

POLICY BRIEF

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Cooperatives and Peacebuilding: Addressing Agrarian Conflicts in the Fergana Valley through a Cooperativist Perspective

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fergana Valley is a significant region for understanding the intersection of agrarian conflict, ethnic diversity, and territorial disputes in Central Asia. Spanning Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the valley has been an epicentre of tension since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Conflicts over agricultural land, water resources, and grazing rights have often escalated into violent confrontations, threatening regional stability. Recent initiatives, such as the agreement reached between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on 94 percent of their contested border territory,¹ have contributed to pacifying conflicts in the region. Nevertheless, such efforts incorporate a top-down peacebuilding model, often failing to address the deeper issues faced by local communities. As a result, challenges persist in the region regarding sustainable development, economic stability, and social cohesion.

This Policy Brief argues that cooperatives, as local agents represented globally,² by fostering collaboration and economic interdependence at the grassroots level, are well-positioned to address the economic and social drivers of conflict in the Fergana Valley from a bottom-up perspective. By understanding how cooperatives can contribute to peacebuilding, policymakers can develop more sustainable, community-driven strategies for long-term peace in the region. Recommendations are provided to strengthen support for a cooperativist development in conflict-affected areas, as this will be essential to fostering long-term stability and peace in the Fergana Valley.

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¹ "Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan Reportedly Reach 94 Percent Agreement on Border," Asia-Plus, July 29, 2024, accessed 18 September 2024, <https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/politics/20240729/tajikistan-and-kyrgyzstan-reportedly-reach-94-percent-agreement-on-border>.

² International Cooperative Alliance, "Cooperative Identity, Values & Principles," International Cooperative Alliance, accessed 17 September 2024, <https://ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>.

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Agrarian Conflicts in the Fergana Valley

The Fergana Valley, a historically significant and densely populated agricultural region in Central Asia, spans southern Kyrgyzstan, northern Tajikistan, and eastern Uzbekistan. This area, encompassing 22,000 square kilometres which are home to 12-15 million people³ is crucial to the economic, political, and religious dynamics of these countries.⁴ Conflicts in the region, fuelled by border disputes and competition for natural resources, have been exacerbated by Soviet-era legacies and external influences.⁵ Despite some success in recent border demarcation talks, liberal peace frameworks have been demonstrated to be a poorly sustainable option as they impose external models that overlook local contexts, marginalise grassroots actors, and fail to address the underlying causes of conflict, ultimately leading to fragile and unsustainable peace,⁶ while practical local peace proposals remain scarce.⁷



Map 1. Source: *The Economist*. Adapted by the author.

³ Kurt, S. *Fergana Valley Issue*. In *Conflict Areas in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, 175. 2022.

⁴ K. Toktomushev, *Promoting Social Cohesion and Conflict Mitigation: Understanding Conflict in the Cross-Border Areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, University of Central Asia–Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) Working Paper, no. 40 (2017).

⁵ A. Borthakur, “An Analysis of the Conflict in the Ferghana Valley,” *Asian Affairs* 48, no. 2 (2017): 334–350.

⁶ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997); Roger Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (London: Routledge, 2010); Thania Paffenholz, ed., *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010); Roger Mac Ginty and Andrew Williams, *Conflict and Development* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁷ See Map 1.

During the Soviet era, arbitrary borders disregarded ethnic and economic realities, creating enduring issues.⁸ Enclaves and cross-border ethnic communities, such as the six enclaves currently existing between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, complicate access to resources, like water, and hinder regional development.⁹ Although some theories interpret these conflicts as post-Soviet phenomena, their roots can be traced to Soviet policies, which were further exacerbated by environmental changes.¹⁰ Diplomatic efforts, such as recent border demarcation agreements, have provided temporary relief, but these state-level interventions have not addressed the underlying issues of resource allocation and ethnic tensions. Traditional conflict resolution approaches often overlook the complex local realities and fail to provide sustainable, community-based solutions that address the core of the conflict.

Furthermore, ethnic dimensions contribute to the current disputes over economic resources, historical grievances, transportation routes, natural resources, and soil fertility among the countries.¹¹ The Fergana Valley is characterised by the presence of three major ethnic groups: Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, who live in a network of interdependent communities. They share resources such as burial sites, grazing lands, and marketplaces. However, the ethnic and political boundaries in this area often do not align, adding to the complexity of regional dynamics.¹² Notably, tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as

between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, have been significant in this context.¹³

These ethnic and resource-based conflicts in the Fergana Valley are deeply rooted in the Soviet Union's national delimitation policies of the 1920s. This process aimed to create administrative units reflecting ethnic diversity but often divided ethnic groups across borders, exacerbating interethnic tensions.¹⁴ While the Soviet concept of nation-building sought to create a unified socialist identity, policies like *korenizatsiya*¹⁵ initially promoted local ethnic identities by empowering local leaders and promoting regional languages.¹⁶ Stalin's centralization and Russification policies in the 1930s reversed these gains, leading to the ethnic complexities that persist today.¹⁷ The division of the Fergana Valley disregarded ethnic realities, leaving sizable Uzbek populations within Kyrgyzstan, which, combined with economic disparities, has culminated in violent clashes like the Osh conflict of 2010.¹⁸

Similarly, ongoing disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan over the Batken and Sughd regions are driven by issues such as poverty, ecological crises, and ethnic fragmentation. The Batken region depends heavily on livestock and agriculture, while Tajikistan's Sughd region relies on external water sources for its agricultural productivity.¹⁹ These tensions are exacerbated by incomplete border agreements, leading to recurring conflicts, sometimes referred to as *ketmen wars* due to

⁸ G. Kurmanalieva, "Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Endless Border Conflicts," *L'Europe en Formation*, no. 1 (2018): 121–130.; Beishenaly, N., and F. Dufays. "Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan: Who Are the Lead Actors?" *Central Asian Journal of Water Research* 7, no. 2 (2021).

⁹ R. B. Bekmirzaev, "Socio-Economic Causes of Ethnic Conflicts in the Ferghana Valley," *American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Research* 2, no. 6 (2022): 135–138.

¹⁰ Toktomushev, "Promoting Social Cohesion and Conflict Mitigation," 40.

¹¹ Bekmirzaev, "Socio-Economic Causes of Ethnic Conflicts," 135.

¹² Kurt, S. *Ferghana Valley Issue*. In *Conflict Areas in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, 175. 2022.

¹³ A. Borthakur, "An Analysis of the Conflict in the Ferghana Valley," *Asian Affairs* 48, no. 2 (2017): 334–350.

¹⁴ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ *Korenizatsiya* (коренизация) was a Soviet policy in the 1920s promoting local languages and ethnic leadership in non-Russian republics, later reversed under Stalin.

¹⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993)

¹⁷ Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and After the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ *Equal Rights Trust, Looking for Harmony: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Kyrgyzstan*. The Equal Rights Trust Country Report Series No. 9 (December 2016), accessed 26 October 2024, https://www.equalrightstrust.org/sites/default/files/ertdocs/Kyrgyzstan_EN_0.pdf.

¹⁹ Aida Murzakulova, *Contextual Factors of Conflict in Border Communities in Batken Province, Kyrgyzstan*, Research report (University of Central Asia, Graduate School of Development, Mountain Societies Research Institute, 2017).

the use of agricultural tools.²⁰ In conclusion, the persistent conflicts in the Fergana Valley require locally tailored peacebuilding approaches beyond traditional models.

Soviet-era infrastructure, now neglected, and divergent national interests contribute to ongoing tensions.²¹ Although efforts and initiatives have been undertaken to resolve or forestall disputes—like the militarization of borders—the traditional model adopted to deal with these issues has, in a general way, deepened the divisions rather than alleviating them.²² The Fergana Valley conflicts, driven by historical, political, and resource management issues, highlight the need for inclusive and cooperative approaches to peacebuilding. The persistent conflicts reveal that strict border controls and traditional peacebuilding approaches often fail to address underlying issues.²³ Effective solutions require a nuanced understanding of local dynamics and the involvement of diverse actors in the peacebuilding process.

Peace efforts in the Fergana Valley have followed a liberal peace model, which promotes democratic governance and free-market economy to prevent conflict.²⁴ However, in spite of international aid initiatives, these interventions have largely failed to stabilise the region due to their top-down approach and disregard for local complexities like ethnic divisions and resource scarcity.²⁵ In contrast, a localised perspective on peacebuilding

emphasises the importance of engaging local communities and adapting peace processes specific to the context.²⁶ A hybrid peace model²⁷ that combines national and international norms with local traditions, as seen in community-based cooperatives in other regions,²⁸ could be more effective, offering an alternative approach which bridges the divide between external interventions and local needs and fosters long-term reconciliation and development.

Revitalizing Fergana Valley from a Cooperativist Perspective

The cooperative movement in the region exhibits a complex mix of Soviet legacy and modern adaptations, with variations across Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. During the Soviet era, cooperatives were primarily state-driven, often top-down in nature, with a focus on collective farming through kolkhozes and sovkhoses. These models emphasised the sharing of resources like machinery, procurement of inputs such as fertilizers, and use of centralised distribution systems. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these systems were largely dismantled, leaving space for new forms of cooperativism, including the transition of collective farms into production cooperatives, with a focus on joint agricultural production using collectively owned land.²⁹ While cooperatives have since expanded, there remains a reluctance among farmers to join them due to concerns about

²⁰ Toktomushev, “Promoting Social Cohesion and Conflict Mitigation,” 40.

²¹ Zvi Lerman and David Sedik, “Cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan: Findings from a Survey of Cooperatives and Users,” in *Management and Governance of Networks: Franchising, Cooperatives, and Strategic Alliances*, ed. George Hendrikse (Cham: Springer, 2017), 233-249.

²² Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 45-67; Anna Matveeva, “The Perils of Emerging Statehood: Civil War and State Reconstruction in Tajikistan,” in *Fergana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), 85-115.

²³ Toktomushev, “Promoting Social Cohesion and Conflict Mitigation,” 40.

²⁴ Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (1983): 205-235; Aline Biezus, *Liberal Peace and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: The Challenges of Implementing Liberal Peace in Conflict-Affected Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 57-72.

²⁵ Nick Megoran, *Nationalism in Central Asia: A Biography of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Boundary* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 45-67.

²⁶ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Mac Ginty, Roger. *Hybrid Peace: The Intersection of Peacebuilding and Statebuilding*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.

²⁸ Cooperatives Europe. *Cooperatives and Peace: A Report on Cooperatives' Contributions to Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution*. Brussels: Cooperatives Europe, 2019, accessed 25 October 2024 https://coopseurope.coop/wp-content/uploads/files/COOPS%26PEACE_research_2019_Cooperatives%20Europe-WEB_0.pdf.

²⁹ Zvi Lerman and David Sedik. *Cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan: Findings from a Survey of Cooperatives and Users*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2017, accessed 17 September 2024, <https://www.fao.org/3/a-i6826e.pdf>.

loss of autonomy and confusion about their scope. Despite the prioritization of agriculture by the governments, efforts to raise interest in the benefits of cooperatives remain essential for improving agricultural productivity and well-being in all the countries of the Fergana Valley region.

Today, the cooperative landscape in the region is shaped by both top-down state initiatives and grassroots movements. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the government has been known to push for agricultural cooperatives to manage resources more efficiently. However, these cooperatives often operate within a framework dictated by state policy, with limited autonomy, aligning more with top-down control. In contrast, in Kyrgyzstan, cooperatives tend to be more bottom-up, with local communities forming cooperatives to meet shared economic goals, including the sharing of resources and the collective procurement of materials like seeds and fertilizers.

The willingness of agricultural workers to organise into cooperatives varies. In some cases, the push comes from the state, particularly in Uzbekistan, where cooperatives are seen as a mechanism for improving agricultural productivity. However, in other instances, such as in Kyrgyzstan, the desire for cooperatives arises more organically from local actors seeking economic collaboration and resilience. Therefore, the nature of cooperatives in the region can range from state-led initiatives to community-driven organizations.

The number of cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan grew from 300 in 2004 to 1,400 by 2011, according to the FAO.³⁰ The Kyrgyz Cooperative Union (KCU), alongside international organizations, has played an important role in supporting the development of rural financial institutions and the passage of the 2004 Cooperative Law. Today, the cooperative movement in

Kyrgyzstan reflects both local and global interactions, with key actors including international organizations, cooperatives, and the government.³¹ Not all countries have the same cooperative structure or initiatives, however. They remain at different stages and have different priorities in this sector. Kyrgyzstan stands out as having a well-organised cooperative federation among the three countries, being the only one officially linked to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan has undergone significant economic reforms, fostering agricultural cooperatives to revitalise the rural economy and enhance farmers' livelihoods. Nevertheless, Kyrgyz cooperatives have supported smallholders, particularly in agriculture, by facilitating access to markets and resources.³²

In Tajikistan, the cooperative movement is emerging but faces structural and cultural challenges. The establishment of cooperatives was a key component of the 2012-2022 Agrarian Reform Programme aimed at modernizing the rural economy and encouraging farmer collaboration. However, the concept of voluntary cooperation is relatively new, and cooperatives struggle with a lack of understanding of cooperative business models and an unfavourable legal and institutional environment. Efforts by the government and international organizations, such as the FAO, to strengthen cooperatives have yet to result in a robust national federation.³³

Uzbekistan's cooperative sector currently faces some obstacles due to stricter government control over the economy.³⁴ Historically, the Uzbek model has favoured large state and private farms, which has limited the growth of independent cooperatives. Although there has been increasing interest in promoting cooperatives, especially in agriculture, Uzbekistan lacks an active and internationally recognised cooperative federation.³⁵

³⁰ Lerman, "Cooperative Development in Central Asia," 4.

³¹ N. Beishenaly and F. Dufays, "Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan: Who Are the Lead Actors?" *Central Asian Journal of Water Research* 7, no. 2 (2021).

³² Ruslan Abazov, "Policy of Economic Transition in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 2 (1999): 197-223.

³³ Zvi Lerman, "Cooperative Development in Central Asia," *Policy Studies on Rural Transition* 4 (2013).

³⁴ Umida Niyazova and Lynn Schweisfurth, "New Regulations in Uzbekistan Effectively Impose Government Control on NGOs," *The Diplomat*, August 26, 2022, accessed 16 September 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/new-regulations-in-uzbekistan-effectively-impose-government-control-on-ngos/>.

³⁵ David G. Anderson, "Contesting Rural Resources: Emerging 'Forms' of Agrarian Production in Uzbekistan," *The Jour-*

Defining and Establishing a Multi-ethnic Cooperatives as Communitarian Local Agents

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise, according to the International Cooperative Alliance.³⁶ The formation of a cooperative begins with a group of individuals identifying shared objectives and appointing a committee to oversee the legal and logistical steps of establishment. Key actions include drafting a statute, often with assistance from local or international cooperative bodies, and conducting elections to appoint leadership. Once formed, the cooperative is registered with both representative cooperative entities and regional authorities.

In conflict-affected or divided regions, where group interests may be hindered by segregation or distrust, external actors—such as local or international organizations or other cooperatives—can facilitate and mediate the process. However, it is crucial that cooperative members retain ownership of decision-making, with external actors providing support rather than control.

Once established, the cooperative fosters stronger social ties and community relationships through shared practices based on the Rochdale Principles. These dynamics emphasise balancing social order and individual autonomy; integrating state, community, and market forces; and applying moral values to societal transformation. This model is key for building resilient, cross-border cooperative communities that enhance social and economic cohesion.

The approach to cooperativism in the Fergana Valley may lean toward a bottom-up perspective, particularly given the importance of agriculture and agricultural cooperatives to the economies of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Agriculture constitutes a significant portion of GDP in these countries, collectively representing around 20-25% of the total GDP. In rural areas, where agriculture is the predominant activity, cooperatives are essential to local economies, fostering agricultural development and supporting rural communities. In Uzbekistan, agriculture contributes approximately 25% to the GDP and employs over 27% of the labour force. In Kyrgyzstan, it makes up 14% of the GDP, with over 30% of the population involved in the sector, and in Tajikistan, agriculture represents about 20% of the GDP, employing nearly 45% of the workforce. The significant reliance on agriculture as a primary economic driver necessitates a cooperative framework that responds to local needs and conditions.³⁷

This bottom-up approach can empower local communities to take ownership of their resources and decision-making processes. By doing so, it can lead to more effective agricultural practices and sustainable development, as local actors are often more attuned to their specific contexts and challenges. While a statist approach might facilitate quick decisions at the national level, it often overlooks local nuances and can stifle grassroots initiatives.

Despite the varying approaches of cooperatives across countries, advocacy and representation, community development, and economic contributions serve as common denominators. These elements not only unify cooperatives' efforts but also highlight their essential roles in advocating for farmers' interests, facilitating local development initiatives, and stimulating regional economic growth. Ultimately,

nal of Peasant Studies 35, no. 3 (July 2008): 424-451, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150802340420>.

³⁶ International Cooperative Alliance, "Cooperative Identity."

³⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "Uzbekistan: Country Profile," accessed 29 September 2024, <http://www.fao.org/uzbekistan/en/>; World Bank, "Kyrgyz Republic: Overview," accessed 29 September 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview>; Asian Development Bank, "Tajikistan: Country Overview," accessed 29 September 2024, <https://www.adb.org/countries/tajikistan/overview>.

they exemplify how local cooperatives can effectively address specific regional challenges while contributing to a shared vision of empowerment and resilience.

In recent years, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) has emphasised the role and contribution of cooperatives as local instruments capable of assisting in peacebuilding efforts. The ICA resolution on cooperatives and peace highlights this aspect. In addition to the recent resolution, earlier guidelines have also addressed this issue. The component related to peacebuilding can be better understood when considering the International Labour Organization's (ILO) stance on cooperatives and their versatility in addressing not only economic but also social issues, particularly regarding dialogue and trust-building.

Thus, conflicts in the Fergana Valley can be analysed from the perspective of cooperativism, especially given the scope of links between these conflicts and agrarian and rural issues. Such analysis allows for greater connection and interdisciplinarity within the cooperative movement. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in Rwanda, where conflicts have historically divided ethnic groups, cooperatives have proven effective not only in re-establishing local dialogue but also in rebuilding trust among communities.³⁸ Multi-ethnic cooperatives' initiatives have played a role in fostering reconciliation and social cohesion in post-conflict settings, highlighting their potential in peacebuilding and community development, conditions that could be replicated in the Fergana Valley.

The local aspect provided by the cooperative model is not limited to the traditional or commercial methods adopted by modern cooperatives. As long as it adheres to the seven

Rochdale Principles, cooperativism should value and integrate local knowledge and the experience of traditional communities. These are often mistakenly categorised or dismissed as “old-style socialist” cooperatives, in contrast to newer and more modern models. In a post development framework, it is important to challenge the developmentalist discourse that dismisses “old-style” socialist cooperatives in favour of Western service models, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of cooperative success instead.³⁹

Conflicts in this region are driven by economic inequalities, political instability, and interethnic tensions,⁴⁰ and in such contexts, cooperatives have contributed to peace by promoting social cohesion, providing economic opportunities, and fostering dialogue across ethnic and social divides. They address resource imbalances, empower marginalised groups, and offer platforms for reconciliation.⁴¹ Cooperative principles⁴² are essential for building trust, fostering inclusive decision-making, and addressing socio-economic disparities. These principles enhance social cohesion, reduce tensions, and contribute to sustainable peace by providing economic stability and opportunities for marginalised communities.⁴³

Overall, implementation of the cooperative model in the Fergana Valley, notwithstanding its challenges, offers a pathway toward economic and social stability, with the potential to play a crucial role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Cooperatives create spaces for dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared objectives, which are vital for fostering peaceful coexistence and addressing the root causes of conflict. By embracing both local and international cooperative models, the Fergana Valley can better harness the power of cooperatives to support long-term development and peace.

³⁸ Cooperatives Europe. *Cooperatives and Peace*. Op.cit.

³⁹ Ottavia Cima, *Rethinking Agricultural Cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan: Towards a Postcapitalist Approach to Cooperation in Postsocialism*. (PhD diss., University of Fribourg, 2020), accessed 17 September 2024. https://www.communityeconomies.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/CimaO_2020_Rethinking%20agricultural%20cooperatives.pdf.

⁴⁰ G. Kurmanalieva, “Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Endless Border Conflicts,” *L'Europe en Formation*, no. 1 (2018): 121–130.

⁴¹ I. MacPherson and Y. Paz, *Concern for Community: The Relevance of Cooperatives for Peace*, Series on Cooperatives & Peace Vol. 2 (Joy Emmanuel, Turning Times Research and Consulting, 2015).

⁴² International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), “Rochdale Pioneers,” accessed 17 September 2024, <https://ica.coop/en/rochdale-pioneers>.

⁴³ MacPherson and Paz, *Concern for Community*, 2.

Conclusion

Despite recent governmental efforts,⁴⁴ the Fergana Valley region continues to face significant challenges related to economics, social tensions, natural resources, and border disputes. Cooperatives have the potential to serve as a formal local mechanism to address

these destabilizing factors and coordinate local aspirations in an institutionalised manner. In order for this to occur, increased public awareness and engagement, as well as ongoing support from governments and international organizations, are essential for establishing a hybrid peace framework that transcends purely local or liberal approaches.⁴⁵

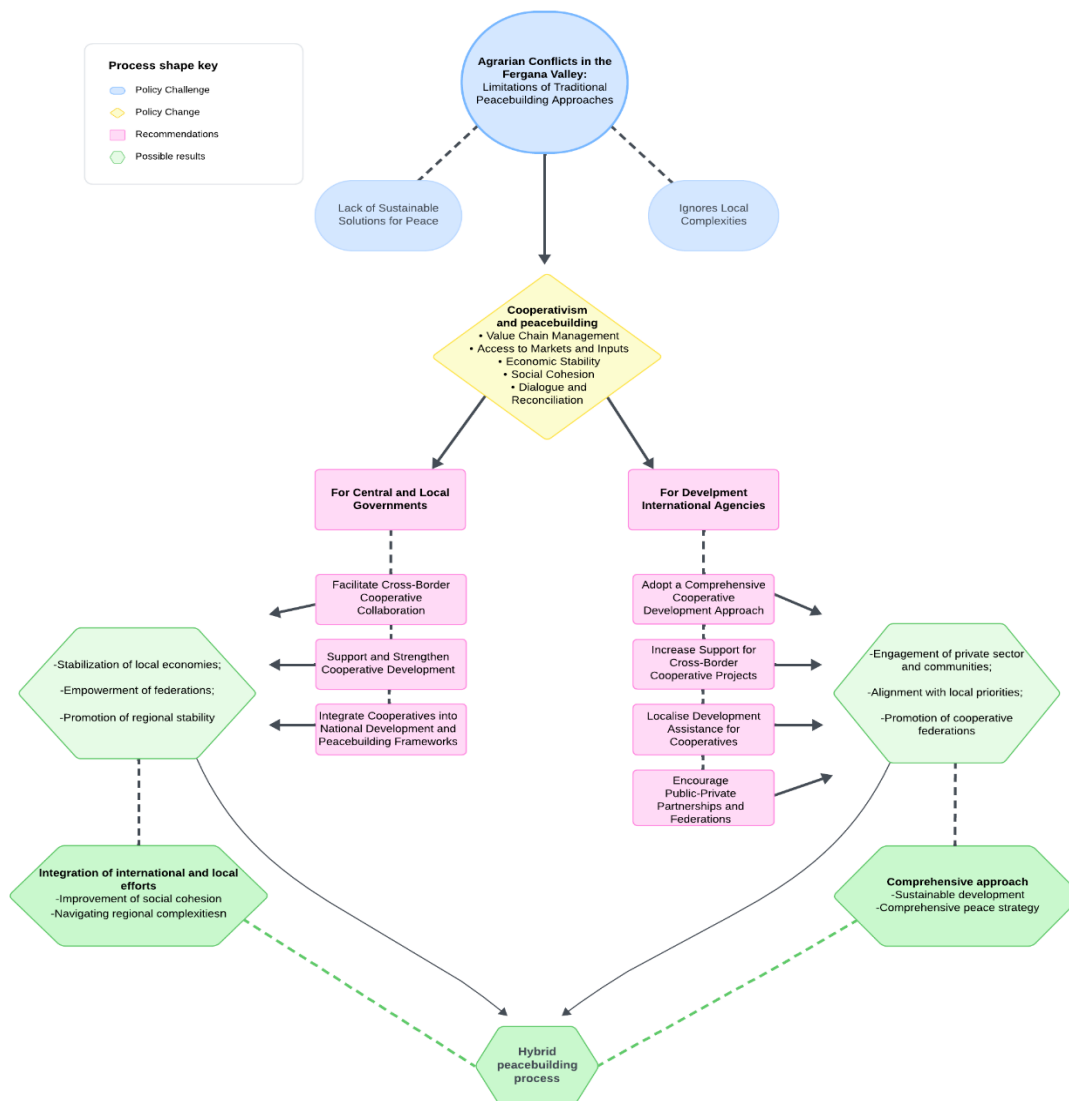


Diagram 1. Elaborated by the author.

A hybrid peace model involving various actors—especially local actors—could play a vital role in fostering lasting peace. Cooperatives, in this context, could not only promote peace but also enhance prosperity,

social cohesion and sustainable development, as well as navigate the intricate regional and border dynamics. Integrating cooperatives into a broader peace-building strategy provides the opportunity to address the complex issues of

⁴⁴ Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan Reportedly Reach 94 Percent Agreement on Border.

⁴⁵ See Diagram 1.

the Fergana Valley. In a broader perspective, the cooperativist model can also support and inspire other mechanisms and similar local organizations to build not only a post development scenario, but also sustainable peace under a more comprehensive and effective peace framework.

Recommendations

For Central and Local Governments

1. *Support and Strengthen Cooperative Development:*

- **Prioritise Cooperative Growth:** National and local governments should emphasise the development and expansion of cooperatives as practical alternatives for the economic and social enhancement in the Fergana Valley. Providing targeted financial resources, comprehensive training programmes, and technical support will be essential for building robust and effective cooperatives.
- **Support the Unification of Cooperatives Organization into Federations:** Such support is important for amplifying the impact and sustainability of cooperatives. Cooperative federations can provide a unified platform that enables smaller cooperatives access to critical resources, such as training in management and technical skills, bulk procurement of supplies, and financial services. Additionally, federations can represent cooperatives in negotiations with governments and international bodies, advocating for policies that protect cooperative interests and promote economic development. By pooling resources and coordinating activities, federations help cooperatives achieve economies of scale, enhance market competitiveness, and strengthen community ties across regions.

2. *Facilitate Cross-Border Cooperative Collaboration:*

- **Promote Joint Initiatives:** Governments can actively facilitate and promote cross-border

collaboration between cooperatives in the Fergana Valley, encouraging joint initiatives such as shared water management projects and cross-border agricultural markets in order to alleviate resource competition and build mutual trust communities.

- **Develop Shared Infrastructure Management:** Establishing mechanisms for managing shared infrastructure—such as irrigation systems, roads, and border controls—is essential for improving the operational efficiency of cooperatives across borders.

3. *Integrate Cooperatives into National Development and Peacebuilding Frameworks:*

- **Incorporate Cooperatives in Strategic Planning:** Governments can integrate cooperatives into national development and peacebuilding strategies. The integration of cooperatives being into these strategies emphasises the need for a more decentralised approach that empowers local communities, which can be critical for effectively addressing conflicts and economic disparities.
- **Investigate Studies:** For further exploration of these themes, look into studies that discuss the role of cooperatives in governance and local development in Central Asia, as well as the implications of centralised governance structures on grassroots initiatives.
- **Implement Legal and Policy Reforms:** Enacting legal and policy reforms to create a favourable environment for cooperative growth is essential. This includes simplifying cooperative registration processes, offering tax incentives, and developing policies that facilitate market access and financial services.

For International Development Agencies

1. *Adopt a Comprehensive Cooperative Development Approach:*

- **Support Holistic Cooperative Ecosystems:**

International development agencies should transition from traditional infrastructure-focused projects to a more holistic approach that supports the entire cooperative ecosystem. This approach should include capacity building, sustainable management practices, job creation, and active community involvement.

2. *Localise Development Assistance for Cooperatives:*

- Tailor Support to Local Needs: Development assistance should be tailored to meet the specific needs of cooperatives in the Fergana Valley.

3. *Increase Support for Cross-Border Cooperative Projects:*

- Enhance Regional Initiatives: International development agencies could provide increased support for cross-border cooperative projects and regional mechanisms for implementation. This support should focus on fostering cooperation among cooperatives across national boundaries, contributing to regional integration and economic growth.

4. *Encourage Public-Private Partnerships and Federations:*

- Promote Partnerships and Federations: Agencies could support the development of public-private partnerships and mechanisms involving private sector entities, business associations, and cooperative producers from the Fergana Valley.

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