Working with and for Adolescents in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises: Accelerating Results

unicef | for every child

Engaging Adolescents across Borders in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan for Sustainable Peace and Development

Summary

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS   5 GENDER EQUALITY   10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES   17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

⟶ **Programming objective**
In areas of high tension and conflict on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, strengthen mechanisms for cross-border dialogue, deliberation and collaborative problem-solving by and with adolescents. This includes targeted attention to promoting social cohesion and inter-ethnic tolerance among adolescent girls and boys, to lower immediate and future risks of conflict and violence among communities.

⟶ **UNICEF's approach in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan**
Strategically invest in adolescent participation and engagement in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, acknowledging their role as rights-holders, to foster peace and social cohesion among those living on the border. Integrate peacebuilding in existing and future humanitarian response and development programmes.

This case study series shows how to accelerate outcomes for adolescents in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16); Gender Equality (SDG 5); Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10); and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). The programmes also advance the Youth, Peace and Security agenda to recognize and support the positive role and contributions young people in peacebuilding and in the United Nation's (UN) Sustaining Peace agenda, which aims to maintain positive peace and reduce the likelihood of conflict through UN programming.

Context

Along the 611-mile (984-km) border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, farming communities manage livestock, grow food and cultivate crops including cotton. In pursuing their livelihoods, many families rely on water sources and pastures shared between the two countries. Cross-border cooperation exists in most communities living along the border. But since 1991, when the two countries became independent, conflicts have sporadically flared up in some areas, leading to high levels of violence – especially in the cross-border Sughd Region of Tajikistan, the Batken Region of Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley, which spans both countries.

The increasing tensions have been linked to diminishing natural resources due to climate impacts, water resource disputes, ethnic differences, contested borders, road and transportation issues, border crossing rule changes and criminal activity. While adolescents and youth are often directly affected by the conflict, their peacebuilding role is rarely recognized or supported.

Along the 611-mile (984-km) border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, farming communities manage livestock, grow food and cultivate crops including cotton.


To address the risks of periodic violence, reduce tensions and strengthen young people's capacities for social cohesion, UNICEF engaged in two programmes between 2015 and 2020:

Cross-Border Cooperation for Sustainable Peace and Development, 2015-2019 – referred to below as the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) programme

- ▶ **Location**: Sughd and Batken regions

- ▶ **Lead organizations**: UNICEF, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UN Women

- ▶ **Partners**: Government departments and civil society organizations (CSOs), including implementing partners the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA) and TajRupt, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Tajikistan

- ▶ **Funders**: United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF)[1] and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)[2]

- ▶ **Focus**: To support young people in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; UNICEF focused its peacebuilding efforts on adolescents aged 14-18 years, while UNDP worked with youth 19 years of age and older
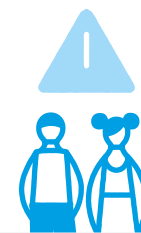
UNPBF programme

The UNPBF programme aimed to increase cooperation and trust between communities Tajik-Kyrgyz village clusters towards mitigating immediate risks of renewed cross-border violence.
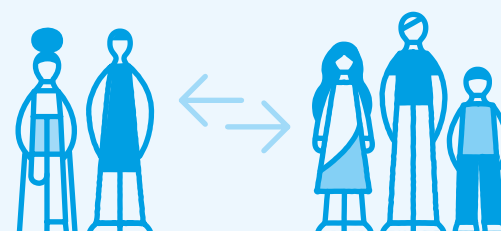
Empowered Adolescents and Youth for Peaceful and Fair Communities in Central Asia, 2016-2020 – referred to below as the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) programme
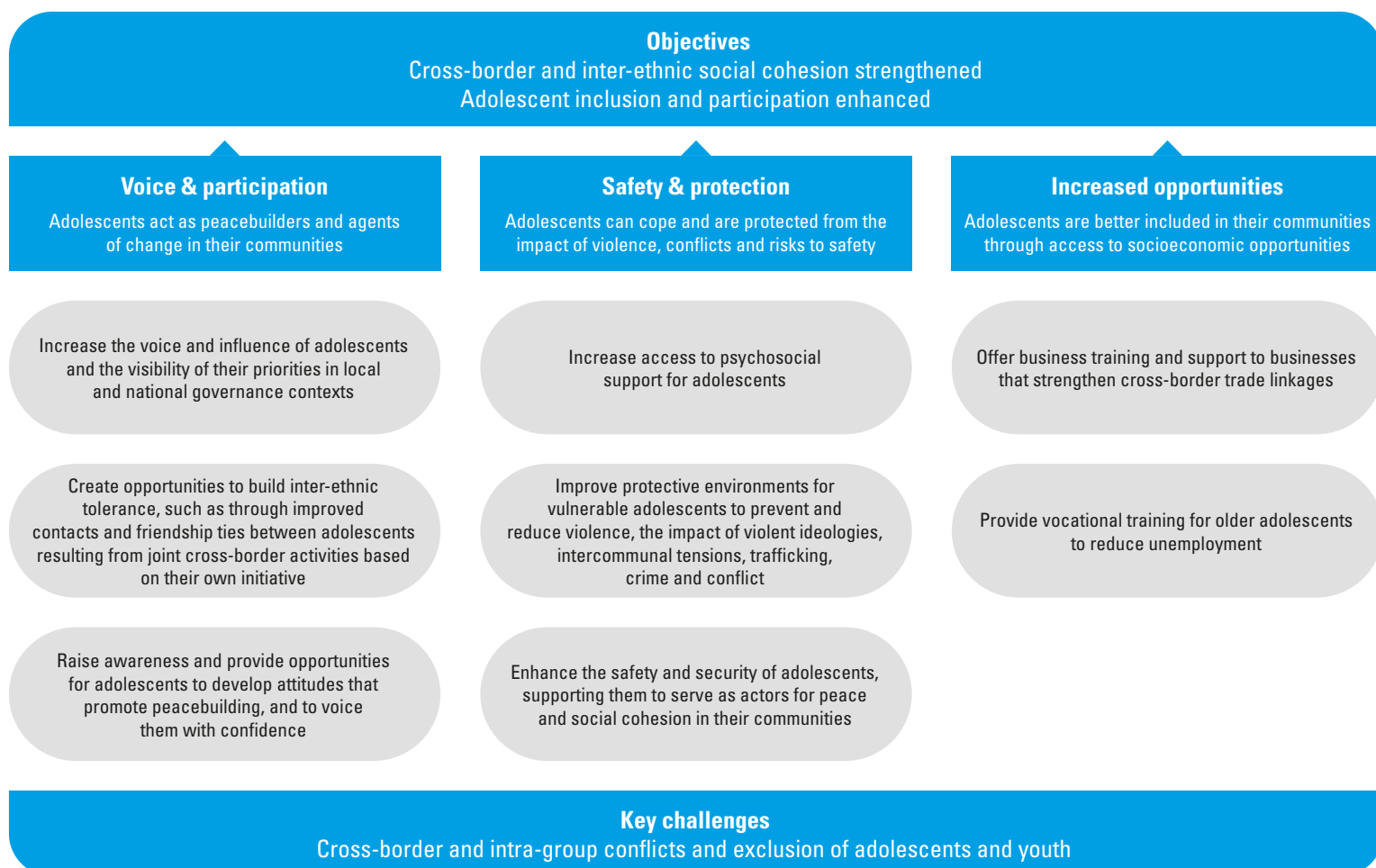
- ▶ **Location**: Ferghana Valley
- ▶ **Partners**: In Tajikistan, partners include TajRupt, EFCA; Initiative Youth of Tajikistan, a CSO; the Association of Scientific and Technical Intelligentsia (ASTI), a CSO; the local governments of the B. Gafurov and Isfara Districts; and the Committee for Youth and Centres of Additional Education of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES); in Kyrgyzstan, partners include the Youth of Osh and others[3]
- ▶ **Funder**: The United Kingdom's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF)[4]

The **CSSF programme** aimed to improve structural stability through child, adolescent and youth empowerment, peacebuilding and cross-border cooperation, with a particular focus on addressing the rise in hard nationalist narratives and violent ideologies.

UNICEF response: Key activities

UNICEF recognizes young people, and especially adolescents, as valuable actors for intercommunal peace and social cohesion, including in efforts to build community resilience against violence. Accordingly, in the two programmes, UNICEF prioritized reaching the most disadvantaged adolescent girls and boys, as well as adolescents with other gender identities, and engaging them in peacebuilding activities aimed at strengthening social cohesion and enhancing participation.

Objectives
Cross-border and inter-ethnic social cohesion strengthened
Adolescent inclusion and participation enhanced

Voice & participation	Safety & protection	Increased opportunities
Adolescents act as peacebuilders and agents of change in their communities	Adolescents can cope and are protected from the impact of violence, conflicts and risks to safety	Adolescents are better included in their communities through access to socioeconomic opportunities
Increase the voice and influence of adolescents and the visibility of their priorities in local and national governance contexts	Increase access to psychosocial support for adolescents	Offer business training and support to businesses that strengthen cross-border trade linkages
Create opportunities to build inter-ethnic tolerance, such as through improved contacts and friendship ties between adolescents resulting from joint cross-border activities based on their own initiative	Improve protective environments for vulnerable adolescents to prevent and reduce violence, the impact of violent ideologies, intercommunal tensions, trafficking, crime and conflict	Provide vocational training for older adolescents to reduce unemployment
Raise awareness and provide opportunities for adolescents to develop attitudes that promote peacebuilding, and to voice them with confidence	Enhance the safety and security of adolescents, supporting them to serve as actors for peace and social cohesion in their communities	

Key challenges
Cross-border and intra-group conflicts and exclusion of adolescents and youth

Toward the programmes' peacebuilding goals, UNICEF Kyrgyzstan and UNICEF Tajikistan, along with local and government partners, for the first time came together to develop and run in-country and cross-border activities addressing structural drivers of conflict. Activities included development of social cohesion curricula, capacity- and skills-building, awareness-raising, community engagement, cross-cultural events for and led by adolescents, and advancing child-sensitive systems and governance.

To reach adolescents most at risk for accelerating conflict, UNICEF supported local organizations already trusted in the border communities. For instance, EFCA in Tajikistan and Youth of Osh in Kyrgyzstan have long histories promoting active citizenship and community engagement. In Tajikistan's borderland areas, the Committee for Youth and Centres of Additional Education partnered with UNICEF to establish Adolescent Innovation Labs[5] that today are not only still active, but expanding.

The UNPBF programme helped to establish community Youth Centres (YCs) at which older in-school and out-of-school adolescents could build positive relationships, skills, competencies and knowledge. YCs have tended to serve older adolescents interested in life skills and able to design and implement their own initiatives to reduce inter-communal tensions.

Strengthening youth and child-friendly local governance

The two programmes applied a Youth- and Child-Friendly Local Governance (YCFLG) approach (see right). The activities helped advance Child-Friendly Cities principles[6] – whereby governments and other stakeholders commit to realizing the rights of young people as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),[7] and young people gain core competencies to civically engage. This includes strengthening their sense of belonging, so they can take a more informed and critical stance on political and religious ideologies.

The UNPBF programme introduced YCFLG in 10 municipalities in Kyrgyzstan. The municipalities responded with child- and youth-responsive planning and budgeting, including direct financing of youth-proposed initiatives, leading to tangible results. In 2020, the YCFLG initiative extended to 18 municipalities and was institutionalized through a national certification process supported by the State. In Tajikistan, the YCFLG approach led to establishing platforms for participation and dialogue in five districts, with an extension to five additional districts in 2020.

In Tajikistan, through the YCFLG approach, the programmes helped to integrate adolescent peace and security priorities into public policies at the district level. This included supporting government staff in advocating for and developing child-sensitive district development plans and policies with a focus on child rights, laws and measures to reduce violence against children, strengthening equitable public service provision to young people, and promoting inclusion.

The Youth- and Child-Friendly Cities work continues in both countries as part of UNICEF's strategic plans. Efforts include building the capacity of the local government staff on the value and modes of adolescent engagement, as well as how to meaningfully involve them in formal and informal local decision-making and community development.

Adolescent participation in the UNPBF programme

1,000 joined cross-border events

800 joined in-country events to promote inter-ethnic tolerance

2,007 improved 21st century skills through the UPSHIFT social innovation programme

641 joined short-term vocational skills trainings

UNPBF activities also involved
→ **2,000+** community members directly, and
→ **80,000** indirectly

Child-Friendly Cities principles for good governance

▶ Equity and inclusion
▶ Accountability and transparency
▶ Public participation
▶ Effectiveness and responsiveness
▶ Adaptability and sustainability

Child Friendly Cities Initiative

YCFLG spotlight: Creating an environment for peace

The CSSF initiative ran early childhood education (ECE) capacity-building activities in cooperation with national and local authorities as part of fostering child-friendly cities. The cross-border exchange visits — with central and local education authority officials, ECE experts and practitioners — were an opportunity for them to review and learn how shared spaces for early childhood learning can contribute to promoting peace, tolerance and greater social cohesion among children, parents and communities, to better support children as they age into adolescence.

By 2020, more than 260 teachers and ECE specialists were trained through a competency-building curriculum, and about 3,900 students benefited from peacebuilding competency trainings. More than 70 community- or school-based ECE centres were opened for 2,500 children (aged 5-6 years) from families representing diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations in nine geographic areas.

©2019 UNICEF Tajikistan

Building understanding, skills and peacebuilding competencies in each country

Recognizing and responding to fluctuating risks of violence and the fragility of peaceful relations among border communities, UNICEF Tajikistan and UNICEF Kyrgyzstan ran cross-border activities and 'mirrored programming' in the two countries, offering a similar set of interventions with and for adolescents on both sides of the border areas in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The mirrored programmes allowed adolescents in each country to gain similar cultural understandings, language skills and peacebuilding competencies.

Despite commonalities in their histories, culture and literature, Kyrgyz and Tajik families often hold antagonistic views of those living across the border. A starting point for UNICEF and its partners included multiculturally-focused activities for adolescents, to encourage them to view each other as human beings with similar values and desires for a healthy, happy life. The activities relied on four complementary curricula delivered through formal and non-formal spaces — in schools, adolescent-friendly spaces and youth clubs.

Multicultural-focused peacebuilding curricula and programming

In both countries, the programmes offered peacebuilding curricula and activities in schools (for instance, through Student Councils and clubs) as well as in non-school settings (for instance, through Centres for Additional Education, Youth Centres and adolescent-friendly spaces), to reach those more vulnerable and potentially at higher risk for violence, crime and trafficking.

The programmes offered an opportunity to develop and deploy curricula that could advance social cohesion education in formal and informal education systems. In 2017, UNICEF Tajikistan developed an Adolescent Competency Framework (ACF) (see right) and supportive Competency-Based Learning Programme that was accredited by the Minister of Education and Science (MoES).

Adolescent Competency Framework objectives

- ▶ Adolescent girls and boys are successfully learning and contributing to school life.

- ▶ Adolescent girls and boys are empowered, motivated and competent to engage positively within their communities.

- ▶ Adolescent girls and boys successfully transition to adulthood and work life.

The learning programme includes four transferable-skills curricula:

Lesson Plan Guide for Student Organizations[8] Co-written by UNICEF Tajikistan for student organization managers (teachers and educators) and student leaders, as guidance for building an organizational structure, planning activities, and monitoring and assessing their effectiveness.	Support student organizations to build competencies through 25 sessions covering a wide range of topics, including: ▶ Identity and self-esteem ▶ Negotiation ▶ Managing emotions ▶ Critical thinking ▶ Leadership ▶ Communication ▶ Social enterprise ▶ Gender ▶ Goal-setting and hope for the future ▶ Cooperation ▶ Problem-solving
Peacebuilding Competencies Curriculum[9] Developed in the UNPBF programme by UNICEF Tajikistan, UNICEF Kyrgyzstan and partners. It builds on the Aflatoun curriculum, which aims to empower adolescents through competency development.	Offers quality, conflict-sensitive education as a foundation for adolescents to contribute to social cohesion and peace, with a focus on: **Personal development** **Problem solving** ▶ Emotion management ▶ Gender ▶ Participation ▶ Work for a child or child labour ▶ Leadership ▶ Violence ▶ Self-control ▶ Problem-solving conflicts with friends and family ▶ Sociability ▶ Peaceful conflict resolution ▶ Creativity and innovation ▶ Collaboration and group work ▶ Optimism and faith in the future
UNICEF Adolescent Kit for Innovation and Expression[10] Activities build on adolescents' strengths and provide them with opportunities to learn new soft skills, awaken creativity, develop a sense of belonging in society, build positive relationships and give back to their communities.	Initially designed for adolescents in emergency contexts, the programme nurtures the resilience that adolescents often demonstrate in challenging situations. It incorporates 10 key competencies: ▶ Communication and expression ▶ Cooperation and teamwork ▶ Identity and self-esteem ▶ Empathy and respect ▶ Leadership and influence ▶ Hope for the future and goal-setting ▶ Problem-solving and managing conflict ▶ Critical thinking and decision-making ▶ Coping with stress and managing emotions ▶ Creativity and innovation
UNICEF UPSHIFT[11] Curriculum aims to empower adolescents and youth to engage positively with their communities and to successfully transition to adulthood and work life.	Offers a non-formal education skills curriculum to: ▶ Improve 21st-century skills, including life skills and livelihood education ▶ Enable social entrepreneurship ▶ Provide adolescents with opportunities for active civic engagement and contributions to building social cohesion

One component of the Peacebuilding Competencies Curriculum (PCC) was for older adolescents to develop and implement their own initiatives. For instance, after a 3- to 10-day PCC training, participants implement community-level projects that promote tolerance between communities, dialogue and participation in local government. Adolescent-led initiatives have included the creation of an inter-cultural theater, a mobile exhibition on tolerance and peace, discussion clubs, environmental projects, an adolescent-run 'friendship festival' implemented in six municipalities in Tajikistan and six municipalities in Kyrgyzstan, a pilot to test a peer-to-peer process for psychosocial support, and child rights-based campaigns.

In the Sughd District in Tajikistan, gender stereotyping is common and can prevent girls and young women from receiving an education. An internal UNICEF study found that the PCC training empowered adolescent girls to speak with their families and organize campaigns in schools to advocate for equal education opportunities for girls and women.[12]

800

In 2018-2020, UNICEF partners trained more than 800 adolescents in the Peacebuilding Competencies Curriculum

Building Russian-language skills

Communication is a challenge in building cross-border relations, as adolescents from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan speak Tajiki and Kyrgyz, respectively. Because Russian is used as the key language of business in both countries, UNICEF recognized that accelerating Russian language lessons for adolescents could increase their potential for dialogue and friendship and prepare them for cross-border work and employment. UNICEF partners therefore integrated language training into spaces offering other adolescent activities.

The activities aimed at improving language and social cohesion competencies helped build trust among the adolescents early in the programmes. They also bolstered adolescents' confidence to meet, build relationships and work together on social projects, first online and eventually in person, when it was deemed safe.

Accelerating Russian language lessons for adolescents can increase their potential for dialogue and friendship and prepare them for cross-border work and employment
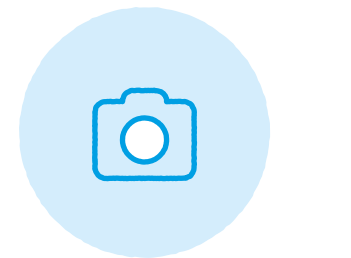
Digital cross-cultural exchange

Adolescents often learn and grow the most through fun and engaging activities of interest to them. To increase understanding and empathy across border communities, the programmes incorporated creative arts as a communication for development (C4D) approach, and supported adolescents to design and run projects. In the UNPBF programme, for instance, adolescents on both sides of the border decided to run a joint photography contest to learn more about each other, and many continued to exchange photos after the contest ended.

Adolescents developed radio programming on tolerance across borders, and both Tajik and Kyrgyz schools distributed a newspaper developed by adolescents from the two countries. In the CSSF programme, adolescents created 26 short films to raise peacebuilding awareness, a digital platform for children was developed and 22 TV lessons were produced.

The media activities built trust and understanding of the adolescent's peacebuilding efforts among parents, caregivers and other community members. This helped secure greater support for adolescents to join in cross-border activities, which was critical for overcoming a reluctance among many adults for cross-border engagement by young people.

Creative arts can raise awareness and empathy and build trust between adolescents

©2019 UNICEF Tajikistan/S. Shokamolova

Cross-border social cohesion activities

In the UNPBF programmes, adolescents and youth participated in cross-border cultural and sports events, joint workshops, educational and vocational skills trainings and other capacity-building initiatives aimed at building inter-ethnic trust, confidence and durable ties. Adolescents also conducted 34 small-grant community projects that further strengthened intercommunal cooperation.

An independent review of the UNPBF programme found anecdotal evidence that friendships have yielded greater trust and tolerance among young people, increased their willingness to participate in joint activities and to continue building connections and bridges for further understanding and communication, and sparked their interest in developing their own initiatives.[13] The programme also surveyed more than 500 young participants from Tajikistan. They reported that capacity-building activities boosted their self-esteem an average of 35 percent higher than before the programme; negotiation skills by approximately 45 percent; and conflict resolution competencies by 35 percent on average. Meanwhile, 1,500 Tajik students and parent-teacher association (PTA) members from 30 border schools improved their knowledge on border crossing rules as well as their peacebuilding competencies.

In UNPBF:

1,500

students & PTA members

1,500 Tajik students and parent-teacher association (PTA) members **from 30 border schools** improved their knowledge on border crossing rules as well as their peacebuilding competencies

The following are examples from seven cross-border activities for adolescents within the UNPBF programme, including those co-designed and run by adolescents themselves:

The Path of Friendship and Goodness Festival, 2019

As part of the cultural exchange, adolescents designed a cultural event that included a Media Camp, where they used film and creative arts to showcase commonalities in their cultures. They jointly produced 15 one-minute videos with messages promoting peace, tolerance, the power of diversity and friendship among nations. These were shared on local TV stations and online, and were often followed by opportunities for cross-border conversation and constructive dialogue between adolescents and community members.

Peacebuilding Competencies Training, 2019

This training, offered in the Isfara and B. Gafurov districts of Tajikistan and the Batken and Leilek districts of Kyrgyzstan, showcased the vital role of young people in strengthening social cohesion and intercommunal conviviality, using their peacebuilding competencies and social innovation skills. Adolescent girls and boys from both countries led sessions, moderated panel discussions and showcased good practice examples of cross-border collaboration. A comparison of before and after training questionnaires showed the activities increased participants' self-esteem by an average of 35 percent; their negotiation skills by about 45 percent; and peacebuilding skills by 35 percent on average.

Peacebuilding Final Forum, 2019

Adolescents involved in the cross-border programme met to share their experiences in a safe space, with open panel and group discussions about how their previous negative perceptions had shifted. They presented a showcase of different social projects from their communities and highlighted their governments' changing attitudes towards peace as well as their own role in the process. They shared positive stories. For instance, in one border area where tensions were escalating, adolescents trained in peacebuilding had been able to converse with their peers across borders and with government officials to defuse the conflict situation.

©2019 UNICEF Tajikistan/S. Shokamolova

Sustaining adolescent participation in peacebuilding

While UNICEF Tajikistan and UNICEF Kyrgyzstan recognized the value of hosting cross-border events to strengthen relationships and social cohesion, they also focused efforts on institutionalizing adolescent participation and supportive structures to help build resilience and to reduce and end cross-border conflict, and on advancing child-centred policies and laws.[14]

This included promoting child-sensitive governance through the Child-Friendly Cities initiative, as mentioned, and creating a foundation for sustainable activities that increase exposure, collaboration and capacities in ways that can erode prejudice, resolve tensions and conflict, and support dialogue and peaceful relations.

For example, since the peacebuilding programmes ended in 2020, UNICEF Tajikistan has continued to operate and scale Adolescent Innovation Labs (AILs) in Centres for Additional Education (CAE) under the MoES, and Youth Centres (YCs) under the State Youth Affairs Committee (SYAC), with opportunities for cross-border engagement. Through the AILs, marginalized adolescents receive training in life skills and social entrepreneurship within the state-run non-formal education infrastructure across the country. Peacebuilding and social cohesion skills are embedded into the programming.

Currently, six AILs are operational in CAEs in districts and towns, and one lab is operating in a Youth Centre, including along the border. The labs' innovative programming incorporates either UNICEF's Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation[15] or the UPSHIFT curriculum. The Adolescent Kit has been adapted to prepare adolescents to apply for and succeed in UPSHIFT, to lead small-scale projects such as educational exhibitions and community performances, as well as to develop innovative solutions that address their unique needs.

Many of the Adolescent Kit's innovation activities are run by government and NGO partners who received training from UNICEF on running activities beyond the centres and spaces to engage the most hard-to-reach young people, including in conflict-affected areas. Through the UPSHIFT process, participants build their skills and are introduced to the notion of social enterprise as a means to solve pertinent issues in their own lives and communities.

With strong government support and leadership, UNICEF Tajikistan is now working with the MoES and SYAC to establish Innovation Labs for Adolescents and Youth in the 61 CAEs and Youth Centres in the country by the end of 2024.

22,000+

22,000+ adolescents and youth in Tajikistan (47% girls) have benefited from innovative programmes in 15 Adolescent and Youth Innovation Labs

60+

60+ innovative solutions were designed by adolescents and youth
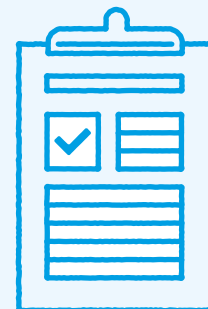
as of 2020

In a cross-border UPSHIFT activity, a team from Tajikistan invented an eco-friendly way of producing paper napkins with a message of peace.

↓

©2019 UNICEF Tajikistan/S. Shokamolova

Lessons learned

Engage with adolescents early and often throughout the programme
Social cohesion and peacebuilding programmes should meaningfully engage adolescent girls and boys as partners in all stages of the programme cycle, including design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Adolescent involvement helps to increase and sustain engagement by creating a greater sense of ownership, such as through consultations, discussions and dialogues, as well as ensuring that the most marginalized, at-risk and traditionally excluded adolescents and youth are engaged. An example is the photography contest described prior. It was a cross-border activity chosen by young people that operated even after the programme's end, as the adolescents from both counties continued to exchange photos online.

Tailor initiatives to different adolescent age groups to increase engagement
Due to their differing stages of development, younger and older adolescents have unique interests and may be disincentivized to participate in activities designed for a younger or older age group. UNICEF found this to be especially true when working to exert positive influence over older adolescents. When offered activities tailored to their age group — especially activities that they themselves had a hand in designing and running — older adolescents were more apt to join and remain in supportive in-country and cross-country programmes.

Additionally, it is important that young people can access adolescent-, youth- and disability-friendly information presented in language that is easy for everyone to understand.

Define clear roles and responsibilities early when working with multiple organizations
Because the programmes involved multiple partners and required coordination and collaboration across borders, it was essential to agree early on regarding the governance structure; theory of change (TOC); and the strategies and collaborative processes for multi-sectoral programming, data collection and dissemination, capacity-building with organizational partners, and advocacy. Having regular communication, clear decision-making governance, M&E protocols and defined roles and responsibilities for partners helps to minimize overall transactional costs and improve programme effectiveness.

Invest in cross-sectoral integration
By working across sectors, integrated programming helps to avoid duplication of efforts within organizations, which can save time, resources and costs. Integration also aids in achieving results for adolescents. For instance, involving UNICEF's M&E section early in the programmes helped in setting goals and developing agreements on how to measure achievements between sectors and with partners. Doing so helped to ensure that planned activities were aligned with measurable goals, such as increasing adolescent participation, improving social cohesion and life skills, and promoting gender equality and child-friendly peacebuilding policies.

Secure trust-based and collaborative civil society organization partnerships
To reach the most vulnerable adolescents, it is critical to develop and strengthen partnerships with local organizations and networks who are trusted and have good relations with community members and local authorities. Doing so can increase adolescent participation and helps in managing the bureaucracy and complexities of working across borders, especially during times of high tension.

Develop enabling environments for peacebuilding
While a commitment to peacebuilding and social cohesion may be strong in a country, sustained efforts require a clear theory of change that prioritizes child rights. A TOC can guide programme design to impact the wider peacebuilding ecosystem, especially since programmes often have short timelines and funding. This requires attention to developing enabling environments for peacebuilding within UNICEF and among government and implementing partners, including securing funding and building local capacities as part of longer-term strategic approaches.
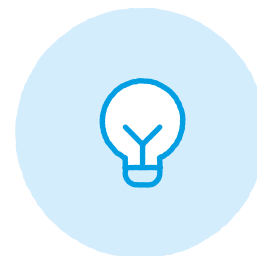
Ensure all can easily understand information
It is important that young people can access adolescent-, youth- and disability-friendly information presented in language that is easy for everyone to understand.
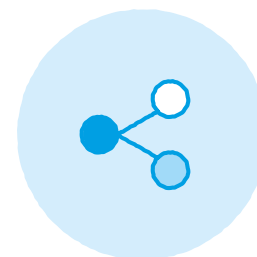
Develop partnerships with local organizations and networks
It is critical to develop and strengthen partnerships with local organizations and networks who are trusted and have good relations with community members and local authorities.

Transforming institutional cultures to value the opinions and views of adolescents is indispensable to strengthening social cohesion and resilience and encouraging adolescent's role in peacebuilding. This entails, for example, strengthening skills for conflict analysis, peacebuilding programme design and conflict-sensitive programme implementation.

Institutionalize adolescent and youth engagement in peacebuilding

Fostering peace and social cohesion among border communities – with adolescents as key stakeholders and change agents – requires formalized processes for their participation. This includes developing a strong peacebuilding TOC for adolescent and youth engagement, and applying it by embedding ways for them to learn and contribute into school life; supporting activities within and outside of schools where they are empowered, motivated and competent to engage positively in their communities; and building capacities and skills for adolescent girls and boys to successfully transition to adulthood and work life.

Create a holistic strategy for adolescent engagement and peacebuilding

It is critical to develop holistic responses that link young people's meaningful participation and influence on policies to broader peacebuilding goals, rather than sectoral priorities. Examples include developing or promoting multilingual education, early childhood initiatives focused on inter-ethnic tolerance, competency-based secondary education, and education skills curricula that can be embedded into formal or non-formal institutions such as schools, outdoor education programmes, learning centres and innovation labs for adolescents. Doing so allows peacebuilding activities to work across sectors such as education, health, psychosocial support, child protection, adolescent participation and development, communication for development, peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Dedicate time to engage the most vulnerable adolescents in programming

To better tailor activities to the local context, it is critical to take the time to identify and engage adolescents from the most marginalized, at-risk and traditionally excluded communities, and to ensure th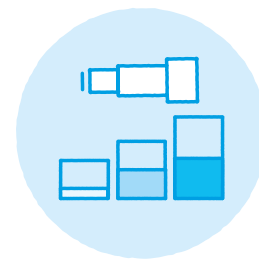at their views help shape the programming. As an example in the programme, instead of taking the more traditional approach whereby organizers compile lists of vulnerable groups to include, UNICEF and its partners conducted focus group discussions with adolescents living in each locality. UNICEF found that, compared to staff, the adolescents were better placed to accurately identify vulnerable groups who should be involved.

Increase parental involvement in programming

Parental involvement is critical for both local learning and cross-border activities. Parents play a gatekeeper role, often controlling where and how adolescents engage. Securing their trust and buy-in with regard to the importance of peacebuilding efforts and their child's participation requires time and resources, and efforts to do so should start early on.

Engage adolescents from the most marginalized communities
It is critical to take the time to identify and engage adolescents from the most marginalized, at-risk and traditionally excluded communities, and to ensure that their views help shape the programming.

Parents play a gatekeeper role
often controlling where and how adolescents engage.

©2019 UNICEF Tajikistan

Develop a long-term vision and adaptive strategy for sustaining peace in fragile contexts

Working in fragile contexts requires adaptive strategies to reach and engage young people, especially to overcome the unique barriers to participation facing adolescent girls and boys who are at high risk for gendered restrictions, violence, crime, violent ideologies and trafficking. While individual peacebuilding projects are valuable, ensuring they fit into a wider strategy is imperative for the sustained behavioral, cultural and legal changes required for long-term change. One example of how to do this is UNICEF's use of mirroring programming until cross-border activities could be conducted.

A longer-term vision prioritizes engaging in systematic dialogue on adolescents and peacebuilding with key stakeholders, contributing to and strengthening peacebuilding networks within countries and across borders, developing and sharing social cohesion and conflict sensitivity resources and training, and collaborating on advocacy activities for country-wide, child-centric procedures, programmes and policies on peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Long-term vision and adaptive strategy
While individual peacebuilding projects are valuable, ensuring they fit into a wider strategy is imperative for the sustained behavioral, cultural and legal changes required for long-term change.

Conclusion

As the UNPBF and CSSF programmes in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate, adolescent girls and boys can actively participate and lead in creating an environment for peaceful intercommunal coexistence in areas of border conflict.

Distilling negative perceptions and strengthening cross-border relationships is a complex undertaking that requires sustained engagement, especially in communities with historic inter-ethnic tensions and other conflicts. Integrating inclusive and meaningful adolescent participation into development and humanitarian programming must be done in a strategic way, to position young people as key actors in maintaining long-term peace and security.

As a 2020 formative evaluation of UNICEF's support to young people in peacebuilding notes, a key challenge is the common disconnect between peacebuilding programmes and capacity- and skills-building, engagement and participation.[16] Skills are not always connected to meaningful opportunities to apply them. Sustaining peacebuilding programmes for and with young people is also challenging because it requires national buy-in and ownership, with peacebuilding approaches mainstreamed into country strategies and programming.

The UNPBF and CSSF programmes addressed these challenges by integrating the Adolescent Competency Framework into UNICEF programming, institutionalizing peacebuilding curricula in formal and non-formal education, scaling the Adolescent Innovation Labs with government support, and receiving commitments to Youth- and Child-Friendly Governance at district levels, among other examples.

The programmes show that embedding peacebuilding curricula in formal and non-formal learning spaces – alongside providing supportive materials and training – can develop adolescents' capacities and skills for maintaining social cohesion. Multicultural education and a focus on language can provide a foundation for building lifelong relationships between communities. Connecting young people to peace-related decision-making, institutions and policy processes can strengthen their participation and influence as active citizens with agency to create change. And creating opportunities for one-on-one connection between adolescents can transform negative perceptions, so that they can find commonalities, build bonds and lessen immediate and future risks of conflict and violence.

> Eliminating conflict and creating social cohesion requires a holistic effort. Adolescents must be seen as changemakers with unique experiences and ideas. Building their knowledge, skills, capacities and relationships from a young age not only benefits them individually, but also promotes peace in their societies.

Endnotes

1 United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF), www.un.org/peacebuilding/fund.

2 Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/fdfa/organisation-fdfa/directorates-divisions/sdc.html.

3 The United Kingdom's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), www.gov.uk/government/organisations/conflict-stability-and-security-fund.

4 Youth of Osh, www.peaceinsight.org/ar/organisations/youth-of-osh.

5 Adolescence skills and innovation, www.unicef.org/tajikistan/adolescence-skills-and-innovation; Innovation Labs, www.unicef.org/tajikistan/topics/innovation-labs.

6 Child-Friendly Cities, https://childfriendlycities.org/what-is-the-child-friendly-cities-initiative and https://childfriendlycities.org/guiding-principles.

7 Convention on the Rights of the Child, www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx.

8 In Tajikistan, the Lesson Plan Guide for Student Organizations is incorporated into Student Council programming in schools under the Centers for Additional Education.

9 Adolescents as Peacebuilders Toolkit, https://www.unicef.org/media/59166/file.

10 Adolescent Kit, www.adolescentkit.org.

11 UNICEF UPSHIFT, www.unicef.org/innovation/upshift.

12 Adolescent Competency Framework: Competency-Based Learning Programme.

13 Peace Nexus Foundation, Review of PBF Cross-border Cooperation for Sustainable Peace and Development in the Border Area of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/kyrgyzstan_tajikistan_november_2017_-_lessons_learned_of_cross-border_project.pdf.

14 Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing participation as a means of achieving sustainable peace, http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2250.

15 Adolescent Kit, www.adolescentkit.org; Adolescent Kit in action in Tajikistan, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Uy2MRSbd3Y&t=56s.

16 UNICEF, UNICEF Engagement with Young People in Peacebuilding: Formative evaluation, https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?fileID=13895.

unicef | for every child