central Asia. The project aimed to reach this goal through the following two objectives: (1) enhance the target states’ capacity to protect the freedom of religion or belief as an effective approach to preventing violent extremism and (2) strengthen youth agency to shift prevailing attitudes from intolerance to plurality among their religious and non-religious peers and elder counterparts. The pathway of change for this project has been outlined in the theory of change and underpinning assumptions. See below diagram #1 with the ToC.
In total, the project has reached over 300 people across three target countries, of which 164 were youth (90 female and 74 male), 77 representing local authorities and the rest are members of the Multi-Stakeholder Working Group (40 representatives joined the MSWG, 20 of them attended the meetings consistently and became permanent MSWG members, representing 8 state agencies/bodies, 5 CSO organizations, 6 academics, and 1 religious organization) and local community members. 55 young people (29 male and 26 female) have been trained to lead participatory research, in-school (reaching out 127 students) and national (164 students) debates and local community talks (engaging 278 people).

The project was kicked-off in November 2019 engaging both implementing partners and external stakeholders where the team has agreed to collectively develop country-specific strategies for the project’s implementation, considering the dynamic differences between the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan contexts.

**CONTEXT OF IMPLEMENTATION**

The COVID-19 pandemic hit central Asia four months after the commencement of the project. The countries in the region were unprepared for it and responded differently. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan readily acknowledged the pandemic and implemented various combinations of measures between March and May, including announcing states of emergency, imposing strict regional or national quarantine or lockdown measures, and closing borders. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also re-introduced restrictions in July 2020. Borders remained closed until April 2022. This caused the need to move all of the project’s events to an online format. The number of regional meetings was significantly limited, only 2 regional meetings were held, which not all project participants were able to attend. The required modification of the project focused mainly on in-country work, thereby making it somewhat difficult to share experiences between countries.

In Kyrgyzstan the situation was further aggravated by widespread social unrest, a political uprising which has led to change in government and massive administrative and legal reforms including constitutional reform. Moreover, in April 2021, an armed conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan erupted in Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, which HRW estimated as "the largest incident of its kind in Central Asia in decades." As a result of the armed clash between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, a total of 55 people from both sides were killed, most of them civilians. More than 200 people were also injured and wounded in varying degrees of severity. The tense situation repeatedly resulted in shootouts between Kyrgyz and Tajik border troops.

Although above developments have drawn away the priorities of country leadership the phenomenon of religious radicalization and extremism nonetheless spurred the governments of the region to respond. Yet efforts to confront radicalization in Central Asia have been undermined by structural and legislative weaknesses. Legal systems with over-broad and imprecise definitions of violent extremism (see Table 2), that emphasize the suppression of radical views, and that lack a coordinated regional response have hindered the development of effective countermeasures to the problem of violent extremism. This is nowhere more true than online, and especially on social media, where public engagement with violent extremism occurs most often, and where VE actors’ use of technology has consistently outpaced legislation and monitoring.

Specific laws on extremism in Central Asia are recent developments. Although provisions on extremism appeared in the national legislations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan from the early 90s, laws on extremism were only adopted by Kyrgyzstan and

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Kazakhstan in 2005, and Tajikistan in 2007, and were largely borrowed from Russian federal law\(^3\). An anti-extremism law was not adopted in Uzbekistan until 2018. This copying of laws from other jurisdictions, without taking account of their shortcomings and compliance with national and international legal and regulatory norms has created problems for the definition of extremism and its application.

Where the countries have tried to combine both anti-terrorist and anti-discriminatory approaches within the law, the result has been extremely broad definitions of extremism. Under these definitions, extremism includes everything from a terrorist act with mass victims to reposting pictures with swastika in a social network, and in some countries, the mere possession of a leaflet or book included in the register of extremist materials. Such broad and imprecise definitions create the preconditions for human rights violations. Under the pretext of countering terrorism, privacy, freedom of expression, belief and conscience are unreasonably restricted.

The countries of Central Asia have very different experiences of communication and interaction between state bodies and civil society, including religious organizations. In Kyrgyzstan, the experience of interaction has accumulated since 2014, from mistrust and confrontation to dialogue and cooperation. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, communication is predominantly vertical, and the religious sphere is entirely regulated and controlled by the state. In Kazakhstan, religious organizations are estranged from the state and do not interact with it. Attempts by experts to encourage religious organizations to engage in dialogue have met with no success.

The varying degrees of competence of experts and government agencies in religious issues, religious freedom, and tolerance also influenced the quality of the discussions. Kyrgyzstan, for example, has a fairly large number of experts and specialists working on these issues in both legal, human rights and social contexts. While in Kazakhstan this topic is not popular and not in demand in the eyes of experts, as a result there are only a few experts, but with a very specific focus of work, such as the protection of convicts on religious grounds. In Uzbekistan, the Center for the Study of Regional Threats deals with this issue, where the issue of religion is directly linked to national security. In Tajikistan, the experience of the civil war has also put the issue in the context of security threats.

Communication is complicated by conceptually different approaches of state structures, experts and religious organizations. Officials followed the idea of national security and the need for strict control, experts - from the position of human rights, and religious organizations - from the position of total non-interference in their activities.

On the part of government agencies, the project mainly involved mid-level officials, which influenced the promotion of the recommendations to the level of their implementation. In Kyrgyzstan, moreover, the work is often complicated by frequent staff turnover, which requires a new person to be immersed in the topic and its conceptual approaches from the very beginning.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION**

The first objective of the evaluation is to assess **whether the project has reached its 2 objectives by utilizing a mutually-reinforcing approach** which built a stronger foundation for progressive CVE policies and legislation for preventing vulnerable individuals from radicalization, and reflective of tolerant attitudes among the public and whether these 2 objectives were relevant to the context.

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Second, it seeks to assess project outcomes and impact against such criteria as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, as well as conditions influencing achievements and challenges faced to generate findings, lessons learnt and recommendations. And finally, it seeks to assess the effectiveness of the approaches applied and sustainability of results achieved.

The evaluation seeks to answer the following five questions that pertain to pathways of change as stipulated in the ToC.

These Key Evaluation Questions include:

- How is the project intervention relevant to the current religious dynamics and government effort in dealing with religious freedom and the religious movements taking place in the targeted Central Asia Republics? How does it address the local needs vis-a-vis the religious dynamics (Relevance)?
- How has this project been successful in building collaboration and strong relationships at the state and community level about effective peacebuilding responses to violent extremism (ToC).
- To what extent the project has been successful in achieving the objectives and outcomes desired by the project design? What are the project achievements vis-a-vis the log frame? What worked and what did not work during the project life? What are the lessons learned from this project so far? (Effectiveness)
- To what extent the project enhanced trust between key project stakeholders including state institutions and civil society from four Central Asian states on state approaches to protecting religious freedom in preventing violent extremism? (Lessons Learnt)
- What are the project exit strategies and action points developed so far? What is the potential for sustainability of the project gains after the completion of this cycle of funding? (Sustainability)

**Methodology and Approach**

The evaluation methodology included three components. The first was a desk review, as most indicators require analysis of data related to project activities. The second was a KAP survey to examine changes in the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of experts and government officials involved in the first component of the project, as well as among youth who were exposed to the project or directly/ indirectly influenced by the project in the second component. The survey consisted of sections such as: trust, communication and interaction between actors working in the field of religious freedom, increased critical thinking, as well as an assessment of the ability of youth to participate and engage with authorities and the community. And third, key informant interviews at the field level to collect qualitative data.

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews engaging 57 key informants representing Search, 3 implementing partners in Kyrgyzstan, 1 in Kazakhstan, 1 in Tajikistan and 1 in Uzbekistan, experts from four countries, trainers, youth and small grant holders.

Quantitative data was collected through a survey questionnaire which was filled by 19 project participants: 8 from Kazakhstan and 11 from Kyrgyzstan.

Data analysis has been done through comparison and the triangulation of data gathered through these different methodologies, from different documents, and from different categories of informants. Findings are from numerous documents, interviews, and surveys. The comparison and triangulation of findings have been done to validate findings, identify lessons learned, and then reach conclusions and recommendations.

**Limitations of the Evaluation and Measures Taken (Quality Assurance):**

The main limitations in data collection and evaluation were the following:
● The violent protests in Kazakhstan in early January 2022 resulting in 177 cases of mass unrest and acto of terrorism and 779 persons being in custody had an impact on reticence on the part of civil society in assessing what happened, as well as a decrease in communication between civil society and the government. Given the tense situation in Kazakhstan, it was difficult to conduct interviews with representatives of civil society, including religious organizations, as well as government authorities involved in the project. Thus, evaluation was limited to interviews with partners and key experts within the first component.

● An armed conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in Batken region of Kyrgyzstan which occurred in late April 2021 posed instabilities and tensions between the two countries. Tensions between the two republics affected the possibility of conducting interviews with representatives of state agencies in Tajikistan and were limited to only two experts within the first component of the project. Moreover, the coordinator of the youth component did not respond to the request for an interview. Thus, only coordinators and participants from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were interviewed within the second component of the project.

● According to information received from partners and experts in Uzbekistan, interviews with representatives of state bodies require official permission, which is usually considered within a minimum of four months in advance. Attempts to contact recommended representatives of state agencies through personal connections of experts were unsuccessful due to a tragic event in the life of one of them (mother's death) and a prolonged illness of another. In this regard, the interviews were limited to partners and experts involved.

● 2 planned Focus group discussions with debate participants and community talks (with 10-12 people for each FGD) failed as the participant were reluctant and not motivated to participate in FGD for different reasons ("no time", "no interest", "too much time passed after the project, so I do not remember much")

● Most of the experts simultaneously participated in various projects in the same area and, due to this, it was difficult for them to remember the specifics of this project, to reflect on the work performed. In addition, time distance also had an impact.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
The consultant has adhered to ethical principles including respect for diversity, inclusivity and openness while also protecting evaluation participants’ safety and confidentiality of their views. To avoid data leak all closed documents were stored with coding access. Participation of all the interviewees was voluntary, with prior consent and permission received for note taking, referencing their quotes. Due to sensitivity of the topics covered by the evaluation the consultant approached sensitively to both questions and process of interviewing, agreeing in advance with all the participants on respecting diverging views, “Chatham House” rules. Moreover, while working with young people the consultant has followed Child Safeguarding Policy by getting oral consent for interviews and surveys.
CHAPTER 2: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter explores the outcome of the project from the perspective of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. It also analyzes the extent to which the priorities and needs of the stakeholders are considered in the intervention's objectives and its underlying theory of change and further in actions. The focus is placed on the differential results across countries and factors that influence outcomes including resilience of capacities and systems for continuation of positive effects. The two sub-sections explore the extent to which the project has achieved its two main objectives, how different elements interacted and contributed to desired change.

Diagram # 1. Project’s theory of change.

The project’s ToC has been tested in two ways, firstly to evaluate the logic of causal interlinkages between elements of the project and secondly, to measure if the project has achieved expected results.

Thus the period of project implementation coincided with policy and legal amendment processes in all target countries except Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan the Governments were developing national religious policies and all three countries were introducing amendments to existing laws: in Uzbekistan, the "Law on Support and Regulation of Activities of Media Agents" and the "Law on Support and Regulation of Activities of NGOs in the Field of Assistance to Social and Economic Adaptation of Amnestied and Repatriated Citizens", in Kazakhstan the "Law on Support and Regulation of Activities of Media Agents" and the "Law on Support and Regulation of Activities of NGOs in the Field of Assistance to Social and Economic Adaptation of Amnestied and Repatriated Citizens" and in Kyrgyzstan the Government has launched massive legal inventory process (revision of over 300 laws including law on religious organizations. This project brought timely intervention by creating inter-state platforms where members of the Regional Multi-Stakeholder Working Groups had the possibility of exchanging and discussing religious policies (which were not the case before, each state considered independently), mutual empowerment and capacitation, and incorporating recommendations related to religious freedoms and non-repressive measures into national legislation which come out from studies and discourses.
Religious organizations were not active participants in events in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, because of the lack of practice of constant interaction between government agencies and civil society. In Kazakhstan, for example, only the head of the Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan (AROK) participated in all meetings within the scope of the project, but the member organizations of this association were not represented. It was assumed by the conveners that the information and results of discussions would be transmitted to the members of the Association eventually, but there was no monitoring of the receipt of information. Moreover, such concentration of all communication on one person may not produce desired results of reaching more people.

According to government officials, not all legislative practices can be successful for the entire region, since there are differences in the approach to the issue of religious organizations in the countries of the region. In this sense, what is considered a successful practice for one country may not have a positive response in another. For example, the activity of Tablighi Jamaat is not prohibited only in Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China and Russia, the Tablighi Jamaat movement is considered extremist and its activities are banned. The situation in Kyrgyzstan is somewhat different. Despite the lack of official registration, the country's mufti and influential theologians openly support the movement. They believe that Tablighi Jamaat is a force restraining the growth of more severe religious radicalism.

The difficulty for regional reflection on religious freedom is the different understanding of the content of this concept in the countries participating in the project. For example, in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, at the state level, religious freedom is interpreted within the framework of countering extremism and national security. While in Kyrgyzstan, the expert community promotes this concept within the framework of social security, engaging in polemics and finding compromises with the authorities in the development of strategic documents and draft laws. Understanding religious freedom in the context of countering extremism entails the prevalence of repressive legislative practices.

Thus, the adopted theory of change has been reflected in the implemented activities. However, it should be noted that the results of the project show that the adopted dual approach has not been fully implemented.

First of all, the two components of the project were not explicitly connected to each other and were implemented more as independent parts. Whereas it was assumed that young people would get acquainted with the draft laws being developed, the recommendations of experts, and become a full participants in the organized platforms of communication and interaction between representatives of state bodies and civil society to be able to challenge prevailing attitudes of intolerance and discrimination.

However young people have achieved tangible results at the community level. According to the project narrative the ToC is formulated as follows: IF the CVE-focused policies and legal frameworks of Central Asian states are protective of religious freedom and not repressive at the structural level, AND youth are empowered to challenge prevailing attitudes of intolerance and discrimination at the community level THEN this mutually-reinforcing approach will build a strong foundation for progressive CVE policies and legislation that do not feed the narratives of extremist organizations and drive already vulnerable individuals towards radicalization, and are reflective of tolerant attitudes among the public BECAUSE building collaboration and strong relationships at the state and community level about effective peacebuilding responses to violent extremism will reduce the repressive state policies around religious freedom that are a driving factor behind individuals being radicalized and violent alternative paths of expression.
Although the theory of change of the project is more focused on collective, institutional changes, the changes caused by the project among the young participants are more personal in nature. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, at the initial stage of the project, according to the coordinators, participants had unhealthy competition between more experienced and less experienced participants, interpersonal conflicts, and a desire to assert themselves, which, as the project progressed, transformed into teamwork, ability to resolve conflicts, to move from confrontation to cooperation. In Kazakhstan, there was a strong politicization of the concept of "activism", where an activist meant a person seeking to occupy a public office, to join the ruling political party. The concept of civic activism and personal growth gradually took shape. A small institutional consolidation of the acquired knowledge and skills is reflected in the creation of debate clubs. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the skills acquired and the debates held will promote tolerance, broaden the understanding of religious freedom at the community level, and increase the level of youth resistance to destructive narratives and discourses.

“I have a feeling that we were expected to make some changes at the community level, but we were only able to make some changes at the participant level, because changes at the social level require more time and probably a different kind of activity.”
(Representative of IDEA CA)

**RELEVANCE**

Needs and priorities of the target countries’ stakeholders have been explored during kick-off meetings with engagement of experts and government officials from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. These platforms have helped to better understand country contexts so that further interventions are planned in a responsive and sensitive manner. It has also resulted in country specific learning and adaptation. Furthermore, the following two studies have informed further strategizing built on actual needs:

1) an analysis of social media content pertinent to FoRB and VE, and
2) a review of the legal and regulatory frameworks surrounding PVE and FoRB. A total of 8 reports were produced, including one consolidated social media analysis and legal analysis

Active participation and interest of the main country stakeholders in the project is an evidence that it is responsive to specific country needs and attentive to voices articulated by different actors engaged. Few examples below support above conclusions:

In Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Information Development and the Committee on Religious Affairs joined the project. Given the fact that in all socio-political issues, the political will plays an enormous role and not all problematic issues are subject to open consideration, the participation of state bodies demonstrated the relevance of the project objectives. Before this project, the partner organization International Bureau for Human Rights itself had no similar projects.

In Tajikistan, representatives of law enforcement agencies, Ministry of Internal Affairs, UBOP (Department for Combating Organized Crime), Committee on Religious Affairs took part in the project activities. For government agencies, it was an experience of interaction with the academic and expert community.

In Uzbekistan, the project coincided with the adoption of the National Strategy to Combat Extremism (2021) and the discussion of the draft law on religion and religious activity. The creation of a single platform for experts and representatives of state bodies allowed them to discuss these documents effectively.
In Kyrgyzstan, the specific context is the already established practice of interaction between state agencies and experts in matters of religious activities, countering extremism and radicalization, which has been in place since 2014. In this context, the project facilitated the continuation and strengthening of existing cooperation including support in drafting and advocacy of the “Concept of national policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the religious sphere for 2021-2026”.

These two studies generated interest of the state authorities in the issue. So, in Kazakhstan, the Prosecutor General’s Office made an expert request to study the possibility of incorporating the report’s conclusions and recommendations into Kazakh law on “On Religious Activity and Religious Associations”. In Uzbekistan, both analyses were directly used in the development of the “Law on Support and Regulation of Activities of NGOs in the Field of Assistance to Social and Economic Adaptation of Amnestied and Repatriated Citizens”.

Since the Central Asian countries involved in the project have their own specificities in terms of freedom of religion and, in general, in communication between state authorities and civil society, including religious organizations, each country has identified its priorities for discussion. According to evaluation findings by experts and project partners, the project responded to the existing needs to establish and strengthen cooperation between government agencies and civil society on these issues.

As for religious organizations, their participation was minimal. In Kazakhstan, according to experts, religious organizations rarely participate in dialogue platforms, citing that they do not experience problems. This can be explained both by the reluctance of religious organizations to interact with state authorities and by a fear of possible negative consequences. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, due to the strict state policy with regard to religious activity and religious organizations, communication was limited to representatives of state agencies and experts and researchers. In Kyrgyzstan, the participation of religious organizations is active but not constant because, unlike experts, for them the interaction with authorities is not regular. In addition, it should be noted that representatives of the dominant religions (Islam, Orthodoxy) are often regular participants in all countries, while religious minorities (Baha’i, Buddhists, Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Lutherans, Evangelicals, Shiites etc.) are not as active and their needs are not adequately studied.

The launch of the project coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, which required a complete overhaul of the entire project in terms of its activities and methods of work with young people. All events were transformed into an online format. Unfortunately, it was not possible to keep the original idea of joint regional events that would have contributed to the formation of a Central Asian group of young leaders with the skills and knowledge to promote positive change at the regional level. The planned trainings were transferred to the Zoom platform and required substantial adaptation for the work, creating difficulties in implementation. There were difficulties with Internet connection, especially with Tajikistan, a large amount of time was required for technical training of participants to work on the online platform, during the trainings many participants did not turn on the cameras, creating discomfort for the trainers, not being able to observe the reaction of participants to various topics and materials. In addition, the constant introduction of new restrictions in connection with Covid-19, the state of health of the participants, the trainers, forced the organizers of the project to repeatedly change the schedule. The pandemic has shown the need for a creative approach to online learning and the development of new tools for the active involvement of young people.

It should be noted that in the project there was no connection between the first and the second components. While logically it would have been effective to ensure the interaction of experts, representatives of state bodies and young people to discuss issues of tolerance, freedom of religion, prevention of radicalization, extremism, thereby bringing young people to a higher level of understanding of the existing problems.
According to the trained youth leaders (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), the project met their needs in particular in such areas as strengthening understanding of religious freedom, tolerance, risks of radicalization, filling gaps in knowledge about religious freedom, tolerance, risks of radicalization, helped them understand how young people can interact with local authorities, religious leaders and community leaders.

According to Diagram #1, the majority of respondents confirmed that the project’s objectives and design responded to their needs and priorities. Of the 19 participants surveyed, 14 noted that the project helped them understand how to interact with local authorities, 12 noted how to interact with the local community, 10 noted how to interact with local authorities, and only 4 noted how to interact with religious leaders. 9 filled a gap in their understanding of religious freedom and tolerance.

Diagram #1

**Needs of Youth**

- The project filled a gap in the interaction between youth and community leaders.
- The project filled the gap in the interaction between youth and religious leaders.
- The project filled a gap in my knowledge about religious freedom, tolerance and risks of radicalization.
- The project strengthened my understanding of religious freedom, tolerance, risks of radicalization.

**EFFECTIVENESS**

Differential analysis of the interviewee’s response across countries against expected changes towards **increased trust and collaboration** display the following results (as outlined in the matrix below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Trust</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Below medium</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: The respondents themselves proposed above criteria based on their assessment of the current situation according to the following concrete signs:

**Low** - sporadic meetings, inconsistent, domination of some actors over others, rare compromises in decisions

**Below medium** - the presence of the desire of different actors to interact, attempts to establish a dialogue, to build common platforms to discuss existing problems, the desire for regular interaction. However, there is still a certain hierarchy in the relationship (for example, the state authorities believe that their position is a priority). Passivity on the part of religious organizations, or their formal presence, when they do not openly express their opinions, or their non-involvement in the dialogue. The dialogue is more personal than institutional.
Medium - the presence of well-established dialogue between state bodies, experts and religious organizations. Initiation of common meetings and discussions by any of the partners based on mutual recognition and respect. Active and open expression of the opinion. Understanding of the common goal, making decisions on the basis of a common agreement or compromise. However, low level of representation of religious minorities, dependence on political will, high frequency of personnel changes, which affects the efficiency of work, attachment to personalities, whose departure may affect the decisions made or the dialogue as a whole.

High - institutionalization of decisions made (enshrined in the law, regulations, programs, etc.), interaction of actors on the basis of transparency, openness and mutual respect. Involvement of religious minorities in the dialogue. Confidence that the decisions taken serve the interests of all participants. Sustainability of existing dialogue platforms, which do not depend on personalities.

Kazakhstan

In general, the level of trust was assessed as "below medium" because government officials did not participate in all meetings, the representation of religious organizations was low, and there were few specialists, experts due to the fact that Kazakhstan has a shortage of experts on this topic. Thus, systematic and consistent work is needed to increase the level of trust. It is also conditioned by the fact that the political will and policies play a major role in the country, many issues could not be discussed openly.

Nevertheless, an indicator of trust and willingness to cooperate was the presence of government officials, experts, and religious organizations at the meetings, where they were able to discuss problems both at the legislative level and in day-to-day practice. During the project, state agencies (Committee on religious affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Prosecutor’s Office) demonstrated their interest in such communication and interaction.

It should be noted that in the republic there are very few civil society organizations working with the problems of this project, which affects the number of experts in this area. As for religious organizations, they are reluctant to contact and communicate with experts or government agencies only when serious problems arise, preferring to solve their issues at the local level by their own efforts.

According to experts, the project has not produced major changes in the communication of different actors. The expert community itself is divided within itself and requires a common interest for interaction. While the state bodies work with the active use of administrative resources. In Kazakhstan, there has been apathy and passivity in conducting online meetings, which is related to the fact that the topic of religion itself is viewed by both experts and religious organizations as undesirable for discussion.

*The objective difficulty for the project is that in Kazakhstan there are two topics that, according to experts, human rights activists, NGOs, one should stay away from. These are LGBT and religion, and, accordingly, this includes freedom of religion. These topics are sensitive and, frankly speaking, unprofitable. Even lawyers avoid working with these topics, except some very specific fields like protecting the rights of prisoners on religious issues. That's why there are no good specialists with whom we can work and somehow promote these topics.*

(Expert from Kazakhstan)
**Kyrgyzstan**

In general, according to the assessments of experts, partners, and representatives of government agencies, the level of trust and cooperation can be defined as medium. At the same time, trust is present to a greater extent at the personal level than at the institutional level. At the institutional level, there is some distrust of state bodies due to general political instability, private rotation of personnel, and changes in attitudes toward the non-governmental sector.

An indicator of trust and cooperation is regular communication and interaction between the authorities and civil society on these issues. The project was a continuation and strengthening of an already existing mechanism of cooperation through participation in general discussions, development of draft laws, strategies, and concepts. It is worthy noting that this mechanism has been developed and introduced by Search in previous projects dedicated to strengthen FoRB since 2014. Interaction has been established, in which the state has learned to delegate both experts and religious organizations to solve certain issues, develop documents, and evaluate legislation. As a result of this approach, the state works with experts. The circle of experts and government agencies seeking to cooperate with civil society is expanding. Key positive indicator is that government agencies independently initiate problematic issues for broad discussion.

"It should be noted that in this dialogue even human rights defenders have become more relaxed in outlining their positions. More and more mutual concessions are being observed, a shift from an accusatory tone to a search for compromise solutions. For the first time I saw a human rights activist riding in the same car with representatives of government agencies on one trip and advising the director of SCRA. Many things are still problematic, though. The stumbling block for religious organizations is the secularism of the state. We need to work toward a change in worldview, a broad understanding of what freedom of religion is."

(Expert from Kyrgyzstan)

It should be noted, however, that religious organizations are less included in the interaction. Their involvement requires coordination of time schedules, which they often do not have, due to the fact that this communication is not part of their functional part, as it is the case with the state bodies and experts. Religious organizations (DUMK, Russian Orthodox Church, Association of Evangelical Churches) were more involved in the final meetings. At the same time, religious organizations have low critical thinking about their activities, and there is a desire to strengthen only their positions instead of looking for compromise solutions in the "win-win" approach.

In general, according to experts, partners, and representatives of state bodies, the level of trust and cooperation can be defined as medium. At the same time, trust is more present at the personal level than at the institutional level. At the institutional level, there is some distrust of state bodies due to general political instability, frequent rotation of personnel, and changes in attitudes toward the non-governmental sector.

**Uzbekistan**

According to experts and project partners, the project laid the foundation for trust and cooperation between government agencies, the expert community, and religious organizations, as project participants became more educated and informed about religious freedom issues. A group of people was formed who were able to carry out a similar project on their own, using the knowledge they gained. It was a new experience of engaging in dialogue for all participants.

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5 https://kloop.kg/blog/2021/11/15/bajsalov-raskritikoval-rabotu-npo-i-vydevinul-usloviya-dlya-sotrudnichestva/
"In the beginning people were stoked, but then after a presentation by a staff member from the Committee on Religious Affairs, and experts, people felt the conversation was possible and it was an important conversation. Community leaders shared their vision. Basically it was a conversation about what awaits us and what we should do."
(expert from Uzbekistan)

Special mention was made of the informal atmosphere in which all participants - religious leaders, government officials and experts - were able to freely express their opinions. The main confessions participated in the round table in Tashkent: the Armenian Gregorian Church, Judaism adherents, Christians, Orthodox, Catholics, and Muslims, which, according to experts, demonstrated a level of trust.

Trust was primarily built at the personal level. As for the institutional level, it was expressed in a deeper understanding by the participants of their roles and significance in the overall state system. Nevertheless, since there were only 2 round tables with the involvement of all stakeholders, the level of trust can be assessed as approaching to the medium, since it is still difficult to assess whether the established ties will remain for a long time without the continuation of the project.

Tajikistan

The organized platform for communication and interaction brought together representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the General Prosecutor's Office, the Committee on Religious Affairs, the Ulema Council from the Muftiyat, representatives of the public council under the Dushanbe Diocese of the Orthodox Church, as well as representatives of the academic community, experts. In general, the project activities were attended by government agencies and experts. Although religious organizations participated in the discussions, according to experts, they acted not so much as subjects of actions, but as objects, on which the changes were aimed. Nevertheless, there was a noticeable increase in trust between government agencies and experts.

"They stopped looking at us as a fifth column. Government agencies saw that experts can make a useful contribution to countering extremism."
(Tajikistan expert).

In Tajikistan, the project laid the foundation for a relationship of trust between the authorities and experts, although, as in other Central Asian countries, this trust is built more on personal communications than institutional relationships.

**Increased understanding and exposure to best practices on implementing legislative and policy revisions for protecting religious freedom**

For this indicator, it should be noted that the very notion of best practices caused some controversy among participants. The basis for such disputes is the different context of regulation of religious activity in Central Asian countries. For example, in countries that have ratified the SCO Convention on Combating Extremism, Tablighi Jaamat is outlawed and considered extremist in the CSTO agreement. However, Kyrgyzstan has a different position on this issue, believing that the Daawatchi movement in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan has been formed for several centuries, has become traditional and contributes to the spread of the Hanafi mazkhab, which condemns violence and calls
for patience. Although experts in Kyrgyzstan believe that such non-preventive practices contribute to the reduction of conflict on religious grounds, representatives of government agencies and experts from other Central Asian countries do not support this position.

The Guidelines for Religious Expertise developed in Kyrgyzstan can be considered a successful exchange experience. This guide was positively received in Tajikistan, where it was adapted to the local context with the participation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UBOP (Department for Combating Crime), and 20 copies were given to interested government agencies.

Different understanding of the content of the concept of "freedom of religion" and "measures to counter extremism" in the Central Asian countries also does not allow for a full exchange of available practices of countering and preventing extremism. In Kyrgyzstan, the expert community has consistently promoted the need to expand outreach work in the field of countering extremism and terrorism...with a focus on promoting religious literacy and coverage of state policy on countering extremism and terrorism, which was reflected in the Program on Countering Extremism and Terrorism in 2017. In general, however, countering extremism in CA countries predominantly relies on forceful methods.

Nevertheless, the regional meetings allowed project participants to discuss challenges and share information about their domestic experiences.

**Strengthened capacity of local government authorities and civil society organizations for the application of grievance mechanisms to reduce religious discrimination**

In Kyrgyzstan, a Handbook on Grievance Resolution Mechanisms was developed with the participation of experts, local authorities. The guidelines were first developed in March-April 2020 to directly inform the pilot training for local authorities. Based on the discussions that emerged from the initial training, local experts and Search adapted the guidelines to reflect the needs of local communities and provide local governments with realistic approaches to resolving complaints as they arise. The guidelines cover four main topics: (1) religion and religious issues in the Kyrgyz context; (2) basic concepts within FoRB and related terminology; (3) local government roles, responsibilities, and legal obligations; and (4) the legal framework for FoRB advocacy in Kyrgyzstan. The manual was translated into Kyrgyz and given to the local authorities who participated in the training for LSGs, as well as to the State Commission on Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan and the State Agency on Self-Governance and Intercultural Affairs. Search worked closely with these government officials to ensure that the online version of the manual was designed to be user-friendly and safe for readers.

Unfortunately, the Guide is only advisory in nature and is not institutionalized for use. Nevertheless, according to the trainers, more than 82% of the trained representatives of local authorities and religious leaders expressed that they would be able to apply their learnings to resolve grievances in their communities. At the same time, there is a need to continue working with LSGs, police officers and communities' leaders to extend their understanding of FoRB, tolerance and human rights.

The project had varying degrees of impact on stakeholders. While in Kyrgyzstan the project strengthened the existing cooperation between state structures and civil society, albeit with still low participation of religious organizations, in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan it laid the foundation for further cooperation, showing how effective such interaction can be on the basis of equal partnership, trust, transparency and openness. However, the January events in Kazakhstan and their aftermath had a negative impact on the attitude of the state and political authorities to civil society organizations. As for religious organizations, they demonstrated their passivity in the course of the project, and after the January events are likely to be even less in contact with government agencies and experts, fearing possible repressive measures against them. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan,
experts, thanks to the project, began to actively interact with government agencies, but religious organizations are still viewed primarily as objects of influence rather than equal partners.

Regarding youth, on the whole, all the project activities found a positive response from the participants, who were able, through training and active interaction, to develop skills in debating, searching for and critically understanding information, and constructive communication on both a personal and public level.

Among the challenges that affected the effectiveness of the project were the following:

- First of all, the effectiveness of the project was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the need to modify the project, in particular the transfer of all offline events to an online format, as well as the impossibility of holding events at the regional level. Almost all events were held within each country separately.
- The need for an online format caused some frustration on the part of the young participants, who were set on numerous trips and live communication. This also affected the fact that participants in the core group of 31 changed throughout the project, creating additional challenges for internal communication.
- The selection of locations, which were determined by Search itself, proved to be problematic. IDEA CA expressed some dissatisfaction that the locations were not agreed upon and determined jointly. The selected locations differed greatly in their characteristics. Thus, in Kyrgyzstan, Karakul and Tokmok cities have their own specifics. Tokmok has a long-standing reputation as a criminal city with a high conflictogenic situation caused by the factor of active migration, active religious groups, and criminal gangs. Karakul, on the other hand, is considered to be relatively peaceful. In Kazakhstan, Aktobe and Shymkent represent the southern and northern regions, which according to the Kazakhstan’s project coordinator have different values and varying degrees of infrastructure development. These differences were also reflected in the participants themselves.
- Different level of preparedness of the participants for active online learning made it difficult for the trainers and affected the communication between the participants. Thus, among the participants there were schoolchildren and college students, young people who had extensive experience of participation in various youth projects and those who were involved in the project for the first time. Different language levels also affected communication and interaction.
- In Aktobe there was a conflict situation with the local debate organization, which positions itself as the only legitimate organization professionally engaged in debates. This organization created difficulties for the participants of the project to conduct debates, which required additional efforts and time from them and the coordinator to implement the planned activities.

Since the project aimed to increase the capacity of target youth to think critically and become more tolerant through learning to respect other points of view and increasing sensitivity towards and awareness of the needs of their communities, the following definition of critical thinking was used in the evaluation: Critical thinking is all about questioning information and thinking about it from different points of view. Look at all the information and all the different arguments before finding a solution, not just what seems easiest or what you most want to happen.

According to the online survey, the largest number of participants from 8 to 16 out of 19 were able to develop critical thinking skills based on the following 3 elements of measuring critical thinking:

- **Making sense of information.** How the person explores all the information available and makes sure to understand it.
12 - Identifying inconsistencies and errors in reasoning and accepting criticism;

13 – Approaching problem solving consistently and systematically and giving constructive criticism;
15 – Analyzing the information received and making sense of it
8 – Reflecting on the validity of my assumptions, beliefs, and faiths

- **Making well reasoned arguments.** How the person put all the information s/he has read into a balanced argument.
- **Arguing a position and getting more confident in expressing an opinion and making decisions**

‘You could say that before I met the project I could not express my thoughts, I thought I was just an ordinary simple person who would come into my life and go away. Now I know that I can now communicate my thoughts to others. And before, it was always up to me, even in my choice of drinks.’

(Participant from Kyrgyzstan)

- **Use evidence to support your arguments and ideas.** Show how s/he has used research and information to back up arguments.
- **Determining the importance and relevance of arguments and ideas and recognizing, constructing and evaluating arguments**
- **Having a dialogue with different people, even if they do not share my views and beliefs**

Diagram #2

As for the issues of tolerance and non-discrimination, it should be noted here that 10 participants out of 19 feel quite comfortable in the company of someone who acts according to the rules of their religion/lifestyle; 2 believe that "everyone should live strictly by the rules of my religion", 2 believe that "people who do not share my religious beliefs are dangerous to me and to society". However, in general, the answers of the respondents indicate their tolerant and non-discriminatory attitude towards others: 15 believe that "people should respect the differences between people"; 13 "can comfortably get along with someone who holds norms and values different from their own", 12 "respect the religious beliefs of people with beliefs quite different from theirs".
The interviews also reveal an increased level of tolerance and non-discriminatory attitudes toward others, particularly in the area of gender, among the trained young leaders.

Now after the project I know that women also have rights. I used to think, according to Islamic concepts, a woman, a wife should stay at home. I believed that a woman cannot be without a man, she is weak and must be behind a man. Now I do not think so."
(Participant from Kyrgyzstan)

Before the project I despised LGBT people, I thought we Kazahks had a different mentality. Now I understand that we live on the free side. I know I am tolerant, I didn't even expect it myself".
(Participant from Kazakhstan)

I think it was hard in the beginning. A lot of guys had never talked openly about LGBT, contraception, etc. However, at the end of the project, they started bringing up these topics for discussion on their own, and so competently, having studied the literature. That was a good result."
(Trainer)

In terms of strengthened relationships which are built between youth, religious and community leaders, and law enforcement through online and offline youth-led actions against discrimination and religious violence in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it should be noted that the main activity of project participants focused on studying the problems of the selected locations (as part of field research and presentation of their results during Community talks), the creation of debate clubs, and the organization of debate tournaments. The six Community Talks reached a collective number of 268 people (124 male, 144 female), including youth leaders. However, the participants, trainers and coordinators noted that the planned and conducted Community talks had no tangible effect and were rather formal, which once again showed that the local authorities and community leaders do not perceive young people as equal partners in solving local problems. Nevertheless, for the youth it was an experience to collect data, to organize field work and to present findings to the broad public. Despite the fact that the project expected participants to interact with religious institutions, LSGs, religious leaders and decision-makers, during the project implementation, communication and interaction were mainly built with varying degrees of success with city halls and schools, where debate tournaments were held. In addition, the very topics of the tournaments held were not related to issues of religious freedom and radicalization. To a certain extent, these issues were given in a generalized way, or within the framework of other topics, such as human rights.
The project definitely had an impact on the participants, especially the leadership group. Seventeen of the 19 online respondents indicated that they were able to build good relationships with others and become successful because of the project. 8 believe that they have become more tolerant of people professing a religion different from theirs.

Diagram #4

Regarding changes in interaction with others, 2 participants believe that no changes occurred, while 10 are convinced that community leaders began to listen to their ideas; 6 noted that local authorities began to listen to the ideas of young people and 6 responded that local authorities began to solve existing problems together with young people. It should be noted that during the implementation of the project participants had to interact with the authorities and educational institutions, which helped them to test their skills in practice.

Diagram #5

However, some participants (9) noted in interviews that interaction with the authorities took place within the framework of debates and Community talks, but within the framework of the latter the interaction was more of a formal nature. Participants presented the results of their research projects at the Community talks, but they did not see any further application of the data obtained. In general, according to the assessment of the country coordinators and the youth themselves in the interviews, the attitude of the authorities, local community leaders and religious leaders toward them is of a
vertical nature, that is, young people are not perceived by them as subjects of action, but rather as objects to be influenced.

“In my opinion, not much has changed with regard to us on the part of the authorities. In general, we are not perceived seriously. Everyone thinks they are young, inexperienced, and do not know anything. Even if we have something to share.”
(Participant from Kazakhstan)

“We like to say that young people are our future and everything is in our hands. But in practice it is not so. Even if we are attracted to some events, they are not some important ones, where important issues are solved, but just sports or some holidays. On the other hand, we ourselves can also be too passive, we do not initially believe that we will be listened to.”
(Participant from Kyrgyzstan)

Utilizing funds saved as a result of hosting activities online instead of in person, IDEA CA organized two interactive online modules for youth from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to enhance their knowledge of FoRB, and practice critical thinking through a unique media experience. 137 youth (29 male, 108 female) attended the first session between 17 and 24 December 2020, and an additional 360 youth (180 male, 180 female) attended the second session between 28 June to 2 July 2021. All respondents noted the success of the online game, saying that it was a real test of critical thinking, the ability to work with information, build teamwork, and distribute their time on tasks. For many, the launch time of the game coincided with the period of exams, but this, according to the participants, only added to the tone and the need to be more disciplined. It should be noted that this game was not planned in the original design of the project and arose as a response to the challenge of the pandemic and its limitations. In this sense, the project had an impact not only on the beneficiaries namely young people, but also on the partner organization, IDEA CA, which implemented the second component, which had to reformat the planned activities into an online format, with the need to use a creative approach to retain the attention and interest of young people to the training offered.

SUSTAINABILITY

The following can be identified as positive trends that can contribute to the sustainability of the project results. In Kyrgyzstan, state agencies began to independently initiate the creation of working groups with the involvement of civil society representatives on religious issues. For example, when adopting the Concept of State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere for 2021-2026, state agencies acted as organizers of a dialogue platform.

In Tajikistan, experts were involved in creating regional consultative groups and creating a regulatory framework for their functioning. The experts developed the Regulation on the creation of advisory groups. The draft was agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the document is currently being legally evaluated by the General Prosecutor’s Office. Moreover, according to the experts, their contribution to the development of the National Strategy of Counteraction to Extremism and Terrorism and the Action Plan for 2021 can be estimated at 40%.

According to the project participants, even though the Coordinating Councils are unlikely to continue their work, personal connections and communication will remain, which will allow them to participate in joint work if necessary.

When asked about willingness to continue cooperation within the framework of CVE, all respondents (100%) from Kyrgyzstan noted that since this cooperation has a great experience and certain success, which was reflected in the joint development of the "Concept of state policy of the Kyrgyz..."
Republic in the religious sphere” for 2014-2020 and for 2021-2026, preparation of the bill on countering extremism and other documents, they are all ready to continue working together.

In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the project contributed to an understanding that state bodies and civil society, represented by experts, can successfully cooperate in solving existing problems in the field of CVE. In this regard, all experts (100%) indicated that they were ready and would continue to cooperate. They also emphasized that, thanks to the project, they began to be invited to join various working groups organized by government agencies, which indicates that the official structures involved in the project are also willing to continue cooperation (100%). However, the willingness to cooperate on the part of religious organizations remains questionable, as the dominance of government agencies in addressing CVE issues and the attitude toward religious organizations as objects of policies, but not equal partners, persist.

In Kazakhstan, experts and partners involved in the project (100%) emphasized that they were ready to continue their work, but the events of January changed the situation in the direction of increasing distrust of the state toward civil society and religious organizations in particular. Since the assessment could not reach representatives of government agencies, it was not possible to measure their readiness to cooperate. As for religious organizations, their opinion that they can solve their problems themselves and their passivity during the project allows us to say that the readiness to continue cooperation is low.

However, it should be noted that due to the limited number of respondents, it is difficult to extrapolate these responses to all participants who were not interviewed.

About youth, we can note at least three mechanisms that may contribute to sustainability:

- Formed groups of the participants from Central Asia with messengers (WhatsApp and Telegram), giving them the opportunity to exchange information constantly and cooperate;
- In the four cities of Aktobe, Shymkent, Karakul and Tokmok participants organized debate clubs, in which play from 10-15 to 40 or more participants;
- The participants independently organize debate tournaments and trainings (Human rights, project application, how to be enrolled to top university etc.) for those who were not involved in the project

The sustainability of the results is affected by the fact that young people are a mobile group that tends to travel outside their location, especially when it comes to small towns. Even established debate clubs will function as long as they have active members. In addition, given the fact that the process of youth mobilization itself took almost half a year, it is difficult to say how long the communications that have arisen among the participants will last.

However, the sustainability of the project results, according to the participants, is more related to the further funding of various activities to consolidate the existing success.

"The problem with all projects funded by international organizations is that they believe that if they have laid the groundwork, then the stakeholders themselves will continue the work. But in practice it all comes down to finances. The state has no money to attract experts and organize broad dialogue platforms, nongovernmental organizations are in search of money, and religious organizations withdraw until they encounter some real difficulties they cannot cope with on their own. And while all the players are busy looking for funds, the sense of unity, trust, and partnership that emerged from the project is lost. And the successes come to naught."

(expert from Uzbekistan)

This is also confirmed by youth. When asked, "To what extent do you think the achievements/results of the project will be sustained?" the majority of project participants (13) responded, "The results will be sustained only if there is further continuation of the project".

Diagram #6
The second factor affecting the sustainability of the project is the institutional consolidation of its results. In this context, close interaction with decision-makers is required. Most of the project results have not yet gone through the process of institutionalization. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the developed guidance on grievance redress mechanisms has not yet become mandatory for use on the ground. Accordingly, its use depends on the willingness and knowledge of the LSG staff. In Kazakhstan, out of 17 recommendations to the legislation regulating religious issues developed as a result of the project, only two were taken into account by the state authorities.

The third factor is political will, political stability, and consistent implementation of religious policy. In Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, virtually all decisions are driven by political will. In Kyrgyzstan, political instability, frequent personnel reshuffles, weak institutional memory, increasing pressure on freedom of speech, and growing religiosity among the population pose threats to maintaining project outcomes.

Regarding the Global Impact Framework (GIF), the ‘Personal Agency’ thematic area, two following indicators were evaluated:

1) % of the population believes they can make a positive difference in their neighborhood.
2) % of the population that takes action to influence the things they care about.

In Kyrgyzstan, all respondents interviewed (100%) in the first component of the project, are convinced that their work together is aimed at making a difference at the population level, as freedom of religion, understanding of human rights, tolerance of their environment leads to the strengthening of peace and cooperation among all communities. They are also convinced that the solutions they adopt or propose will encourage the involvement of all stakeholders in preventing and countering violent extremism. However, the degree to which different communities and groups influence their environment varies. For example, in their view, the dominant Islamic discourse, which equates ethnicity and religious identity, claims that 80% of the population is Kyrgyz and therefore Muslim, thereby downplaying the personal conscious choice of the individual in matters of religion and ignoring the interests and rights of religious minorities.

In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, all respondents (100%) believe that by controlling and regulating the religious sphere, they can keep negative trends (recruitment to extremist organizations) in check and promote the idea of national security and therefore bring positive change in the life of the entire population. Although this approach shows the prevalence of public over private, which can increase the conflictogenicity of religious issues. It should be noted that in Kazakhstan, according to experts, their degree of influence on decisions regarding religious freedom is low, due to the shortage of
specialists in this field and the lack of expert interest in this issue and 99% of influence is in the hands of state authorities (political will).

As for young people, all trained young leaders from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (61% of the total number) believe that they can not only contribute to positive change at the level of their environment, but are already actively engaged in this through the creation of debate clubs, organizing training sessions for young people on human rights, critical thinking, debate technology, media literacy.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion assesses the extent to which the project achieved its overall goal of providing a framework for state and nonstate actors, especially youth, to reduce religious discrimination in Central Asia and prevent radicalization to violence. The relevance and effectiveness of the project are examined, as well as how the components of the project together contributed to the overall goal. Recommendations are provided to learn and strengthen future projects aimed at promoting freedom of religion and belief at the regional, country and local levels.

As part of the work aimed at forming and strengthening communication and interaction between state authorities and civil society, in particular, experts and religious organizations to promote freedom of religion as a counteraction to extremism, the following types of good practices should be highlighted within the following project activities:

1. The research which specifically explored two topical areas: (1) an analysis of social media content pertinent to FoRB and VE in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), and (2) a review of the legal and regulatory frameworks surrounding PVE and FoRB. Eight reports were produced, including one consolidated social media analysis and legal analysis. The consolidated reports were disseminated widely by Search. Most importantly, the finalized reports were utilized and informed the activities of the Regional Multi-Stakeholder Working Group. Overall, the reports received stellar feedback. For example, an academic from Kazakhstan explained how the report had already been approached by the Office of the General Prosecutor to explore how the report's findings and recommendations could be integrated into Kazakh legislation. However, beyond eliciting recommendations for legislative revisions, the report also resulted in tangible amendments to existing laws, particularly in Uzbekistan. In fact, one of the expert researchers in Uzbekistan reported that the two analyses were directly used in the drafting of Uzbekistan's "Law on the Support and Regulation of the Activities of Media Agents" and "Law on the Support and Regulation of the Activities of NGOs in the Field of Assisting the Social and Economic Adaptation of Amnestied and Repatriated Citizens. According to experts, these reports allowed them to see not only the specifics of their countries in matters of religious freedom and violent extremism, but also the Central Asian region as a whole, with the exception of Turkmenistan. In Tajikistan, the recommendations developed were taken into account by the Prosecutor General's Office in developing a strategy to prevent extremism and terrorism.

2. The Regional Multi-Stakeholder Working Group (RMSWG) was an effective dialogue platform for government agencies, experts, and religious representatives, bringing together Ministries of Interior, Ministries of Education, National Security Agencies, Defense Councils, and state agencies responsible for youth affairs amongst others, in addition to non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, religious groups, and/or academic experts. Ahead of formally establishing the RMSWG, Search conducted a rapid stakeholder mapping and analysis to identify the most relevant and critical entry points to FoRB and PVE in each country. Based on the mapping's results, Search invited 40 representatives to join the RMSWG, 20 of them attended the meetings consistently and became permanent RMSWG members, representing 8 state agencies/bodies, 5 CSO organizations, 6 academics, and 1 religious organization. In addition, the national working groups created to focus on country-specific issues have been successful. These working groups brought together different actors to address issues related to the promotion of religious freedom and countering extremism. The recommendations they
developed were passed on to decision makers. It should be noted that an important result was the formation of trust and cooperation between government agencies and the expert community and an understanding of the commonality of their interests in preventing and countering extremism. For example, in Tajikistan, the partnership resulted in the initiative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to create local regional working groups. The regulations for the work of such groups were commissioned to be developed by the experts involved in the project. In Kyrgyzstan, the new law on countering extremism was drafted in close cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, nongovernmental organizations and experts.

3. The exchange of successful practices between the countries was of a practical nature. For example, the Guidelines on religious and psychological and linguistic expertise of materials developed in Kyrgyzstan was received with interest by the Ministry of Justice and the State Committee on Religious Affairs of Tajikistan. As a result, it was adapted to the local context with the participation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Directorate for the prevention of organized crime of the republic.

4. In Kyrgyzstan, training for local authorities were conducted at the local level, one of the results of these discussions was the development of a guidebook for local authorities with the tools needed to resolve grievances as they pertain to FoRB. This guidebook was used to resolve problems on the ground, which indicates that it is in demand.

However, one can note that there are objective shortcomings of the project, affecting its effectiveness and sustainability of results.

1. Due to the limitations of Covid-19, the regional working group meetings were held in a hybrid format, which could not but affect the quality of the work. For example, at the regional meeting in Almaty, representatives from Tajikistan were able to participate online, but the weak Internet connection created difficulties in communication.

2. Political events, in particular the conflict in the border area between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan affected communication and made it necessary to refrain from meetings in offline format.

3. The specifics of the existing culture of interaction between government agencies, experts, and religious organizations affected the nature of meetings. Thus, in Kazakhstan, there was the alienation of religious organizations; their reluctance to contact, and therefore the work was limited to the participation of only the head of the Association of Religious Associations of Kazakhstan. State agencies represented by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Committee on Religious Affairs were passive during the meetings. In Uzbekistan, representatives of government agencies (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Committee on Religious Affairs) and experts were the main participants in the meetings, but they were restrained in their speeches for fear of censorship. Representatives of religious organizations participated in the roundtable in Tashkent. In Tajikistan, the main communication and interaction took place between representatives of government agencies (Prosecutor General's Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, UBOP, Ministry of Justice) and experts and representatives of the academic community.

5. Since the working groups from government agencies consisted mostly of mid-level managers, many of the recommendations developed were not enshrined in the draft laws, strategies, and programs being developed. In other words, the project did not provide for a lobbying mechanism that would help institutionalize the proposed recommendations to improve legislation related to religious freedom. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, despite the active work to develop and discuss the draft law on religious freedom and religious organizations, it was rejected and frozen until 2023.

6. Insufficient institutionalization is also observed in the implementation of the Guidelines for grievance resolution mechanisms. This guide, although used by local authorities, is of an advisory nature, which does not ensure its use throughout the country as a mandatory basis for the resolution of local problems related to religious issues.
7. Freedom of religion is understood differently not only in different countries of Central Asia, but also by the actors themselves: government agencies, experts, leaders of religious organizations. Regional cooperation and the exchange of best practices require a common understanding of religious freedom, prevention and countering extremism. In this sense, the project has not been able to develop unified regional positions, which in turn is due to the different approaches to countering extremism in the countries of Central Asia. For example, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, freedom of religion is considered in the general context of threats to national security. In Kyrgyzstan, experts promote a human rights approach, trying to find a compromise with the state authorities considering religious issues in the framework of countering extremism. In Kazakhstan, the issue is not actively discussed at the state level and does not arouse much interest among the expert community amid the passivity and aloofness of religious organizations.

8. In the issue of trust and cooperation between government agencies and civil society, including religious organizations, trust and interaction thanks to the project are largely built at the personal level, but they have not been able to reach the institutional level. This, in turn, affects the sustainability of the results achieved, which are predominantly dependent on the personal factor and political will in general. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, despite the fact that the dialogue has been built since 2014 and has had a number of successful results (general discussions of draft laws, joint development of strategies), interaction depends on the understanding and competence of individual officials and their openness to the civil sector. In Kazakhstan, the events of January have significantly undermined the results of the project, demonstrating how the political context can fundamentally change the situation. The ongoing tense situation in the Batken region, on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, is also not conducive to regional engagement.

9. Regarding communication and interaction between state bodies and religious organizations in promoting religious freedom and preventing and countering extremism in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, religious organizations are still viewed as objects of influence, but not as equal partners. In Kazakhstan, religious organizations remain alienated from the dialogue due to the involvement of only one representative of religious organizations, the head of AROK (Association of Religious Associations of Kazakhstan), which makes the interaction dependent on one person. In addition, the adherence of religious organizations to the position of defending only their own interests is also not conducive to constructive dialogue.

10. In the project, the connection between the two components was not observed - the work with young people did not overlap in the work of building dialogue and interaction between stakeholders, which created the impression of the implementation of two projects united by one theme.

11. There was poor information and media support for the project, which could have involved the general population in understanding and reflecting on existing problems, which would have promoted ideas of religious freedom at the public level, and not only at the level of the expert community and responsible government agencies.

In the framework of increasing capacity of target youth to think critically and become more tolerant through learning to respect other points of view and increasing sensitivity towards and awareness of the needs of their communities and strengthening relationships between youth, religious and community leaders, and law enforcement through online and offline youth-led actions against discrimination and religious violence in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the following successful results can be defined:

1. Despite the limitations of Covid-19 and all the limitations associated with it, the project was able to redesign the planned activities with a creative approach and generally achieve its goals.

2. Contributions to meaningful youth participation were considerable. Several of the project's outcomes are likely to be sustainable over the long term, namely: improved skills and behaviors that young people have internalized through the series of trainings, field research and organizing events for school children; the changed views of authorities and decision-makers, who now see the potential of young people and their added value; and improvements in
intergenerational relations, such as relations between community decision-makers and young people. These skills and relationships are unlikely to disappear because the funding cycle has come to an end.

3. The field studies conducted by young people in their communities gave them the skills to identify the problems they faced, the needs of their communities, the generalization of the results, and the presentation of the results at the community level with local authorities. In addition, they made them feel like agents of action, agents of positive change.

4. The project helped students develop organizational skills, communication skills with authorities, media literacy, creating their own networks and debate clubs to develop critical thinking skills, public speaking, searching for and analyzing information, verifying it, and public speaking skills.

5. The activities carried out at the local and national level have strengthened regional communication and cooperation among young people.

6. The organized online game involved participants from all over the region, reinforcing their knowledge of human rights and critical thinking and media literacy skills. In addition, the development of the online game is a demonstration of creativity and the use of modern learning technologies, which are close to the spirit of youth.

7. The project applications supported by Search helped to reinforce their skills and strengthen their understanding of their role as actors capable of contributing to the social, intellectual development of young people.

8. Debate clubs in which young people can learn the skills of critical thinking, argumentation, listening to the opponent's position, building interpersonal cooperation, and public speaking were created in the selected locations. These debate clubs are one of the mechanisms of sustainability of the results obtained.

9. The participants of the project united through social media and messengers where they can exchange information and work on joint initiatives.

At the same time, we should note some weaknesses in the implementation of this component of the project, which affected its effectiveness and sustainability.

1. The greatest impact on the project was caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which entailed transferring all activities to online format which did not contribute to the regional integration of young people as agents of positive change in preventing and countering extremism and becoming partners for local authorities and their communities. Due to the online format, the composition of the core group of selected young leaders changed, which did not allow the formation of a core-group of Central Asian transformers.

2. The selection of locations was not coordinated with the partner-implementer of this component, and the selection of participants was carried out through the usual partner channels, which led to a mixed composition of the group, which included young people with extensive experience of participation in projects, already existing skills of critical thinking, media literacy and young people without any such experience. This, in turn, influenced the learning process, in which some were easy and at times uninteresting, while others were difficult and often incomprehensible.

3. Since the implementer was an organization with long experience in introducing debate technologies, the main focus of work with young people focused on teaching debates, organizing and conducting them, which somewhat narrowed the format of work with the problem of religious freedom and promoting tolerance.

4. In terms of interaction with local authorities and community leaders, the main work focused on organizing and conducting debates and creating debate clubs. In general, the attitude of local authorities to young people has not changed in the direction of cooperation, joint discussion of problems and finding solutions to them.

5. Hence, while the project contributed positively to youth leadership, it did not reach a level where young people felt they were no longer dependent on external support.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations are based on insights generated during data collection, and on evaluation findings.
and conclusions. They are intended to support the partners’ learning and development, in order to strengthen future interventions for increasing communication and partnership between key representatives from state institutions and civil society from four Central Asian states on state approaches to protecting religious freedom in preventing violent extremism (CVE) and youth participation for freedom of religious beliefs and prevention and countering violent extremism.

• All relevant staff and stakeholders should be engaged in the design phase, to incorporate their expertise and experience, and to anticipate and mitigate against potential challenges before they arise. All partners should refrain from wanting to do too much, and be realistic as to what can be done – and done well – given the project’s timeframe and budget. Make sure the budget is sufficient for the effective and full implementation of the project and all its components. Spend time exploring and understanding the specific contribution of each project component, how the various components link with and reinforce each other in the given context, and how they contribute to the project outcomes and objective.

• In order to strengthen regional cooperation, deep work is needed to develop a categorical and conceptual framework, with a clear distinction between religious and religious studies, a clear content of the concepts of "freedom of religion," "tolerance," "human rights," "social security," "extremism," and so on. All stakeholders should be involved in this work.

• It is necessary to expand the circle of stakeholders, not limited to the usual partners. It is necessary to involve in the dialogue people and organizations that have not previously been involved in the dialogue. It is necessary to understand what is going on in the work of organizations that are self-excluded from the dialogue, perhaps not supporting secularism, in order to develop ways of possible cooperation.

• In order to institutionalize the results and ensure their sustainability, a lobbying mechanism at the decision-making level needs to be thought through. In this regard, it is necessary to involve Parliament and the Government, to strengthen advocacy among decision-makers and those who have influence in society.

• Consistency and consistency in combining the work at the legislative level and the implementation of decisions made in practice is required. In particular, in the work with young people it is necessary to unite them in dialogue platforms with experts, representatives of state bodies, religious organizations in order to deepen understanding of existing problems and development of joint solutions.

• Work is needed to build the capacity of government agencies and LSGs based on international experience and the local context, using creative, innovative, "soft" approaches to training.

• It is necessary to organize a broad media campaign highlighting the goals, process, challenges, and results of the project. It is important to use social media to engage a wide range of the population as well as young people.

• The media and educational program should be based on a re-framing of "national security" from a security context to a social context to a human rights context. Documentary films could be made that show the problems that exist and how to solve them.

• Since we are talking about education and behavioral practices, it is important to build a partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture. In addition, it must be taken into account that without socio-economic changes, infrastructure support it is impossible to achieve sustainable results. Therefore, it is important to involve the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Social Development in the partnership.

• For a wide involvement of the population it is necessary to use creative approaches with the tools of art, new technologies, involvement of business companies.

• It is important to have an equal impact on the population in the geographic cross-section and an adequate distribution of resources. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the southern region is oversaturated with training, and the northern region suffers from a lack of training; the same locations are used in public discussions.

• Comprehensive, systematic work is needed at the local level, with the study of the life of local communities, leaders, LSGs, religious movements, and local organizations.
• A broad promotion of civic identity, independent of religious or ethnic affiliation, is required.
• In working with young people in the implementation of such a project, a careful selection of places that have much in common socio-economically and culturally is required. The gap between urban and rural development must be taken into account, which affects the level of preparedness of potential participants.
• Explore assumptions young people might have regarding freedom of religious beliefs and their participation, prior to finalizing project design. Take young people’s assumptions into account in the design. Some of these assumptions may limit conflict resolution, social cohesion and/or youth participation – if this is the case, seek to mitigate these as part of the design.
• The selection of participants should be based on clear criteria in order to work with a relatively homogeneous cast. Young people who have not previously participated in any projects should be involved to avoid a strong gap between those who move smoothly from project to project and those who have no experience. Methods of engaging young people should be expanded beyond proven channels and partners. Provide ongoing support to young people who have received training, by following up with them (especially in the early stages), seeking opportunities in which they can share their learning with others, and encouraging collaboration among young people. Continue to engage trained young people to support those who will/are receiving training, as peer-to-peer education generally contributes positively to outcomes and inspires young people.
• To promote the transformational effect at the regional level, joint regional events with live direct communication and interaction between participants, with a request for further joint projects are needed.
• It is necessary to diversify the forms of work with local authorities and community leaders with young people, using a creative, interactive approach to form an understanding of the role and importance of young people as equal partners.
• To expand knowledge and understanding of religious freedom, tolerance, human rights, prevention of extremism among young people, it is necessary to create platforms for communication and interaction of young people with experts, decision makers, and state bodies.
### ANNEX

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<tr>
<th>KII</th>
<th># of persons</th>
<th>Country/Organization (if applicable)</th>
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<td>Project staff (Search)</td>
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<td>Including the Director of Search</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project partners from four countries</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan - IDEA CA, SCRA, RCSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Kazakhstan (Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Tajikistan (Marifatnoki)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Uzbekistan Center for Research and Invitation Projects</td>
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<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Trainers (based on the list of trainers)</td>
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<td>Mini-grant holders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth (Community talks organizers)</td>
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<td>1 from each location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate participants (based on IDEA CA recommendations)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
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1. **Online Survey for Youth**

   https://docs.google.com/forms/d/13iHNOriwjEaWPux9fswpgWzhZyuU7TZtinfTuYRrNvE/edit?usp=sharing

**Questionnaire for the final evaluation of the C Search for Common Ground project "Protect to Prevent"**

Dear Participants
Search for Common Ground asks you to respond to the following questionnaire.
Your answers will help us evaluate the results of the project, which aims to prevent radicalization to violence by strengthening the capacity of state and non-state actors to reduce discrimination on the basis of religion in Central Asia.
All of your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for the final evaluation of the project.
Please complete and submit the questionnaire by March 2, 2022, 12:00.
Thank you for your cooperation!

**Personal data**

Age
Gender
Country
Position
Project activities

Which of the project activities did you participate in? (you can choose several options, if necessary)

- Training
- Community Talks
- Community needs research
- Makaton
- ToT on debate
- Debate
- Grant application development
- Other:

What of your needs did the project meet? (you can choose several answers)

- The project filled a gap in my knowledge about religious freedom, tolerance, and risks of radicalization
- The project strengthened my understanding of religious freedom, tolerance, radicalization risks
- The project filled a gap in the interaction between youth and local authorities.
- Filled a gap in the interaction between youth and religious leaders.
- Filled a gap in the interaction between youth and community leaders.
- Other

Critical Thinking

What have you learned from the project?

- I have a better understanding of issues related to religious freedom, radicalization, and other sensitive topics.
- I can analyze the information I receive and understand its meaning.
- I can determine the importance and relevance of arguments and ideas.
- I can recognize, construct and evaluate arguments
- I can identify inconsistencies and errors in reasoning
- I can reflect on the validity of my own assumptions, beliefs, and certainties
- I can consistently and systematically approach problem solving
- I know how to conduct field research
- I am able to have a dialogue with different people, even if they do not share my views and beliefs
- I am able to give constructive criticism
- I am able to accept criticism
- I am able to argue my position
- I have become more confident in expressing my opinion and making decisions
- Other:

Tolerance and non-discrimination

Check the box next to the opinions you share (multiple choices are possible)
• I believe in a society where all people share the same beliefs.
• I believe everyone should live strictly by the rules of my religion
• I could easily live with someone who holds different standards and values than I do
• Values and norms that are important to me make me see myself as completely different from other people
• I would like to be a member of a society where everyone's approach to life is the same as mine.
• I feel quite comfortable in the company of someone who acts according to the rules of their religion/lifestyle.
• I respect the religious beliefs of people with beliefs quite different from mine
• I do not care if my country is run by Christians, Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists.
• I am of the opinion that people should respect the differences between people
• I believe that people who do not share my religious beliefs are dangerous to me and to society
• I have a strong tendency to only trust people who practice my religion
• I believe that people who do not share my religious beliefs should be re-educated or isolated
• Other:

**Interaction**

What policies/procedures have you developed with local authorities?

What cross-country activities have you initiated/conducted together with Central Asian youth?

How do you interact with project participants from Central Asian countries? (you can choose several options)

• We have a common group on WhatsApp, where we exchange messages
• We have a Telegram group where we exchange messages.
• We organize and hold events for young people together
• Other:

What changes do you think the project has caused?

• I became more tolerant of people who do not share my views or religious beliefs
• I think that project participants will be able to resist extremist appeals, at least on a personal level because of their critical thinking
• Young people, participants of the project have built good relationships and can interact successfully.
• I have a better understanding of the reasons for radicalization and it helps me not to become a target of manipulation
• Other:

What has changed in your interaction with your environment because of the project? (you can choose several options)

• It became easier for me to communicate with local self-government bodies (LSGB)
• Local self-government bodies began to listen to the ideas of young people
• Young people together with LSGs discuss existing problems and work on solving them
• It became easier to communicate with community and religious leaders
• Community leaders began to listen to youth ideas
• Other:

Where else besides the project were you able to apply the knowledge and skills you gained? (more than one way to look at this).

To what extent do you think the accomplishments/outcomes of the project will be sustained?

• The results will be maintained, because young people, LSGs and community leaders saw that together they can solve many problems.
• The results will be preserved only if there will be further continuation of the project
• Results won't keep so there's no clear vision of what will happen next at the local, national level
• Other:

2. Online survey for state agencies and not-state stakeholders

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/187E92weQAJi9QOW6DWj77pnOVxk0w8WNSrktTTe0UE/edit?usp=sharing

Questionnaire for the final evaluation of the Search for Common Ground project "Protect to Prevent"

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Personal data

Age
Gender
Position
• Civil Servant
• Expert
• Head of an NGO
• Leader of a religious organization
• Academic
• Other:
What project activities have you participated in? (Mark more than one option, if necessary) *
- Member of the Coordinating Council
- Round tables
- Conferences
- Other:

Trust and collaboration

Assess the level of trust between state institutions and religious organizations/communities prior to the project?
Lack of trust 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High Confidence

Assess the level of trust between state institutions and religious organizations/communities during the project?
Lack of trust 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High Confidence

What do you think the level of trust between government institutions and religious organizations/communities will be after the project is completed?
Lack of trust 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High Confidence

Which of the following characterizes the communication between state institutions and civil society during project activities? (You can mark several options, if necessary)
- I could openly express my opinion, position.
- I showed respect to all participants
- The participants were respectful to me
- I was able to take responsibility for the results of the activity
- No form of humiliation, insulting the dignity of the participants was tolerated
- Everyone had the opportunity to speak out
- Other:

Evaluate the level of interaction between state institutions and representatives of civil society before the project?
Lack of trust 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High Confidence

Evaluate the level of interaction between state institutions and representatives of civil society during the project?
Lack of trust 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High Confidence
What were the forms of interaction between state institutions and representatives of civil society? (You can tick several options, if necessary) *

- Joint discussion of existing problems in the area of religious freedom
- Joint development of recommendations for decision-makers
- Developing draft laws or amendments to existing laws and regulations
- Organizing joint events outside the project
- Participation in common venues (round tables, conferences)
- Other:

What do you think will be the level of interaction between state institutions and civil society on religious freedom issues after the project is completed?

Lack of trust 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High Confidence

In your opinion, what changes did the project bring about? *

- I have (become) more trusting of state institutions in matters of religious freedom
- I have (become) more willing to listen to experts' opinions
- I have become more tolerant of those who hold different religious views
- I have a wider circle of partners in government institutions
- I have a wider network of partners at the civil society level
- Project participants work together to address confessional issues
- Other:

In your opinion, what are the achievements/results of the project?

Your recommendations for the organizers of the project

Your recommendations for the project participants