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POLICY BRIEF



NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DYNAMICS IN BORDER COMMUNITIES OF KYRGYZSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN

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This Policy Brief aims to provide insight into the institutions and local dynamics involved in natural resource management in border communities, and to provide solution-oriented recommendations to address natural resource management challenges.

This document was produced by the University of Central Asia's Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI), following research conducted between September 2015 and February 2016 in Batken and Soghd oblasts within the framework of the project "Reducing conflict over water and pastures in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan."

KEY FINDINGS

SECURITY AND NATURAL RESOURCE USE

A scarcity of natural resources per se is not the primary cause of conflict between border communities. Rather, the main factors that give rise to tensions are inefficient use of natural resources and inadequate maintenance of critical infrastructure.

Conflict research in border areas commonly focuses on unresolved border issues as the key to mitigating disputes. The leading factors creating tension between neighbouring communities are (i) an increasing trend of militarization on both sides of the border; and (ii) an emphasis on insular infrastructure projects that fail to incorporate cross-border interests, and thereby fail to facilitate cooperation.

Openly accessible and comparative baseline information on the resources in question, including quantitative and qualitative characteristics and usage trends, is not available in either country. Without such statistics or figures, it is difficult to obtain a complete picture of the needs and trends in natural resource use in Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan.

Kyrgyzstan's current moratorium on pasture use by foreigners rendered illegal the practice of pasture use in Kyrgyzstan by communities from Tajikistan, where residents traditionally shared resources across borders. This results in tension between communities.

COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

Because cross-border management of natural resources is framed as a national-level issue, Local Self Government bodies (LSG) do not have a sufficiently high level mandate adequate to address these needs. This constrains potential cooperation between countries at the oblast and district levels.

Analysis revealed a failure of international organisations to coordinate projects and programmes implemented in border communities. There is no database on social and infrastructure projects implemented in the past; such a database would allow for better planning of future interventions.

For international organisations implementing projects in border communities, an essential component is the involvement of partners on both sides of the border. An absence of cooperation from both bordering communities puts projects at risk. Donor Councils at the administration level of Batken oblast and Soghd oblast could coordinate activities of international organisations in the oblast.

DEVELOPING INTER-ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS FOR NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In both countries, multiple institutions with diverse interests and priorities manage pasturelands. For example, management functions are divided between Forestry administrations (*Leskhoz*) and Pasture Users Unions (PUU) (both countries), collective, individual and *Dekhkan* farms (in Tajikistan), and government agencies and non-governmental enterprises. As a result, institutional interests often outweigh cooperation around the effective use of resources.

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Over the years, the changing borders of village districts in Kyrgyzstan have increased tension around natural resource management. For example, the division of Samarkandek ayil aimak (AA, the smallest administrative entity in Kyrgyzstan) into three separate units (Ak-Sai, Ak-Tatyr, and Samarkandek AAs) has resulted in the reduction and fragmentation of grassland between the units. Residents of the three AAs are now forced to pay fees to three different Pasture Committees and Forestry administrations each season.

Institutions responsible for natural resource management are established to manage resources located within the boundaries of specific administrative units (for instance, in AAs). However, these institutions do not cover the entire territory of an administrative unit; instead they manage only those resources linked to a particular infrastructure. For example, the Water Users Association (WUA) in Samarkandek AA only covers two villages, Samarkandek and Jany-Bak, located along the Ak-Tatyr channel; the third village in this AA, Paska-Aryk, is not serviced by this canal, and therefore is not covered by the WUA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SECURITY AND NATURAL RESOURCE USE

To the governments of both countries:

Focus border security policy on preserving conditions for a free border-crossing regime for citizens. Avoid militarisation of the border.

To local self-government bodies (LSG) of Kyrgyzstan:

In order to reduce tensions over the use of summer pastures and increase incomes of local border AA budgets, lobby for the abolition of the moratorium on use of AA pastures by foreigners. Pricing for foreign citizens should be delegated to Local Councils (Aiyl Kenesh).

To international organisations (e.g. ACTED, AKDN, GIZ, UNDP), research institutes, national statistical committees, and other stakeholders:

Systematically collect, store, analyse and disseminate baseline information on characteristics of natural resources and the social and ecological dynamics of their use.

COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

To regional and district administrations and international organisations:

Develop mechanisms of cooperation following principles of problem-based management of natural resources: focus cooperation on specific issues of relevance to both parties.

To the project implementation unit under the Ministry of Agriculture and Amelioration of the Kyrgyz Republic, together with international organisations:

Assess the activity of regional coordination councils and develop a general vision for a logically interconnected system of actions between coordination councils at national and regional levels.

To the Office of the Plenipotentiary Representative of the Government of Kyrgyz Republic to the Batken region:

Strengthen the capacity of the Donor Coordination Council and empower the Council to collect and systematically analyse information on project interventions in the Batken region.

To international and non-governmental organisations:

Create an integrated database of infrastructural interventions undertaken over the past 10 years in the Batken region. This database should contain information on all areas where interventions took place, to help redress asymmetries between the Batken and Leylek districts.

DEVELOPING INTER-ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS FOR NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

To the Kyrgyz Pasture Association:

Facilitate the signing of a memorandum on use of summer pastures by the Pasture Committee of the Batken region and the oblast Forestry administrations.

To the State Agency for Local Self-Government and Interethnic Relations, and other local authorities:

Lobby for necessary changes to the Forest Code of the Kyrgyz Republic to grant priority right of access for pasture use by Pasture Committees of AAs sharing a border with Forestry territory.

To international organisations (e.g. AKDN, ACTED, GIZ, UNDP), pasture departments, water departments, oblast-level administrations, LSG bodies, and other stakeholders:

Encourage a variety of models of cooperative management of natural resources, including but not limited to Associations of Pasture Committees, Memoranda of Cooperation between Forestry administrations and Pasture Committees, and WUA Unions at regional level.

To PCs of Samarkandek, Ak-Say, Ak-Tatyr:

Establish an Association of Pasture Users Union and introduce a transfer pasture ticket to allow for the joint management of pastures.

To the Department of Water Resources in both countries:

Carry out a functional analysis of the work of the Departments of Water Resources related to current legislative reforms. Define institutional responsibilities in cooperation with WUAs.

Engage donors in the design and implementation of a professional training and capacity building program for WUA staff and heads of border villages and *mahalla* committees, and promote systematic exchange of experience between the WUAs within the country.



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