



Analysis of Peace and Conflict Potential in Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan



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Preface

This research was conducted to provide an understanding of the peace and conflict potential in Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

The report is part of an analysis conducted in the GTZ target regions of the programme “Promoting Food Security, Regional Co-operation and Stability in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan”.

The findings are used for the implementation of the GTZ project “Promoting Food Security, Regional Co-operation and Stability in Batken Region”.

Fieldwork was conducted in September, October and November of 2003 in four regions in the Oblast by the following local team:

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A one-week training workshop in Batken preceded the fieldwork.

The GTZ project in Batken provided support. The GTZ programme structure in Dushanbe provided supervision of the fieldwork under the guidance of Daniel Passon (GTZ). Jan Koehler (ARC GbR Berlin) was responsible for the overall research and was in charge of the general supervision.

The final report was written by Daniel Passon (GTZ) and Azamat Temirkulov (ARC GbR Berlin).

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Executive Summary

Batken Oblast in Southern Kyrgyzstan is part of the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia. In the 1990s, the valley became notorious for a range of political, economic and social problems, resulting from the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the last decade, parts of the valley, especially in Uzbekistan, have drawn international attention. Only the incursion of several hundred fighters of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan into the Batken region in 1999 and again in 2000 directed the attention to this part of the valley. The Kyrgyz Government reacted with the creation of an independent administrative unit – Batken Oblast. The impoverished region was now seen as a breeding ground for militant Islamism. Finally, with 09/11 and the shift of the international focus onto Central Asia, the international community increasingly developed plans and projects to combat the poor economic and social situation in the Batken region. Most of these activities aim at the prevention of further conflict escalations. In 2003, the GTZ started a project for the “Promotion of Food Security, Regional Cooperation and Stability” in Batken region. While most international organisations and local NGOs included a focus on crisis prevention and conflict mitigation in their activities, risks were often seen in radical religious developments and the abundance of drugs and weapons. During the research in Batken region, no evidence for an immediate threat to stability from drugs, arms or Islamism related issues was found.

This report identifies three main conflict arenas within Batken region:

- Conflicts arising around the distribution and use of water;
- Conflicts arising around the shortage of arable land, its distribution and the organisation of access to it;
- Conflicts arising around borders, their changed status and regime of control.

Water is the most important resource for the economy in Batken Oblast and has substantial importance for the neighbouring countries in the north. Despite the importance, the distribution of water is poorly managed. A lack of irrigation water and resulting conflicts are an omnipresent problem in Batken region. Political reasons for this lie first and foremost in the organisational deficits of the administration. The lack of a functioning control and sanction system in particular leads to problems with the important distribution facilities. The collapse of the Soviet Union has triggered major changes in the economic sector. People who were previously working in collective farms (Kolkhoz), or state farms (Sovkhoz) or industrial enterprises, are now mostly working on small farms, which all need access to irrigation water. The existing infrastructure of the canals was not planned in such extensive dimensions, and is not able to deliver water everywhere it is needed. The constrained financial resources of the state and water users have led to the collapse of whole sections of the system. Finally, people still have difficulties in adapting to a more sustainable use of this scarce resource. The will of water users to pay charges is still limited and damaging facilities when building private canals is frequent. The establishment of Water Users Associations since 2002 is a promising step towards enhancing the functionality of the system, and thereby to prevent conflicts. The GTZ should seek to support this development.

Apart from water, **land** is the most important resource of Batken Oblast. However, it is a dominant reason for conflict mainly along the border, where undemarcated spots have become triggers for disputes between citizens of the different states. The main source of the problem lies in the slow demarcation process between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as well as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uncompromising political demands combined with the ignorance of politicians at the national level towards local sensitivities are an obstacle to finding solutions. However, economic factors, too, are responsible for a "land" conflict arena. The need for arable land makes the relatively flat areas along the border in the northern part of the Oblast interesting for farming. People from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, who face a similar economic fate, compete with Kyrgyz farmers for disputed spots. The demographic growth in the rural areas of the region puts more pressure on the scarce land resource. Communities in densely populated areas try to extend their arable land in order to make a better income with farming. To prevent conflict, activities within the "land" arena should try to offer income alternatives to people in rural areas as well as focus on agricultural extension that could make the use of land more effective.

Batken Oblast **borders** Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In addition, several enclaves, belonging to these countries, are situated in the Oblast. Conflicts arise from upgraded administrative borders between the former Soviet republics. Border posts frequently disturb the daily routine of local inhabitants by violating the law. The partly undemarcated border is a permanent source of conflict. The political factors, which determine the arena, are above all the absence of will of the politicians to engage in serious attempts to improve the regional relations. That counts for the demarcation process as well as for trade policy. The opportunity to use border posts as instruments to block transit roads has often been used in recent years in order to push through political demands. Economic factors are rooted in the divergent national economic policies in the region. Uzbekistan, which tries to protect the domestic market, makes procedures at posts particularly difficult. The economic opportunity for border guards to derive an additional income from taking bribes has developed into an organised system and is a permanent problem at all posts. A security factor emerges from the mining of parts of the border after the IMU incursion in 1999 and 2000. People and cattle are frequently blown up, which is aggravating relations in cross-border communities. In the context of the GTZ project in Batken, activities should be comprised of the establishment of a regional forum as a possible step to improve dialogue and to decrease tensions at borders.

Not a particular conflict arena but a point of concern in terms of conflict prevention is the situation of **young people** in Batken Oblast. Perspectives for young people in Batken are bleak. Missing education opportunities, few chances to find a regular income and limited spare time activities result in excessive alcohol consumption, eroding social relations and crime. Losing young people could pose a threat to the development of Kyrgyzstan in general, and Batken region could finally make a future recruiting ground for fundamentalist groups.

Four case studies within the analysis focus on the identified conflict arenas and give detailed recommendations for possible activities of GTZ Batken.