PARTICIPATORY VIDEO IN PEACEBUILDING:
LESSONS LEARNT FROM OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES AND KYRGYZSTAN

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INTRODUCTION

How can we overcome barriers of exclusion, intolerance, and disempowerment in areas of volatile conflict? How can we bridge divides and facilitate spaces for reconciliation? How can we move beyond ignorance, disengagement, and disillusionment? Participatory video (PV) methodology can answer some of the most challenging questions in peacebuilding. It is powerful in particularly polarised conflict settings, and among particularly marginalised people. As an innovative and engaging tool, PV leverages modern technology to effectively build self-awareness and agency, bridge divides, and amplify messages in ways that can reach policy-makers.

PV combines hands-on training, using interactive games, with the production of short videos that bring up issues of major concern to participants. Through the self-awareness and the emergence of agency via these processes, PV promotes connections among individuals and communities, emphasising the inclusion of marginalised groups in decision-making processes. PV can, therefore, be used in a wide variety of contexts. The methodology owes a great deal to the work of Jackie Shaw and Clive Robertson at Real Time, who developed it during the 1980s as a tool for community activism[1].

This publication is an insightful reflection on the transformative process of PV methodology, as experienced by members of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). Particularly successful in the context of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, GPPAC members in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Kyrgyzstan reflect on the PV projects they implemented. In the course of these projects, we have been inspired by the real stories of marked change.

In places where agency, power, and equality are elusive, PV methodology opens up a world of possibility. In this world, a young boy no longer feels the need to resort to violence; he chooses tolerance. In this world, a young girl challenges harmful gender norms and stereotypes, igniting social activism among her peers. In this world, the belief in being able to initiate tangible change thrives, revealing once dormant agents of change. With a unique ability to elicit empathy, the PV approach has shown itself to be a profound means of overcoming long-standing hostilities. Thus, we would like to offer the reader a closer look at the main aspects of the participatory methodology that enabled such changes.

We will walk the reader through our experiences and the lessons learnt, in the hope that our story stirs the interest in PV methodology that its success demands. With this publication, we aim to kick-start a conversation with other organisations looking to transform and prevent conflict, using innovative, effective, and visual methods.

Let us tackle the roots of violent conflict together, with 'cameras in hand'.

[1] For more information, please see: Shaw J and C Robertson (1997) Participatory Video: A practical guide to using video creatively in group development work, London, Routledge.
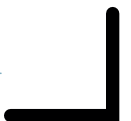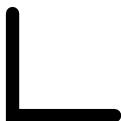
THE POWER OF PARTICIPATORY VIDEO (PV) METHODOLOGY IN PEACEBUILDING

Peacebuilding:

Processes that help to restore relationships in conflict-affected communities; build institutions with community input; prevent political and social violence; and help empower citizens to work for positive change in their societies across ethnic, religious, and political divides.

The PV approach is a vehicle for building peace. It is particularly effective in restoring relationships within conflict-affected communities, empowering citizens to work for positive change across divides, and humanising the facts and figures of conflict. This humanisation can elicit emotion thereby enabling the voices of people in conflict to be heard by policy-makers, as well as in a larger context.

There are two core elements from which using PV in peacebuilding derives its relevance: it is participatory and it uses video. Being participatory in multiple ways, it involves the self, the group, and the local community, via 'playback' and 'feedback' processes.

Using video, the approach is remote, and not immediately personal. It is both intrinsically authentic and non-threatening, thereby challenging entrenched stereotypes and prejudices. Peacebuilding needs this same combination to enable hostile groups to see and hear each other in new, less conflict-ingrained ways. Through its focus on group dynamics, creativity and authenticity, equal participation, and 'playback' and 'feedback' processes, PV methodology is distinct from conventional film-making.

1.1 WHY PARTICIPATORY VIDEO, NOT CONVENTIONAL FILM-MAKING:

1.1.1 Participation and group dynamics

PV methodology distinguishes itself from conventional film-making by emphasising participation and group dynamics, combining the technical training of video skills with participatory group-building games. As the methodology focuses on group dynamics, it is essential that the facilitation is carefully managed to ensure everyone has a chance to express themselves and challenge themselves in different activities. Each participant has an equal voice and each opinion is equally valued. During the development of the film storyboard, participants are enabled to discuss issues on which they might have very different views—such as gender norms, family, work, etc.—agreeing on some things and disagreeing on others. With strong facilitation, the participants learn to listen to each other and appreciate their differences. Risks of friction and a further increase in divides among different groups should be mitigated by the facilitator in order to ensure respect, tolerance, and understanding.

Present everywhere are questions regarding inclusivity, full participation, and finding a voice, as is the challenge of being heard by authorities. The essence of the PV process—namely, the interactivity of the training and the playback sessions—builds group dynamics so that participants feel confident enough together to also feel confident as individuals. It is the sharp combination of self-esteem-building measures and the innovative methodology of PV that increases group solidarity and confidence in conjunction with that of the individual.

1.1.2 Creativity and authenticity

Often, youth express participation fatigue with traditional peacebuilding activities, such as seminars, trainings, and roundtables. PV, on the other hand, is considered engaging and exciting. It is a modern tool, which unleashes the creative potential and talent of its participants, empowering them to be active and responsible citizens. PV engages participants as sole creators of powerful messages, with

a sense of ownership over the process. As they develop their films, they are encouraged to listen to each other and to reach consensus.

While film can be an excellent way to express and convey views in any situation, all too often films are made by 'outsiders' with their own ideas on how the film should be angled and focussed. At every stage of the process, PV films are created and led by the participants themselves, portraying their views as they would like them portrayed.

When the films are shown to policy-makers, the public from opposing groups, or even simply the broader public—since within one society there can still be considerable ignorance regarding other sectors of that society—they carry with them the full force of the local ownership of their making. There is an intrinsic difference between a film that has been made on behalf of someone else and a film where a (perhaps marginalised) person expresses themselves and their specific issues or concerns in their own individually thought out way. By its very nature, PV is the authentic expression of local ownership, which draws from impactful glimpses of real life and emotive messages, which are unlikely to be captured by more calculated and professional messages that miss the immediate emotional connection.

1.1.3 Equality and playback

Experiments with PV started in a number of countries—both East and West—as early as the 1980s[2]. This was when video equipment was cumbersome to use and carry, and playback—the part of the process when participants view themselves on the screen—was difficult to organise. While the methodology has essentially remained the same in training video skills, the equipment has become much simpler and lighter. The training still requires working with a professional camera, so participants can work together and experience the training jointly, but each stage can now be easily and quickly grasped at the basic level by participants; thus, making the process widely accessible.

[2] See Wade, G. (1980) Street Video Leicester, Blackthorne Press; Dowmunt, T. (1987). Video with young people London, Cassell/Inter-action press; Shaw, J. (1986) Process Work and community video practice Independent Media, 57: 7–8

The process of PV training is an equilibrium of turn-taking. Initially, members of the training group rotate, taking turns both behind and in front of the camera that is set up on a tripod with the sound connected to a hand microphone. The equipment is easy to pass from one participant to the next. Not only do they all share in the process of filming and being filmed, they share in the 'playback' of this, so as to 'participate' via the filming and communication processes, while also "participating" by engaging with their own image on the screen. For instance, as the microphone is passed along, they ask and/or answer questions, taking turns with the filming. Everyone is required to film, be filmed, and review the results together, joining the discussion/analysis of these. They participate as equals, even if some, in fact, have more experience than others[3].

For most people, it is not easy to confront their image; especially to do so in a shared context creates connections among participants. As the process develops and participants become more accustomed to seeing themselves on the screen, they also become more aware of how they can control their image. From the outset of the training, they are participating in the creation of their own desired self-image. This is similar to media literacy, in so far as through media literacy training, one learns how to speak/look better on the screen. However, the PV approach also includes an element of control, taking responsibility for what one chooses to put on the screen.

The participatory element of PV is also present at the group level, in so far as all experiences related to the filming and playback sessions are shared—which include facilitated, learning-focussed discussions about the process and their reactions to the playback. Additionally, the exercises for filming are largely organised around questions and 'chat shows', and the participants' choice of what they consider important enough to film. So through, for instance, a 'chat show'—where one participant is behind the camera filming, another holds a microphone asking questions, and one or two others are answering the questions,

say on the subject of 'problems in school' or 'women's issues in refugee camps'—the group starts to get to know each other. They become accustomed to discussing more and more issues, including sensitive issues, in increasing depth, and building on previous conversations to explore further among themselves. Ideally, during the training, they would also do an exercise called 'the river of life'. Each participant shares some of their most profound life experiences; not for filming, but rather to build emotional connections with each other, enabling them to work better together, and to take on a variety of roles within their group.

In particular, through the collective process of developing a storyboard and planning short films together, participants gradually learn to appreciate the importance of listening to each other, of careful planning, and of clear roles and responsibilities within each process. Throughout the training process—which includes the film-making— participants take on all the different roles: such as producer, camera operator, actor, director, scriptwriter, make-up artist or costume designer. Participants can explore and expand their strengths, and feel comfortable acknowledging their weaknesses.

The editing of the films is done as much 'in-camera' as possible, keeping the amount of film that will not be used to a minimum. This preserves participants' control over the final film and keeps costs down. In some cases, participants are introduced to video editing skills to encourage them to conduct the full cycle of video production independently after the project ends, but film editing is a separate skill and takes a long time to fully master.

1.1.4 Feedback and discussions

PV can be used simply as an effective tool for empowerment and self-awareness, or improving self-expression, which are sufficient ends in themselves. However, with the simplification of showing films today, the component of a series of 'feedback sessions' is now often added to the PV process, increasing both the impact and the reach of the films.

2 Details on the approach and exercises in Shaw J and C Robertson (1997) *Participatory Video: A practical guide to using video creatively in group development work*, London, Routledge

The films offer an excellent tool for advocacy. Their screening can form the basis for discussions on the topics they raise, with people from similar backgrounds to the participants to elicit additional points relevant to the film, or with audiences from very different backgrounds, such as policy-makers or duty-bearers[4].

When the films are shown within the participants' community, the feedback from the audience—the discussion and perhaps also interviews—can be made into a short additional film. This provides a participatory element that augments the power of the initial film, which, when screened together, produces even more potent advocacy.

In addition to increasing self-awareness, group cohesion, and mutual learning, the feedback sessions/screenings of the films bring an element of participation from the community. For example, during the project in Kyrgyzstan, the local, national, and international communities were given a unique insight into current issues 'through the eyes of children', who are often more sensitive to existing issues and more direct in talking about them. The children participating in the project illustrated at their schools that youth can highlight problems, express their opinions, and influence society. Most importantly, the children are now confident that society and decision-makers will react and assist in solving issues and problems which are important to them.

[4] For more details on this extended Participatory Video process see Shaw J (2015) *Re-grounding Participatory Video within community emergence towards social accountability Community Development Journal: doi: 10.1093/cdj/bsv031* and Shaw, J. (2017a) *Pathways to Accountability from the Margins: Reflections on Participatory Video Practice,* Making All Voices Count Research Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

1.2 HOW PV METHODOLOGY CAN PREVENT CONFLICTS:

1.2.1 Bridging divides to 'the other'

Both the PV process and the films themselves can bridge divides. Through participation in the PV process, the project participants learn to communicate with each other and respect the opinions of other members of the team. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, teams were diverse, including people from different backgrounds. Their collective work helped them to learn more about 'the other' and understand similarities rather than focus on differences. All too often, people have negative perceptions and stereotypes of others based on second-hand information rather than personal experience.

In the context of peacebuilding, this is especially important. The dynamics of any conflict tend towards polarisation and simplistic divisions of 'us' and 'them', 'we are right' and 'they are wrong'. Fantasies and fears feed into conflict. We all have stereotypes—in fact, we need stereotypes to manage the many and complex perceptions we hold at one time; but in a conflict, the negative stereotypes (again with the polarisation) become more rigid, and instead of being lenient in our minds, being open to changing them, we are happy to have them reinforced and that is even what we look for. Again, they both reinforce and justify our fears, and our violent, fearful reactions.

Across the divide, 'the other' looks less than human. We can, therefore, do whatever we must to protect ourselves against them. In fact, conflicting parties may use dehumanisation as a tool to maintain levels of fear necessary for the constant violence. It is only through the dehumanisation of the Palestinians, for example, that the Israeli government can keep their people in such a state of fear that they feel entitled to attack Palestinians in 'self-defence', even without any visible danger.

The Kyrgyzstani village, Chek-Abad, where the population has been historically divided into brigades—(the groups of people in the agricultural households who have a common labour task) — is a

great, if not literal, example of bridging divides. Children, following the example of adults, divide themselves into their own brigades and are in constant conflict with each other. Already after two months of participation in the project, boys and girls from different brigades started breaking these barriers, conducting mini-trainings for their peers on tolerance, finding common interests, and understanding that their power is in unity. The experience acquired during the trainings in PV helped the participants act more proactively, even outside the scope of the project, contributing to bridging divides in their communities.

In several of the country's regions, girls and boys from different ethnic and social backgrounds started to work together in teams; for many, it was the first close interaction with representatives from different communities. From the early stages of the project, they already started to demonstrate knowledge, appreciation, and understanding of 'the other'. A girl from the Batken region said: *'In this project I found many new friends, met with pupils from other communities, and it turns out that we have a lot in common'.* Another example of changing attitudes towards 'the other' is the personal change of view of a girl from the Batken region bordering with Tajikistan. She used to perceive the boys from the neighbouring Tajik village as aggressive. After her participation in the project, she understands that those boys are also just children, and it is possible to become friends with them and solve issues through discussion.

1.2.2 Revising gender norms and stereotypes

PV processes also help to eliminate some long-standing gender norms and stereotypes. For instance, historically in Kyrgyzstan, gender norms imply that girls do not participate in decision-making processes. An interesting example from the project is a school in the Chui region. The families of ethnic Dungans living there adhere to traditional views on gender roles, such as the belief that young women should get married immediately after school without the right to work in governmental,

municipal, or other public institutions. During the first trainings of mixed gender groups, a division was observed: girls were passive and boys were actively trying to be in charge, adhering to the gender stereotype that only men are capable of using technology. The project team then created space for girls to speak and express their opinions in the process of film-making. Weekly joint team exercises influenced the positive mitigation of the gendered situation in this group. Despite their initial scepticism about the girls' ability to be equally engaged in creating videos, the boys recognised the necessity to cooperate with them on equal terms. Afterwards, participants even raised the problem of gender-based discrimination in some of their movies.

The project in Kyrgyzstan led to an increasing number of strong female leaders in the schools; and, in turn, the boys in those schools started to speak out about gender issues, prioritising them, and providing recommendations to alleviate them.

Another example can be drawn from one of the Palestinian PV projects. Afaf, a Palestinian woman from the Shu'fat refugee camp on the outskirts of Jerusalem, was a participant in a gender pilot project exploring the potential impact of PV as a tool to shift gender norms in an increasingly conservative environment. Afaf had five children, was divorced, and was clearly very depressed. She remained this way throughout the PV training, but decided to make a film about her experience. Although in the film she refused to show her face, by the time of the feedback sessions she was standing in front of the audience, claiming her story, and warning others away from early marriage, away from giving in to family pressures to stay in an abusive marriage. Female Palestinian refugees suffer from intersecting inequalities, including poverty and traditional patriarchy; divorcees in Palestinian society are also stigmatised. The PV process transformed Afaf and raised her voice to the level of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, who were moved to change their plans by what they learnt from her.

1.2.3   Empowering agents of change

'Power within'[5] is an integral part of the authenticity of PV films. This power within is a major casualty among people who are marginalised, which includes those living in a prolonged conflict situation. Frequently, such people tend to see themselves as victims and identify with their sense of victimhood.

Linked with the psychological problem of victimhood is the loss of agency. PV immediately restores agency: by the act of filming, by the (perhaps distinct) act of finding a voice, and not least also, by the build-up of mutual support within the group of participants. Such agency and acceptance of responsibility—for instance, not only of making the film, but also speaking and opening up in front of an audience—can transform the participants from passive victims in a conflict situation to leaders within their community and beyond.

Being responsible for different stages of the project, participants start to feel empowered and to act as agents of change. During the project in Kyrgyzstan, children exceeded initial expectations and did not only develop their own skills and knowledge. Importantly, the children became agents of change, who encouraged an end to violence in their communities. One boy shared the following story: *'I was in the park and saw a lot of children fighting. I screamed, "Teachers [are coming]! Hide!", and they ran away.'* One of the project participants also mentioned: *'During the training I started to wonder why we fight. I did not see any reasons, only negative consequences, so I stopped doing it'.*

1.2.4   Including marginalised groups

For participants who come from a disadvantaged background and initially behave in a very closed off and quiet way, participation in the PV process offers an opportunity to open up, feel included by their community and peers, and have their voices heard. The dynamics of

[5] Power-within', often expressed as a sense of dignity, self-awareness, and self-confidence, is needed for people to assert their views, access opportunities, and influence decisions that affect them (Veneklasen and Miller 2002; Howard and Vajda 2017). (Quote from Jackie Shaw (2017a) *Pathways to Accountability from the Margins: Reflections on Participatory Video Practice,* Making All Voices Count Research Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies). However, the internalised stigma resulting from systemic disrespect and discriminatory social norms undermines power within.

the process focus on the fact that everyone plays an equal role and all opinions are taken into account. This feeds into power within.

For instance, one of the participants from the Kyrgyzstani project, who was initially always shy and not sociable, was in the end regarded as one of the best camera operators in his group. His mother approached the project staff to express gratitude: *'He is a different person now; he started to talk more, to enjoy his life, while earlier he was just sitting behind his computer and did not want anything.'*

The Palestinian experience also echoes the combination of immediacy and impact that PV elicits: Participants from marginalised areas were able to move and influence those who would not normally listen to them, via films that were simple and direct and that addressed their daily difficulties through non-political approaches. However, it is as much the internal process as the external process that gives PV its power, especially in relation to power within.

The feedback sessions are also crucial for amplifying voices. To raise the issues in the films is not enough, though the empowerment of participants during the film-making is already a big step forward. The meetings with decision-makers are an excellent springboard from which real change in society is possible. Often, marginalised groups do not have access to policy-makers, to whom they could propose their recommendations and share the problems they are facing. Such projects provide an invaluable platform to exchange opinions that should continue even after the projects end.

1.3   POSSIBLE RISKS AND CAVEATS

There are certain potential risks associated with PV[6]. First of all, if it is done too quickly and with a focus on the end product (the film), rather than on the process, the group dynamic will lack sufficient cohesion. All the steps in the PV process are equally important and should not be skipped. After the PV exercises and trainings, the selection process of the topics for videos in teams, as well as the preparation of scripts

and storyboards, gives participants an opportunity to get to know each other. This is important, taking into account that most of the participants of peacebuilding projects in areas of conflict (or potential conflict) are not familiar with these kinds of activities. They require time to really become familiar with each other, their new roles, and new environment. If the process is rushed, there is the risk that their power within will not have had sufficient time to develop.

Trainers and project staff, helping the participants throughout the PV process, play an important role in guiding the process and making sure everyone is equally involved, especially when it comes to working with marginalised groups. However, they also need to make sure that their interference does not affect the group dynamics or decisions. Facilitation can distort the group dynamic so that only some individuals benefit, while others are pushed back (although the playback system should be a strong bulwark against this).

There is an additional risk of too many (or too high) expectations being pinned on the feedback sessions. The discussions and recommendations may influence the policy-makers, but it may also not be the case. Not everyone is susceptible to the opinions of others, nor are they always open to them. The situation may also be difficult to change; it may take more time, especially when it comes to influencing long-standing, deeply entrenched positions or traditions. There is also, of course, a potential risk of exposure to anyone appearing in a film that addresses controversial issues. While group solidarity can help with this, they cannot guarantee that there will be no backlash.

Ultimately, much of the success of any PV project relies on the quality of the facilitation. Good facilitation minimises these risks and provides the participants and their community with the most effective PV training and films. The two case studies that follow, from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and from Kyrgyzstan, both worked with skilled and dedicated teams.

[6] For further research on the interconnections between the potential and risks, and how to mitigate them see Shaw J (2016) Emergent ethics in participatory video: negotiating the inherent tensions as group processes evolve Area Volume 48, Issue 4 pp. 419-426 doi: 10.1111/area.12167 Shaw J (2012) Beyond Empowerment Inspiration: Interrogating the Gap between the Ideals and Practice Reality of Participatory Video in E J Milne, C Mitchell, and N de Lange (eds.) *Handbook of Participatory Video* Lanham MD: Altamira Press pp. 225-241

Chapter two

THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES AS A CASE STUDY: **PIONEERING PV WITHIN GPPAC NETWORK**
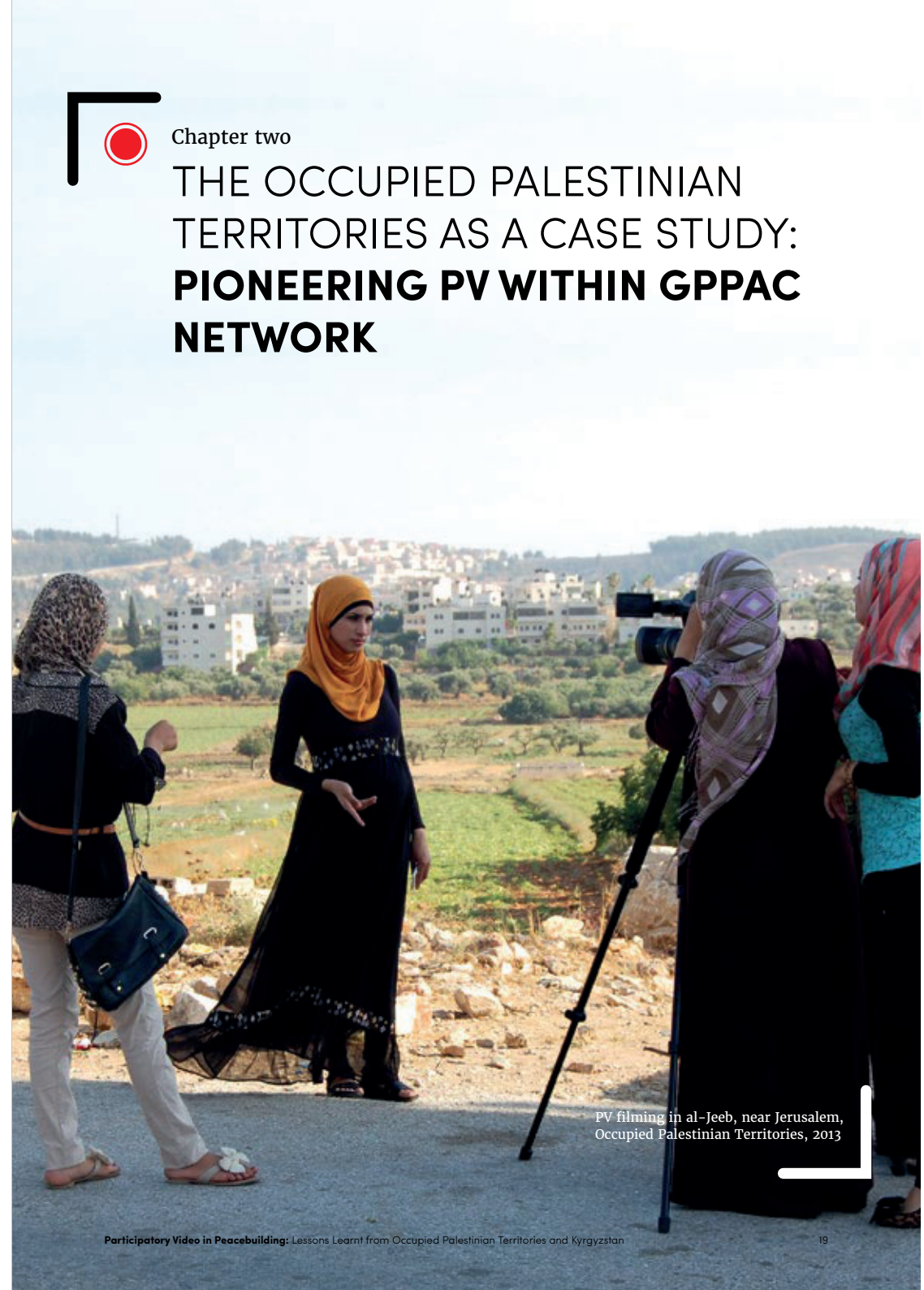
PV filming in al-Jeeb, near Jerusalem, Occupied Palestinian Territories, 2013

The project 'Cameras in Hand' was inspired by a number of projects that had been implemented by GPPAC member, Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND), in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. MEND is a Palestinian NGO based in East Jerusalem that works to promote the principles and the practices of active nonviolence and democracy, in the fullest sense of both words, working especially with education and with innovative use of media. Experimental work with PV methodology in the Palestinian context started back in the year 2000. It explored the methodology in schools, refugee camps, and villages, and also directly with local municipalities. MEND also pioneered how to use PV for unconventional advocacy for gender equality; for raising awareness on the plight of the most marginalised; for building bridges of understanding; and for bringing taboo subjects into the general discourse, adding feedback meetings and advocacy via social media as amplifiers. As the work progressed, it became clear that PV is also a tool for transformation.

These components are relevant for projects in other contexts, such as Kyrgyzstan, despite differences in the actual conflict. In fact, although the populations are roughly the same (around 6 million), the area of Occupied Palestine is very small and parts of it, such as the Gaza Strip, are among the most densely populated in the world, in contrast with the vast spaces and distances in Kyrgyzstan. Further explanation is needed for a better understanding of the Palestinian context.

2.1 CONTEXT: ISRAELI OCCUPATION AND THE DEHUMANISATION OF PALESTINIANS

While 20% of Palestinians are an ethnic minority living as Israeli citizens within Israel, the majority have been living under Israeli occupation[7] in the Occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

[7] There are also some 6 million Palestinians living in exile outside the Occupied Palestinian Territories: in refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and throughout the world in a global diaspora. Some are allowed to visit, many are not. This chapter focusses only on the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

This occupation has been ongoing since 1967, for more than 52 years, in a conflict lasting more than 100 years. Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are separated from Israelis by a system of walls, permits, and military checkpoints, so there is limited opportunity for human contact—(as opposed to Israeli soldiers confronting Palestinians, for instance, at the checkpoints). This situation facilitates the denial or distortion of the Palestinian narrative. Israelis' prejudice against Palestinians leads to their dehumanisation, as well as their portrayal as terrorists or perpetual victims, not deserving of a voice. It is, therefore, hard for the Palestinian voice of peace to be heard and taken seriously; often dismissed as mere 'propaganda'. This makes the task of peacebuilders in Occupied Palestinian Territories difficult, urgent, and important.

The Separation Wall near al-Jeeb surrounding the house of one of the PV participants; she is not allowed to build her house higher or to remove the asbestos from her roof. In some places, the wall is composed of 12-metres-high concrete slabs and frequent watchtowers. In other places, such as this one, it can look quite innocuous—just like a sound barrier beside the motorway, apart from the barbed wire on top.

In addition to the overall political situation, Palestinians face many other—often intersecting—issues too, such as internal fragmentation, gender inequality, poverty, and youth exclusion. Many of these issues are similar to those faced by the Kyrgyz participants. Among Palestinians, there is a need for internal community building. In the face of frustration and despair over the larger political goals, community building becomes a step towards peacebuilding and perhaps the best that can be done as of right now.

2.2 PROJECT 'PARTICIPATE': FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

The PV process can help facilitate a personal transformation from despair to hope by evoking the humanising empathy of others, especially where there are intersecting inequalities that multiply the barriers. One example of such transformation occurred within the project 'Participate'[8]. The project intended to explore what elicits change; and not just a 'theory of change', but how to create change in general, especially in relation to global development goals. It was part of a global effort, coordinated through Sussex University, to both explore and highlight the importance of participation, especially of the most marginalised, in setting and working towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

NGOs from 18 different countries worked with a wide variety of participatory approaches, including some others with PV. MEND chose to work with marginalised Palestinian women from two villages (al-Jeeb and Nebi Samwel) where policy-makers and politicians never visit; where the women, although living within sight of Jerusalem,- a city previously only 20 minutes away and now impossible for them to access without an Israeli permit - cannot visit the city, and hardly leave their villages due to the problems of the Israeli checkpoints.

[8] See Burns, D. et al (2013) *Work with us: How People and Organisations can Catalyse Sustainable Change*, Brighton: IDS and T. Shahrokh and J. Wheeler (eds) Knowledge from the Margins: *An anthology from a global network on participatory practice and policy influence*, Brighton, IDS p.27-31

The women's films were shown in New York in the 'Participate' and 'Beyond 2015' meetings, where they reduced many in the audience to tears. The young women's choice of drama, instead of reporting or narration, helped the audience understand what living under the Israeli occupation actually feels like.

While one film focussed on the history and day-to-day life of the village in a fairly conventional approach, the participants from the other village, al-Jeeb, chose to make several short films using drama as a means to convey their isolation and wretchedness. The choice of drama and simplification, instead of listing grievances, freed the audience to be able to respond. As part of the PV training, the participants in al-Jeeb had played the 'disappearing game', which teaches the basics of in-camera editing via a combination of humour and simplicity. The participants had also been trained to prepare a storyboard, using other techniques, and taking turns in acting, producing, and filming; they all enjoyed joining in the multi-layered training. One of the short movies produced within this project, 'The Unhappy Birthday'[9], illustrates how the wall, the checkpoints, and the permit system prevent change by undermining not only the free movement of Palestinians, but also the right to family life, friendships, and social cohesion. The film's poignancy lies in its simplicity and directness, and in the fact that it was made about an example of daily life as the participants experience it. After the creators of the movie had been told that their films would be shown to UN officials in New York (to influence policy-makers), they decided (after considerable discussion) to do something original and creative, and to use drama for all of their films. During the training, the women had also engaged in deep discussions about their lives and their personal difficulties.

This enabled them during the filming to really work as a collective, and to take on different roles for each film. They found their voices, their creativity, and their courage through PV methodology. *'I liked it when we listened to each other, when we cooperated. That's what made this film successful this time. When we didn't listen or work together, the process was a disaster, we weren't proud of what we did, and we were angry at each other,'* said one of the project participants.

[9] https://vimeo.com/77866443

'The Unhappy Birthday' was the inspiration for the development of a PV project in Kyrgyzstan. It was shown to schoolchildren and teachers in Kyrgyzstan as an example of the powerful potential of PV methodology to create the changes they would like to see.

2.2.1 Reflections on change

Change is both simple and complex: simple in terms of needs, and complex in terms of how these needs should be addressed, whether at the level of the international community or within a school system. There was a real desire for change among the women during the 'Participate' project. They were prepared to overcome social barriers simply to be part of it. One of them confessed:

> 'My husband's family did not approve of me taking this training. But I don't care what they think. I am doing this for me'.
>
> **Participant** in the 'Participate' PV project

Among the key components for making change is the shift in relationship dynamics. Film can contribute to this by bringing images

and voices to policy-makers in a non-threatening way; but most importantly, touching and stirring up empathy, which is one of the strengths of the PV approach. Change is made possible by:
- Opening the lines of communication and encouraging dialogue, within the community and with key policy-makers;
- Enhancing capacity building;
- Actively participating with communities in the search for workable theories of change.

One size does not fit all:
- For change to be sustainable, it needs to be community specific;
- Each community faces its own set of obstacles and barriers;
- Working within communities and encouraging dialogue will help produce organic solutions to individual issues.

2.3 CHOOSE A FUTURE': PV SUCCESS IN SCHOOLS

While 'The Unhappy Birthday' was the inspiration for 'Cameras in Hand' to use PV in general, an earlier and particularly successful project of MEND, 'Choose a Future', provided the template for the widespread application of the methodology in schools.

The project, 'Choose a Future', was carried out with seven girls' schools, involving 14 teachers and 120 girls in conservative areas in the Occupied West Bank. It aimed to encourage the girls to continue their education rather than drop out of school to get married or just stay at home. Not only did the girls (with the support of their families) choose to stay on, they showed courage and initiative—quite different from their peers and even their communities—during the violence that erupted towards the end of the project. In the village with the highest dropout rate of girls in the entire West Bank, which was also without any clinic or medical facilities, the girls took the initiative to set up a clinic, and organise the provision of medicines and regular visits from doctors.

Although this project took place a long time ago, it has stayed relevant as an example of successful girls' empowerment even in the face of considerable odds. It was the first time PV had been used in the Palestinian context, piloting the linking of nonviolence and conflict resolution skills with the use of technology to promote self-awareness; ultimately impacting action and leading to positive change. It began in the year 2000, towards the end of the Oslo Peace Process, and ended in 2001, during a time of intense violence: the so-called 'second intifada'. At this time, there were armed confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians, Palestinian cities were being bombed, and villages and cities were sealed off from each other. It was dangerous and almost impossible to move around at all. The PV 'Choose a Future' project was almost the only project that continued in the West Bank despite the violence.

This commitment came from the appreciation of the project's value; in particular, the unique combination of skills, the strength of the internal group support and affinity among participants. The project started with training in conflict resolution, dreams, and an introduction to IT[10]. A 'development room' with computers and PV equipment was established in each school to ensure sustainability. Real Time, an organisation from the UK, originators of PV methodology, came and spent ten days training the staff and coordinators at MEND in this methodology. In the planning for the Kyrgyz 'Cameras in Hand' project, it was decided that it would again be important to bring the lead trainer from Real Time, in addition to staff from MEND, to ensure that the games and the team building would be fully understood and fully replicable in the context of another country. The quality of the facilitation, especially at the beginning of the training, can make a significant difference to how open the group are to one another and to what extent they work democratically regarding the exchange of ideas for films or the assumption of different roles. The presence of the Real Time trainers ensured that the emphasis was on the training and group building, not on the end products.

[10] Information technology.

While the initial setup training and capacity building was carried out by Real Time, local trainers and local ownership were essential, both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Kyrgyzstan, to maximise the level of participation. What is more, it is not always those who are most skilled in film-making who make the best PV trainers. The basic film skills are definitely useful, but the expertise in facilitation is more important to moderate the participants and make sure that no one dominates the process. With PV, inclusivity is fundamental, so the trainer must make sure that all participants are given equal chances, particularly in finding their individual specific skills.

2.4 REFLECTIONS ON FEEDBACK

The produced films must be seen and impact a broader audience than the PV participants. Subsequent PV projects that broadcast the films on local television, showed them internationally, or used them as training films were seen to be participatory for those trained, but did not involve other local voices as much as they could, and therefore risked limitations both in scope and authenticity.

Feedback sessions to discuss the films and for this feedback to, in some way, be incorporated into the films' content before showing them to policy-makers were first tried with the films from al-Jeeb and Nabi Samwel. However, there was only one feedback session in each location due to the lack of time.

Two recent MEND projects in the Shu'fat refugee camp have specifically included a widening circle of feedback sessions, leading up to a final session with policy-makers. They have also included an extra short film containing interviews with members of the audience to make sure that the main points from these sessions are also presented to policy-makers, whether as amplification or as separate issues that the audience felt needed to be addressed. The participants from the

Left: early feedback; **right**: the final high-level meeting.

PV training were present to lead the discussions and expand on their films. The pictures below represent the different styles of feedback sessions: early feedback in the Kalandia refugee camp and a final high-level meeting in Ramallah.

The feedback sessions also increase the strength of PV methodology as a tool for empowerment. When MEND worked with women, they were initially reluctant, in some cases afraid to film and be seen filming openly. Overcoming this barrier and going outside to film, made it easier for them to speak up in public places, including at the feedback sessions where they had to own their work.

Both projects—one on gender issues and one on mental health issues in Shu'fat camp—were not only well received by the representatives of the Palestinian Authority present at the final high-level meetings, but also had a distinct impact on their plans. For instance, on the future inclusion of Palestinian refugee women in the plans for the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs.

2.5 INEVITABLE CHALLENGES

The bulk of MEND's PV projects have been with women and girls, so gender norms have been a challenge as well as a key component of the projects. In all cases, the professionalism of the team and the focus on the task have enabled these challenges to be met and overcome.

Traditional patriarchal Palestinian attitudes have made it difficult for some women to participate, to continue participating, or to agree to

show their faces if the films are to be made public. The inhabitants of the refugee camps and villages can be particularly conservative, afraid that their filming would be frowned upon, or become subject to criticism or abuse. In the projects, they were very worried before going outside to film for the first time. However, their fears in all cases turned out to be groundless—all they met with was curiosity.

> 'I'm not afraid of filming outside; I'm afraid of what people will say about me … here, in particular, people don't like to see women develop. If they see you with a camera they think you're trying to act like a man'.
>
> **Participant** in the 'Participate' PV project

Gender challenges can take different forms. PV training is very 'hands-on' and involves close physical proximity. Two young female trainers faced a different kind of gender challenge in training a group of middle-aged male government officials from one of the most conservative towns in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Again, professionalism and focus secured the project's success. In terms of shifting entrenched gender norms, as well as learning from PV film and training, one of the participants even insisted on bringing his teenage son to learn with the group as well.

The empowering process of PV can lead to exaggerated expectations. The proposition of a participant to make a film about her own mental health issues proved to be too much for her and her fellow participants to follow through with, despite allowing additional time for discussions. The project served as a timely reminder of the limits of what is fair to expect from participants; even when they themselves have become empowered, often most of those around them are still in the same place.

2.6 WHY A PROFESSIONAL CAMERA WORKS

Additional lessons from the work in the Shu'fat camp emphasised the importance of participatory training, as opposed to more traditional video training or training with mobile phones. There was a clear difference in impact between the participants in the project which used a professional video camera, and another project which used mobile phones. With the mobile phone project, the films were of mixed quality. While they offered interesting glimpses into the life of young Palestinians—some showing courage and imagination—there was no group cohesion, to the extent that many did not even show up for the closing event of the project. Some of the participants did not get around to making films at all. Also, although several became good at filming other people, none of them were at ease being filmed or talking on camera. They never developed any group identity and the solidarity that goes with that.

With PV, the participants work with a professional camera set up on a tripod with a hand microphone and headphones. They all take turns, and must be aware of what the others in the group are doing. From the outset, the training sessions involve shared experience, generating collaborative dynamics. With a mobile phone, on the contrary, each participant focusses on their own separate experience. The process from the outset is non-collaborative and non-integrative, despite including conventional group work.

The playback component of PV, which is made possible with the professional camera equipment, relates to the self and the self-image. This is complemented by the simultaneous support and solidarity that are built up as the group discuss and share in more and more depth, and on increasingly personal and sensitive subjects. The trainers were the same for both projects, but the process was significantly different.

The comparison between the two approaches (professional cameras vs mobile phones) is an important one. It demonstrated that it is not enough to simply provide a safe space, but that the space also

needs to be inclusive and enabling, to the extent that participants can explore and experience the possibility of alternative power dynamics. MEND is currently developing a combined process, which starts with training using professional equipment to give the full benefits of PV, while including, during the last session or two, an explanation of how to transfer the filming techniques to a mobile phone.

2.7 EXPANDING AND EXPORTING PV METHODOLOGY

The experience with PV methodology and the lessons learnt from it in the Palestinian context had been rich and varied enough for MEND to feel confident that the GPPAC network as a whole could benefit from this approach. Taking the most effective and most sustainable of the projects for a difficult political situation, it was decided to try exporting the experience to a very different context in Kyrgyzstan. Under the framework of the project 'Cameras in Hand: Transformation and empowerment of young Kyrgyzstani girls and boys', the methodology was adapted to working with schools, teachers, and children (including a strong gender component), to keep the equipment in the

schools, and to set up a series of feedback sessions in ever-widening loops. The aim was to empower the children sufficiently for them to show their films and advocate for their needs and concerns even up to the highest levels. It, thus, contained key ingredients from MEND's most successful projects.

MEND was included in the preparation of the project and in the training of facilitators in Bishkek, which provided a unique opportunity for comparisons. As mentioned above, Real Time gave the initial training to the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) team to ensure that they would start off correctly, with the emphasis on the interactive games and relationships, rather than on the films. The obvious enthusiasm for the project among the FTI staff, along with the very thorough and intensive training, ensured the project would have strong local ownership and a solid foundation from which to flourish.

The variety and quality of the films produced by the Kyrgyz schoolchildren in the project, as well as the positive changes in them and in the communities, is sound evidence that the Palestinian experience with PV as a peacebuilding tool can be replicated in various contexts.

Chapter three

KYRGYZSTAN AS A CASE STUDY: 'CAMERAS IN HAND'
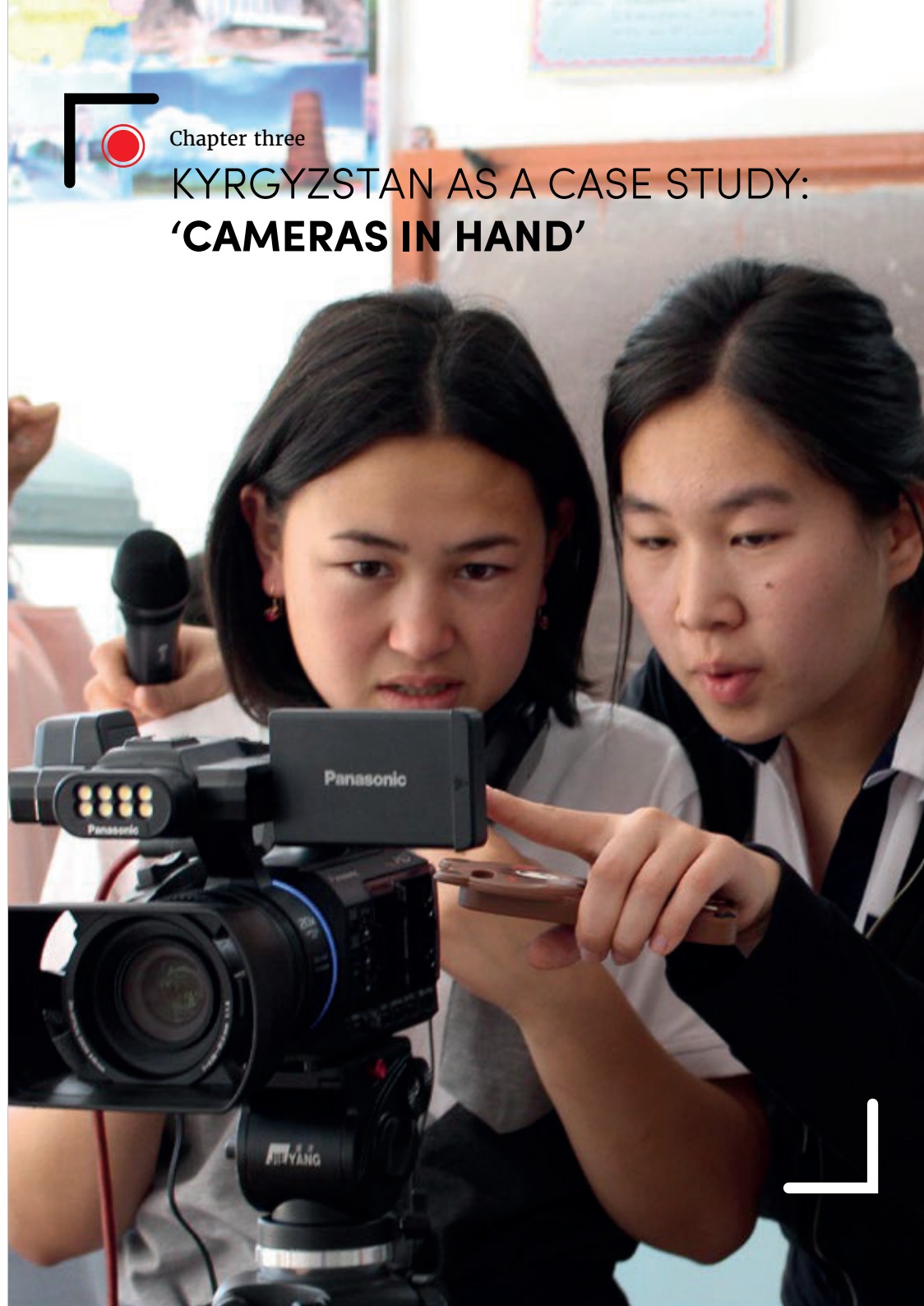
3.1 CONTEXT: INTERNAL TENSIONS ALONG MULTIPLE DIVIDES

Kyrgyzstan is characterised by a pervasive potential for conflict. After the country became independent in 1991, its short history has been marked by various internal tensions along ethnic, gender, social, and urban-rural divides. In 2010, for example, a violent conflict in the country caused 500 deaths, injured almost 2,000 people, and displaced another 400,000. More recently in March 2019, tensions spiked in the border regions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, once again illustrating unresolved hostilities and instability. Young people comprise roughly 50% of the population, yet they express feelings of exclusion from political, economic, and social processes. Their inclusion is vital if sustainable peace in the country is to be achieved.

Specifically designed to tackle these very issues, the project—*'Cameras in hand: Transformation and empowerment of Kyrgyzstani girls and boys'*—draws from the PV methodology. It focussed on empowering Kyrgyzstani youth from different ethnic, gender, and social backgrounds in Osh, Jalal-Abad, Chui, and Batken regions. The aims of empowerment were threefold: to amplify their voices at local, national, and international policy levels; to recognise them as agents of change within their communities; and to foster understanding about the 'other', bringing new insights to gender roles, norms, and issues.

As discussed in the Palestinian context, during this project, the young participants learnt to work together as part of a team. They learnt to produce videos, through which they could transmit their ideas about the world and discuss ongoing problems in their communities. The PV methodology enabled discussions on difficult issues, helping to generate dialogue and find consensus.

3.2 PRIORITISING LOCAL AND NATIONAL OWNERSHIP

The 'Cameras in Hand' project, which covered most of the regions of Kyrgyzstan, was impossible to fully implement without the active support from the state, municipalities, and school administrations. Despite the divided context in Kyrgyzstan, local and national authorities understood the power of PV and showed a supportive commitment to its successful implementation.

The leadership of the **Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic** provided support throughout the project. Such support from the government agencies was made possible by the implementing partner of the project—the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI)—who provided information to the Ministry about the planned activities, and conveyed how the project contributed to the governmental youth development programme.

The support offered by the Ministry in the early stages of the project also enabled support from regional departments of education, which ensured the participation of youth and teachers during trainings and supported required travel.

Local authorities also actively participated in the realisation of the project. They noted the importance of the project's advancement in other communities of Kyrgyzstan, nodding to the innovative PV approach to resolve local and national issues in the spirit of peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan.

Moreover, the understanding and commitment of **the school administrations** turned out to be an equally important factor in the realisation of the project. They helped with the organisation of meetings with students, allocated time and space to conduct mini-trainings.

Lastly, the parents of participating children also played a crucial role in the success of the project. If, at the start, some of them were against the participation of their children due to distrust and lack of information, many of them changed their minds after seeing the importance of their children's work. Many of them later became important partners, actively helping the youth, some even starring in the videos themselves.

'A lot of projects are being implemented in the region—including those with youth—but this project is interesting, easy-going, and innovative. It attracts the attention of the community and increases the knowledge of our youth, allowing them to see the results of their work. Young people have a great desire and confidence to solve the problems in their communities'.

Ms. Maripat Tashpolotova,
Deputy Governor in the Batken region

'This is an innovative and interesting project for our students, which will allow young people to deliver their peaceful messages to decision-makers, and we will contribute to this. In the new academic year, we will organise seminars for all schools in the Aravan district to spread the PV methodology'.

Mr. Teitbek Raimkulov,
Head of the Aravan district department on education in the Osh region

3.3 ARTFULLY SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

From each of the four chosen regions, two urban and two rural communities were selected; all of which either had a history of conflict or marked potential for conflict, as well as ongoing and latent problems that influenced the position of youth in their communities. Local education departments played an active role in the selection of schools. To avoid an imbalance of support to schools, attention was paid to the presence of ongoing and completed peacebuilding projects in schools. In the end, 32 schools were chosen from a total of 96.

Two teachers were selected from each school to support the participants throughout the project. The selection was made factoring in the school administrations' recommendations. During the selection, attention was paid to whether the teachers had any previous experience working on projects or working with students on social issues.

In total, 128 students between the ages of 14 and 17 were selected to participate in the 'Cameras in Hand' project. The selection process comprised three stages: submission of the application form, a group exercise, and individual interviews. During the selection process, gender, ethnic, and age balance among participants was ensured.

An example of an exercise used to select children during the second stage: 'unusual actions'

Each participant was asked to remember a recent unusual or original action, something that in hindsight was hard to explain. The participants were then asked to briefly talk about it and comment on their actions. Afterwards, a group discussion took place about the influence of the unusual actions on our lives, what stops us from committing unusual actions, and whose unusual actions the participants would want to recreate. The most active participants were chosen for the third round. The aim of the exercise is to draw out the participants' creativity and their ability to utilise it when analysing their own lives. It also increases their openness to new life experiences.

The final selection step was based on individual interviews, during which project staff paid attention to the motivation and potential of participants, while ensuring a gender balance and inclusion of national minorities.

3.4   GATHERING YOUTH PERCEPTIONS

A baseline survey was employed shortly after the selection of participants to gauge their perceptions regarding values, identity, local politics, gender, and nationality issues. This was invaluable to a later analysis and evaluation of changes the children went through with the help of PV methodology. The quantitative data were gathered from more than 250 boys and girls, aged 12–16 from targeted schools—50% were project participants and 50% were from a control group—and were disaggregated by sex, age, and ethnicity. The study revealed ongoing, as well as latent, conflicts and problems that affect youth in the targeted communities and schools. They included violence in schools; gender stereotypes, including issues of early marriage; interethnic tensions in the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions; and more. The most common problem in Kyrgyzstan is the neglect and homelessness of children whose parents are labour

migrants in Kazakhstan and Russia. Official statistics and informal conversations with members of the communities pose significant cause for concern, that these children become victims of psychological and physical abuse.

Typical in places of conflict, the survey revealed an intolerance among project participants towards 'the other'. The feedback provided by the children towards the end of the project, however, demonstrated positive changes in their worldviews. In the beginning of the project, Askat, one of the participants from Osh, felt prejudice towards students from India who lived nearby. He often tried to avoid them as much as possible. Thanks to his participation in the project, his attitude towards his neighbours changed. In his own words, he managed to expel 'stereotypical thinking' by opening himself up to the perception of 'others'.

> 'I gained a lot of friends of other nationalities, even among foreign students, whom I previously avoided because of my own hostility. Now I spend time with them every evening to practice and improve my English'.
>
> **Askat,** a project participant from Osh

The baseline survey also clearly outlined that before the start of the project, the majority of participants had no experience in communicating with decision-makers, with the exception of possible family and neighbourhood relations. Their participation in the project enabled interactions with deputies of local parliaments, officials, and both school and local administrations during feedback sessions. Through these activities, youth gained presentation and public-speaking skills. Of ultimate importance, they integrated themselves in solutions to local problems, thus increasing their civic engagement.

3.5 DEVELOPING CAPACITIES

3.5.1 PV methodology

As previously mentioned, PV methodology is an interactive group process, the purpose of which is to enable participants to open up, build a team, explore issues of importance to them together, and have an influence on decisions affecting their lives. The process is a deep exploration of members of the group and the world around them in a participatory and creative manner, naturally producing a stronger impact on audiences than conventional film-making. The interactive approach, through games and exercises, helps to maximise the engagement of participants in the learning process and to gain new skills in an accessible way.

In order to effectively introduce PV methodology in Kyrgyzstan based on the experience of other countries, it was necessary to adapt it to the local context. This happened in several stages. The first stage focussed on a 'Training of Trainers' (ToT) for the project staff. The training was provided by experts from MEND—who have experience implementing the methodology in Occupied Palestinian Territories—as well as a representative from Real Time, originator of PV methodology.

Stage one: Training of trainers
The ToT mirrored PV methodology itself. It was fully immersive and interactive, with its main focus on relevant games and exercises, including video making, playback, and discussions. Over the training course of eight days, the future trainers delved into learning by doing through participatory exercises. They learnt the basics of operating a professional camera, different video techniques, and in-camera editing.

The ToT participants also had the opportunity to watch videos produced in other countries using PV methodology, exposing them to ways it can be used in peacebuilding. The last two days of the training focussed on placing the project staff in the role of trainers and facilitators of the PV creation process.

Key reflections from introducing the methodology into a new context:
- It is important for trainers to have practical experience with the interactive PV exercises, as well as with implementing similar projects in peacebuilding. It is preferable to involve the originator(s) of the methodology in the initial stages.
The trainer/facilitator plays a key role in the success of the project.
- It is preferable that the trainer and participants speak the same language. If this is not possible, additional attention needs to be paid to providing high quality translation.
- Due attention should be paid to the selection of equipment, which is also key to success. The preparation and consultation with experienced trainers/originator(s) of the methodology should not be underestimated.
- It is advisable to supplement the training on PV methodology with a session on video editing, using simple video editors.

Stage two: Training of teachers
During the second stage, the FTI staff adapted and conducted trainings on PV methodology for 32 teachers, to prepare mentors for the students. The trainings were conducted separately in Russian and Kyrgyz languages. Adapted handouts in the form of written instructions with detailed descriptions of the training sessions were compiled by the project team to aid the trainers. These included

exercises, during which the participants' feedback was filmed at the start and at the end of the training. The participants received detailed handouts at the end of each session.

After this, the teachers and FTI team jointly adapted and conducted a two-day mini-PV training for all 128 young project participants (32 in each region). The project team involved teachers in the capacity of co-trainers. Later on, the pupils met in their schools each week for 2 months to participate in all PV exercises. These sessions were facilitated by the project staff, with the involvement of teachers. In some schools, children were so excited that they met more than once a week on their own initiative. During the weekly sessions, in addition to teaching PV methodology, emphasis was placed on team building, unleashing the participants' potential, increasing their self-confidence, and showing them the opportunities for self-realisation. Furthermore, the sessions included discussion of relevant, context-based issues, reflecting on changes that participants noticed in themselves and in their groups.

> 'The children opened up, started to talk freely in front of the camera, learnt to freely express their ideas and opinions, as well as learnt to work in a team and act as one.'
>
> **Ms. Bakhtigul Khudaiberdieva,** Head Teacher in secondary school, village Chek-Abad (Osh region)

In the context of Kyrgyzstan, an additional training in editing and video production was provided to staff and participants. The necessity of such training derived from the large-scale nature of the project, which was simultaneously rolled out in 16 different regions. Outsourcing the video editing services—as was done in Occupied Palestinian Territories—was, therefore, not logistically possible. Additionally, the video editing training contributed to building the participants' confidence in their ability to independently create high-quality videos, as well as to the sustainability of the project as a whole.

The process of selecting participants' topics for videos also deserves attention. Over the summer, in all 16 target schools, participants prepared movie ideas and scripts. Participants chose the best ones in teams, in an inclusive and democratic way with the help of the PRES-formula (Position-Reason-Example-Summary). The short movies explore important social issues in Kyrgyz society, such as, gender inequality, access to education, child labour, divisions in society, border tensions, environmental issues, and issues of migrants' children and others.[11]

3.5.2 Additional Training Supporting Peacebuilding

The baseline survey revealed a lack of critical knowledge among the young people. Of particular importance, there was insufficient understanding around the cause-effect relationships of conflict, problem analysis, and media literacy, which could subsequently exacerbate various tensions and intolerance in society. Thus, it was necessary to provide separate training to cover these gaps. By forming a common understanding of peace and conflict, as well as positive attitudes towards diversity, tolerance, and gender equality, these trainings served as a great aid to the PV and peacebuilding processes. Children received additional training in tolerance and conflict analysis, social media campaigning and advocacy, which further contextualised the project and increased understanding of peacebuilding and its implications. During the conflict analysis trainings in each region, children and teachers started to openly speak about problems faced by children in school and at home, often for the first time since it is not common in Kyrgyzstan to talk about these sensitive issues.

Inspired by the project, participants in a secondary school in the Batken region conducted a conflict analysis training for their peers of their own accord, acting as agents of change. Throughout the project, similar situations of self-initiated action have been observed in other communities. For many of the participants, especially from rural marginalised areas, the social media training has instilled a wider feeling of inclusion in the process of solving social problems, and bridging gender, generational, and class inequalities.

[11] The videos are available here: https://gppac.net/youth-empowerment-kyrgyzstan

3.6 GENERATING DIALOGUE WITHIN PV

During the project, participants learnt to develop constructive dialogue around issues raised in the videos among themselves, and with parents, teachers, and decision-makers. Participants noticed personal and behavioural changes. For example, in the village of Aleksandrovka, boys used to dominate discussions and decision-making, which was—in the children's own words—modelled after their families in which patriarchal attitudes prevail. However, after a series of project activities participants learnt how to use argumentation, find a consensus on the basis of tolerance and respect for each other's opinions, and develop a common point of view that incorporates different views and voices, as well as genders, religions, ethnicities, and other affiliations.

'Before, we often argued and were unable to immediately agree with proposals made by our friends. Each one of us would stand their ground. During the development of the script, it already became clear that without unity we would not make a video'.

A project participant from Kok-Zhangak, Suzak region

'As a teacher, I can clearly see and feel all the changes in my students. The boys started to be interested in studying, and they no longer wander in the streets after classes. They are more open, friendly, and behave differently. For example, one of the boys was very rude, he swore at me, and after lessons his parents would call me, as they could not find him while he was wandering around the town. Now he is a very polite and responsible boy who always helps me in the classroom'.

Tolkunai Uzakova, a teacher from Uzgen, Osh region

Similar outcomes were evident with the establishment of dialogue with adults, in particular with authorities. Here, it is important to highlight the necessity of gradual feedback sessions, starting with participants' peers, moving to schools and local governments, and lastly, to national and international levels. Such an approach is paramount in easing participants through the step-by-step skill-gaining process. At the start of the project, the children did not know how to create an invitation for an event. Over time, they have refined their advocacy skills, mastering many aspects involved in establishing trusting, mutually beneficial relations with various stakeholders.

3.7 EVOLVING THROUGH FEEDBACK

The participating children illustrated that youth can highlight problems, express their opinions, and influence society. Most importantly, the children are no longer disengaged or disillusioned. They are confident that their society and decision-makers will react and assist in solving existing issues.

During the very first feedback session in the village Check-Abad (Osh region), the participating local decision-makers (representatives of local self-governing bodies, local branch of the Ministry of Education, regional youth committee, police, school administration, etc.) demonstrated their genuine and serious reception of the message

concerning youth fighting. They made a series of commitments: meetings with parents to discuss ways to resolve the issues; preventive discussions with all pupils by police officers; additional training on tolerance in other schools of Check-Abad; placing a banner calling for peace and friendship in the village; and mixing children from different conflicting districts in the same classes.

Within the project, 32 videos—two in each of the 16 communities—were filmed by youth and presented for discussion during the local feedback sessions. After the sessions, young people proceed to hold the decision-makers accountable for the implementation of adopted recommendations via continuous consultations.

> 'Our videos will have a positive impact on the population, as we [the children] will only be telling the truth, raising community issues and openly speaking our minds about them'.
>
> **Nurbolot,** a pupil from the Myrzak village, Osh region

Some feedback sessions elicited certain challenges, as some of the recommended solutions to problems elaborated during these meetings were difficult to execute. In many localities, however, the authorities recognised the existence of problems and took steps towards their solution. For example, in the village of Maevka, Chui region, the meeting brought up the problem of pupils' safety during night hours. Their video voiced safety concerns of children who return home late through dark unlit streets in winter. Following a recommended consensus, students and the school administration collected information about street lighting.
The data was presented to the parents' committee, which prepared 24 applications for the local government to solve the problem of night-time lighting. After a week, lighting was installed on the main

streets of the village, near the school.
Children from all 16 targeted schools took part in the national feedback session, where they presented five videos to policy-makers, including representatives of the Ministries and Parliament. The project staff have noticed significant evolution since the start of the project when it was difficult for children to express their opinions. By the end of the project, children were much more confident, conveying their messages effectively to officials at the highest level of decision-making.

3.8   ADVOCATING ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

At the end of the project, eight selected participants presented videos and success stories on the international stage, in The Hague, in Utrecht, and in Brussels. Each of them represented a different community from all four regions of Kyrgyzstan, and felt a responsibility to speak out on behalf of their teams.

Naturally, selecting eight participants from 128 was a difficult task. At first, 16 videos were chosen (four from each region) from the 32 produced. To ensure the transparency and fairness of the selection process, movies from one region were evaluated by representatives of another. The independent regional panels comprised representatives from government agencies, partners, journalists, and independent experts. At the next stage, representatives from partner organisations chose eight from the selected 16 videos (two from each region). Level of creativity, scope of the topics discussed, and their link to peacebuilding were among the criteria for selection.

After that, the project staff together with the school administration chose one person from each of the eight teams who created the selected videos. The representative was chosen based on their participation from the start of the project, active involvement in all project activities, and social media activity. Moreover, the children prepared essays on 'the world through the eyes of children' and took part in face-to-face individual interviews.

Finally, the project staff obtained the parents' consent, most of whom supported their kids, seeing this opportunity as beneficial for their development.

> 'Our community has already changed a lot during the project, and now they are becoming even more interested in it after they found out that we are going to The Hague and Brussels, and will show the videos outside of the country'.
>
> **Dilnoza,** a project participant from the Batken region

The main goals of this international advocacy visit included:
- Advocating for further inclusion of civil society and youth in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan;
- Providing a platform for engagement with international policy–makers outside the country, and connecting Kyrgyzstani youth to the broader international community concerned with peacebuilding;
- Empowering youth outside of their comfort zone and country's context;
- Educating and training the children in lobbying and advocacy, familiarising them with new cultures, educational systems, and concepts;
- Illustrating the participatory methodology as a powerful and effective tool for conflict prevention and youth inclusion that it is.

The young representatives had numerous meetings, informal discussions, and workshops with different actors concerned with the situation in their country. These actors included: representatives of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Municipality of The Hague, EU Commission, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, PAX, Search for Common Ground, SaferWorld, the embassy of Kyrgyzstan, and many others. During these meetings, the hope for their future cooperation was expressed. For example, the children were invited to join the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) as an informal group and to contact them with any questions and suggestions for cooperation.

The young Kyrgyzstani leaders also met with their peers residing in the Netherlands. They spent a day in the International School of The Hague, where they presented their project, discovered new cultures, and attended some of the classes.

The group was also warmly welcomed by their compatriots in the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in Brussels. *'It was a pleasure to meet and talk to active boys and girls, who, from a young age, are trying to influence the life of their communities and the country through their actions, changing it for the better',* said the Embassy's social media post.[12]

After a long exciting day at the European Development Days 2019, one of the participants said: *'I enjoyed it a lot because we were taken very seriously and were told on numerous occasions that the opinions of us, children, matter!'*

During the final conference in Kyrgyzstan in July, all the young participants had a chance to meet each other, as well as representatives of state and municipal bodies, parents, teachers, as well as the FTI staff. The purpose of this meeting was to exchange experiences, summarise the project, as well as to develop recommendations and plans for the continuation of the initiatives started during the project. Teams from each region presented their videos and shared their experiences of participating in the project, expanding on their achievements, challenges, personal changes, as well as changes in their communities.

[12] https://www.facebook.com/kyrgyz.embassy.7/posts/699823250447686?__tn__=-R

Moreover, they shared their international experience with all the other participants and discussed ways to implement new ideas for conflict prevention on the ground.

> 'My impressions are very positive. We can learn from the way they [people in other countries] pay attention to cleanliness, order, education, and culture. However, we should always appreciate what we have: our Homeland, nature, traditions, our uniqueness. We just need to develop, be responsible, and respect each other.
>
> Many of us have gained the motivation to study well and learn languages, in order to study in developed countries, gain experience, and travel. We tell friends, classmates and relatives about our impressions and the importance of broadening one's horizons, studying and seeing the world. Our country also has potential for development. Only by studying and analysing other experiences can one find the capacity to grow within themselves'.

Participant in the international advocacy visit

3.9 REACHING FURTHER THROUGH MEDIA

Working with social media became an important aspect of the implementation of PV methodology in Kyrgyzstan. It proved to be a useful addition to the feedback sessions and helped the young participants spread messages among their peers, decision-makers, and reach a wider audience.

Due to the trainings held during the project, children learnt about online etiquette, increased their media literacy, and critical thinking; for instance, learning how to better convey their messages to target audiences via Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. They were introduced to examples of successful online campaigns and global trends. Social media campaigning as part of PV methodology increased participants' confidence in the possible reach of their messages, in the possibility to be heard. This meant that the project touched young people from different origins and genders from all over Kyrgyzstan and beyond. The social media advocacy strategy employed an inclusive approach, using all the minority languages spoken in Kyrgyzstan in order to reach as many people as possible.

Core to the project's communications strategy was familiarising young people with positive examples of civic activism, motivating them towards self-development. In the Facebook group created for all project participants—a melting pot of different ethnic groups and social backgrounds—the development of the project, stories of success, achievements, and videos were shared. The page served as a forum for dialogue among young people, and a way for them to share information and ideas[13]. On the social media platforms, participants shared how they spread ideas of tolerance and peace in their communities, how they connected to public life, and how they started to participate in discussions to solve local problems.

Key project activities were filmed as interviews with the participants, in which they reflected on the changes that have occurred and what they have learnt. This did not require a lot of effort, as the methodology involved the constant use of cameras. It was a useful way for the project team to monitor the progress of the project.

3.10 SECURING SUSTAINABILITY

The approach towards the continuity of the project is systematic; project participants select new teams of young peers to replace those graduating, ensuring a smooth continuation, leveraging the skills and experiences already gained. This forms the basis of sustainable development and dissemination of PV methodology. FTI has been using a similar approach for another youth project, based on the 'forum-theatre' methodology, which has existed independently for four years after the completion of the project thanks to the measures taken to maintain follow-up communication.

The main aspects of ensuring sustainability were:

A - Technical support and equipment
Each target school was provided with free professional equipment for the filming, processing, and screening of videos. School administrations, in turn, allocated a classroom to be used by the participants, under the guidance of teachers. Classes on PV methodology were held regularly. As a result, the club was created within each school, which, in addition to its project tasks, also actively took part in events organised at school and provided media support. Today, such clubs remain an integral part of school life.

B - Human resources
School teachers were part of the project's staff as co-trainers throughout the project; with the expansion of their skills, they became local trainers and practitioners of PV methodology. By the end of the project, the teachers were able to, together with the participating students, select new children to get involved in PV-making.

C - A final event with a focus on sustainability
During the final conference, each team developed its own continuation plan for the upcoming academic year to implement and spread the compelling effect of PV methodology in their schools. Government representatives and local authorities emphasised the importance of executing such events and expressed their readiness for further cooperation.

'I am very happy to hear that the new generation is raising such topics as it does in this project—the problems of our society. If children themselves understand and are trying to solve the problems, then they must truly be worrying to them. Our common task it to make joint efforts towards solutions, to contribute together. Sometimes some questions are resolved not only by the state, but simply by families. So, you, the new generation will already tomorrow act in a way previously deemed unacceptable during issues presented in your families. Mentality will hence start to change gradually'.

Mr. Izzatbek Berkhmamatov,
Chairman of the Youth Committee in Osh

D - Post-project follow up
With the start of the new academic year, the participants have selected new teams from the younger classes in order to replace the participants that are graduating. As practice shows, the former participants continue to be involved in communicating with the team and are happy to share experiences and teach the newcomers. The trained team will then continue to give training to new groups, including mini-trainings on conflict analysis, sessions on tolerance and gender equality, and weekly classes on PV methodology. In 2019, the project staff will conduct a special mini-session on sustainability for teachers and children, during which a mapping of opportunities will be conducted to preserve the continuation and multiplication of the project.

3.11 FINAL REFLECTIONS

The main achievements of 'Cameras in Hand':
- Young Kyrgyz project participants from different social backgrounds now feel empowered to express their opinions at local, national, and international levels;
- Kyrgyz youth participating in the project have learnt to create the necessary conditions for dialogue and reconciliation among peers, to bridge divides through mutual understanding;
- The young people have transformed into messengers of positive change in their own communities, bringing forward new perspectives on the existing gender roles, social norms, and problems in their society;
- A new platform 'Film. Show. Decide.' has been created, where the most pressing problems in society are discussed through film. Government officials, civil society, and international organisations' representatives participate in these discussions. The platform's role is to amplify the youth's voice and convey it to local and national decision-makers, as well as find ways to solve problems collectively.

The PV approach in Kyrgyzstan has a clear structure and a logical sequence; from the development of participants' skills and potential to increased confidence in addressing issues to decision-makers at various levels. Since the beginning of the project, the youth gained substantial experience in film-making. Activists worked in teams of eight people and were responsible for the entire process of video creation—from writing scripts to editing shots and acting. PV methodology has proven to be a brilliantly innovative way to teach boys and girls to convey their messages and opinions in an engaging manner. The young participants developed personally and as a collective during the feedback sessions on local, national, and international stages. In similar projects, there is space to go one step further: to support young people in developing and implementing solutions to the social issues raised in their movies.

'It's not enough for a project to just make videos, it's important to have as a result the real actions happening after the feedback sessions. After meetings, it's important to follow the process, to continue the influence on decision-makers, to remind about yourself – a particular strategy is needed in order to achieve results'.

Ms. Tazhykan Shabdanova, the President of FTI

'Cameras in hand' successfully adapted PV methodology to a peacebuilding context, exemplifying the potential to use such an approach for the resolution of wide-ranging problems in society. In the context of our ever-changing modern society, timely and adequate responses are necessary, and PV methodology has shown its profound ability to provide such responses as an easily adaptable approach to any context worldwide. Ultimately, we should let the work speak for itself and see for yourself.[14]

[14] https://gppac.net/youth-empowerment-kyrgyzstan

ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR THE PREVENTION OF ARMED CONFLICT

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a network of civil society organisations active in conflict prevention and peacebuilding practice world-wide, promoting a fundamental shift in how the world deals with violent conflict: moving from reaction to prevention. GPPAC members work together to inform policy, improve practice and facilitate collaboration amongst civil society, intergovernmental organisations and state actors.
www.gppac.net

FOUNDATION FOR TOLERANCE INTERNATIONAL

Foundation for Tolerance International is the largest non-governmental organisation in Central Asia and has been working in the field of peacebuilding since 1998. FTI works to prevent conflicts, build peace and justice in cities and in high-mountainous, remote and border areas. FTI promotes a culture of non-violence, tolerance and regional cooperation.
FTI coordinates the regional network of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) in Central Asia.
FTI's mission: Central Asia lives in peace and harmony

MIDDLE EAST NONVIOLENCE AND DEMOCRACY (MEND)

Established in East Jerusalem in 1998, MEND has been a pioneer in the field of active nonviolence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories for more than twenty years. MEND explores innovative approaches with regards to education and media, and has been developing projects using participatory video since 2000. MEND works towards nonviolent solutions including building hope, demilitarising minds, and perceiving conflict through the lens of human security. MEND has a small team but with wide impact. It has been part of MENAPPAC, within GPPAC since its founding in 2005.
www.mendonline.org
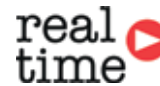
REAL TIME

Real Time is one of the most established and successful participatory media organisations, with an international reputation for participatory video and visual methods. Real Time specialises in participatory engagement and communication, using workshops, projects, training, production and screenings to make visual methods and creative digital technology available for everyone. Real Time's key strength is ensuring that the complex messages that emerge can be effectively communicated, through visual media, to a wider audience, including key decision-makers. Real Time uses creative audiovisual story-telling methods to stimulate deeper exploration of reality. This opens space for all views.
Real Time has extensive experience in managing complex communication projects including many different stakeholders, communities and organisations often in an international context.
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