

KHATLON SOCIAL MOBILIZATION PROJECT

**TACIS INSTITUTION BUILDING
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME (IBPP)**

IMPLEMENTED BY GHAMKHORI/CHRISTIAN AID

PROJECT EVALUATION

**OBJECTIVE: *IMPROVING INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS, INCREASING
MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND TRUST***

EVALUATION CARRIED OUT BY: DR. SABINE FREIZER-GUNES

08-17 MARCH, 2006 IN KURGAN TUPPE

PROJECT EVALUATION

KHATLON SOCIAL MOBILIZATION PROJECT IMPLEMENTED BY GHAMKHORI

Objective: Improving inter-ethnic relations, increasing mutual understanding and trust

Executive Summary

Ghamkhori successfully addressed the highly sensitive issue of inter-ethnic conflicts, improving community level inter-ethnic relations, and providing the means to increase mutual understanding and trust between majority and minority groups in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan through the Khatlon Social Mobilization Project (KSMP). Improving inter-ethnic tensions was one of KSMP's four main objectives. The project was funded by a Tacis Institution Building Partnership Program Grant (IBPP).¹ It was carried out from January 2004 until March 2006 in some 36 villages and in the city of Kurgan Tuppe.

To improve inter-ethnic ties, *Ghamkhori* carried out assessments of current relations; prepared modules on conflict resolution and tolerance; employed the modules in its focus group lessons with men, women, and youth; trained teachers and mahalla committees on conflict resolution; encouraged mahallas to respect a representative ethnic balance amongst their membership and to promote peaceful resolution of conflicts in their communities. While *Ghamkhori* effectively undertook all these activities, its most immediate conflict prevention impact occurred when establishing multi-ethnic mahalla committees. The right to participate in local decision-making regardless of ethnicity was protected, and the likelihood that the needs of all groups will be taken into account during planning was enhanced. Ethnically mixed mahallas also have greater capacities to respond to inter-ethnic conflict in their communities.

Quantitative evidence of success includes:

- The establishment of 57 mahalla committees, of which 40 were multi-ethnic.
- The discussion of inter-ethnic conflict amongst 22 mahalla committees.
- The resolution of 10 inter-ethnic village level conflicts.
- The evocation of tolerance and the promotion of inter-ethnic understanding by 22 mullahs.

Ghamkhori also had a broader positive impact on conflict. For example it addressed conflicts within the family through its women's rights and women center endeavors; promoted ethical messages about the importance of tolerance, equality, and citizens' participation in its work amongst focus groups; and encouraged local groups to address community-level conflict without waiting for the intervention of higher authorities. However it is more difficult to assess to what degree *Ghamkhori* has effected higher-level conflict prevention or resolution – for example at the region or national level, amongst government, national media or other influential decision makers.

¹ IBPP, Support to Civil Society and Local Initiatives, contract no: 623394 Khatlon Social Mobilisation Project (KSMP).

Ghamkhori is one of only a handful of Tajik NGOs, which address inter-ethnic conflict in its programming. Since the start of the KSMP it has applied successful strategies and approaches. Its capacities to address inter-ethnic conflict could be strengthened through more extensive staff training on conflict assessments, conflict responses, and the development of conflict prevention educational materials. *Ghamkhori* should also incorporate peace and conflict impact assessment methodology in the planning and monitoring of all its programs – whether they are directly conflict related or not. Especially in the coming months, should the NGO start supporting economic self help groups which would involve the allocation of small grants, *Ghamkhori* should carefully study how its intervention may effect local conflict potential.

Summary of key recommendations:

- *Ghamkhori* should continue working on inter-ethnic conflict prevention and improving inter-ethnic relations. If conflict alleviation is no longer identified as a separate objective of its work, the NGO should streamline conflict prevention and resolution throughout all its activities.
- *Ghamkhori* should maintain a conflict sensitive approach to its project planning, monitoring and assessment. It should carry out conflict assessments at all stages of the project cycle. *Ghamkhori* should build on the questionnaire it currently uses for the assessment and monitoring of inter-ethnic relations in local communities to allow for a broader analysis of conflict causes and consequences. *Ghamkhori* should develop new conflict indicators.
- *Ghamkhori* should further develop its conflict and tolerance training modules. The training on conflict should be divided into training on conflict causes, and a session on how to respond to conflict.
- *Ghamkhori* should consider ways to step up its impact to address broader conflict issues, which are often the root causes of community level inter-ethnic conflicts, such as land ownership, water use, unequal social service provision. It should continue its cooperation with district and regional level governmental officials.
- District and Regional mahalla committee forums should keep being held at least once every six months; forum participants should be encouraged to think about regional level conflicts, conflicts that exist between villages/districts, and how to respond to them. When necessary the forums should define advocacy strategies to prevent or alleviate conflict.
- *Ghamkhori* staff should receive additional training on designing and carrying out conflict assessments. It should receive new materials on conflict causes and responses to improve its own training modules. It should continue to exchange experiences with local and international NGOs working on conflict. New contacts should be made especially with EU based groups.
- The staff of the Women Center should benefit from additional training and experience sharing with other psychologists, women's rights activists, lawyers, and social workers working on domestic violence. Contacts with women shelters and centers in Russia should be developed.
- *Ghamkhori* should maintain a multi-ethnic staff and continue to promote the message that it works with all groups regardless of ethnicity or regional background.

Methodology:

Two teams carried out the evaluation of *Ghamkhori's* Khatlon Social Mobilization Project (KSMP). The first who did their assessment in September 2005, evaluated the bulk of KSMP's work, including how *Ghamkhori* met objectives 1-3 of the Tacis-IBPP funded project.² Consequently, this evaluation evaluates the project effectiveness, efficiency and overall impact in improving

“inter-ethnic relations within the target communities through minority participation and by increasing mutual understanding and trust between the main and marginalized ethnic communities.” (Objective 4)

An independent consultant was hired from 8-17 March, to carry out the evaluation, and a training, to increase *Ghamkhori* staff's capacities to address conflict in the communities where they work. For the assessment, focus group discussions were held with a range of project beneficiaries in three villages where the project was implemented;³ *Ghamkhori* project reports and training materials on conflict were reviewed; and *Ghamkhori* staff was interviewed.

The main questions, which the assessment attempts to answer, are:

- What are the organizational strengths and weaknesses of KSMP in particular the component of inter-ethnic relations? What needs are identified in order for *Ghamkhori* to be increasingly effective in this area?
- What strategies, approaches or activities can KSMP improve or adopt to increase the sustainability of its work in terms of community ownership, cooperation with civic authorities, and effectiveness in developing the inter-ethnic dimension?
- How have inter-ethnic relations changed or developed because of KSMP?
- Has a focus on inter-ethnic relations been relevant or important?
- How have staff interacted with the beneficiaries and raised the discussion question of inter-ethnic relations? How effective have *Ghamkhori's* facilitators been working on conflict in focus groups? In what ways were these effective or how might they be improved?
- How have schoolchildren been involved and how have their understanding/attitudes changed?
- Are all ethnic groups represented in the Mahalla Committees? What is their effectiveness in addressing the needs of all ethnic groups and in addressing conflict?

Background:

Ghamkhori defined improving inter-ethnic relations as one of the specific objectives of the KSMP. It did so due to the realization that “although at the surface life in Tajikistan has largely returned to ‘normal,’ many of the regional and clan-based rivalries remain.”⁴ These tensions risk amplifying into community level conflicts, which could have serious consequences on post-war stability and development. In order to address this problem *Ghamkhori* streamlined conflict

² Other objectives included increasing the level of local self-governance, improving the health of rural communities, and reducing the acceptability and occurrence of domestic violence. IBPP, Support to Civil Society and Local Initiatives, Grant Application Form, submitted by Christian Aid by 4 April 2003.

³ In Yangiobod (Vakhsh district), Tut (A. Jomi district) and Dusti (Bokhtar district) mahalla committees, men's groups, women's group, school children and teachers were interviewed. (9,10, 11 March 2006).

⁴ Grant Application Form, TACIS IBPP, submitted by Christian Aid in 2003, p.4.

resolution training through many of its activities with mahalla committees, focus groups, and teachers. It also identified “reduction of inter-ethnic tensions and conflict” as a specific activity to be carried out through the assessment of inter-ethnic relations in villages; monitoring of representative ethnic representation on mahalla committees; organization of seminars on conflict resolution and tolerance; and cooperation with mahalla committees.

Tajikistan’s civil war and forms of ethnic conflict:

During the 1992-1997 civil war the highest level of violence and destruction occurred in the Vaksh Valley (around the city of Kurgan Tuppe, Khatlon), where *Ghamkhori* implements its activities. In the 1930s-1960s in the Vaksh Valley, up to 90% of the population were settled from other parts of Tajikistan to develop cotton processing and the chemical industry.⁵ Already in Soviet times conflicts developed here as a people originally from different regions started feuding over resources, land, water and administrative and managerial posts. During the late 1980s an ideological conflict between former communists on one hand (who tended to originate from Kuliab) and political Islamists (often Garmis) on the other was superimposed on regionalism. In Spring 1992, after both sides in Dushanbe organized a series of massive demonstrations, armed fighting broke out in the region. Due to the lack of institutions to moderate regional and ideological conflict it quickly spiraled out of control, launching the civil war.

In many parts of the Kurgan Tuppe region were people murdered, raped and expelled according to their regional identity. In these cases “the regionalist group became community based and almost turned into an ethnic group. [...] The fact of belonging to a regional group automatically implied a political solidarity which, even if rejected by the individual concerned, was assumed by others.”⁶ Displacement of populations occurred due to fighting, fear, lack of food and shelter. When displaced returned to their homes they often found them burned, looted or occupied.

A Peace Agreement was signed in 1997 putting an end to the war. But the conflict left many Tajik communities fragmented and prone to violence. At all levels of society, the use of force had become an acceptable and effective means to defend self-interests. In the post war period it is a challenge to ensure that conflicts are no longer solved through force but through dialogue or formal institutions. Building society’s capacities to manage tensions without violence remains the key to ensure peace consolidation.

Though the civil war profoundly impacted society and political life, there has been little open discussion about its causes and consequences. There is a general sense that certain ethnic groups won the conflict while others lost out. Today governmental positions, and other valuable assets, are reportedly allocated according to ethnic identity with the winning group getting the greatest share of the pie. Yet talking about inter-ethnic or ideological conflicts in the country is taboo. Processes of recrimination, reconciliation and forgiveness have not followed their natural course, as people have been encouraged by central authorities to forget rather than forgive.

⁵ Shirin Akiner, “Prospects for Civil Society in Tajikistan.” In *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives*. Aryn Sajoo, Aryn B. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris). 2002: 155; Barnett Rubin “Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery.” In *Post-Soviet Political Order. Conflict and State Building*. Barnett Rubin and J. Snyder, eds. (New York: Routledge). 1998: 151-152.

⁶ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*. (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers). 2000: 98.

Consequently, it is extremely difficult to determine what inter-ethnic conflicts remain; how to deal with post-war fear, anger and hate; and how to build sustainable inter-ethnic relations based on confidence and trust.

Origins of Ghamkhori's work on conflict:

Based in Kurgan Tuppe, *Ghamkhori* started its activities in 1997 in the heavily destroyed villages of the Bokhtar district of the Khatlon Region.⁷ *Ghamkhori* initially choose not to work on inter-ethnic reconciliation, because according to the Executive Director “the wounds were still aching, and people had not forgiven each other. [...] We did not have much experience in reconciliation and in working on peace building.”⁸ Nevertheless from its inception the organization was committed to working with all victims and persons in need regardless of ethnicity.

By 2003 *Ghamkhori* felt that its organizational capacities had sufficiently strengthened, and its understanding of local villages broadened, to begin tackling inter-ethnic conflicts. However when it began to do so in early 2004 it faced the challenge of defining a new assessment tool (questionnaire), training module on conflict (for focus groups and others), and response mechanism to address conflicts it was confronted with during project implementation.

During the past two years KSMP was implemented in villages where Tajiks, Uzbeks, Russians, Kyrgyz, Tartars and Koreans live. Tajiks and Uzbeks further divide themselves into smaller “ethnic groups” based on their region or village of origin.⁹ Latent or visible conflicts existed between groups in some of the communities where *Ghamkhori* was active. Through KSMP, the NGO tried to assess the level of conflict, prevent escalation of tensions, and educate citizens about conflict and tolerance. It found that conflict existed between families and groups due to their different ethnicity, and some local institutions such as mosques and mahalla groups were segregated. Consequently *Ghamkhori's* focus on understanding and improving inter-ethnic relations was an important component of its broader mission of achieving sustainable improvement in the life of impoverished community in the Khatlon province.

II. Ghamkhori's projects and conflict resolution:

II.a Assessment and monitoring of inter-ethnic relations in local communities:

As part of its general methodology of carrying out assessments before engaging in communities, *Ghamkhori* facilitators studied the ethnic makeup and the relation between groups in all villages where it started activities. This was necessary because ethnically disaggregated data is not available in Tajikistan.

⁷ According to the UNDP (1995: 50) Human Development Report, Bokhtar was where “the most damage during the war was inflicted.” “Of 132 villages, 45 are leveled to the ground completely. Over 6,400 houses were burned and 2,994 partially ruined. More than 5,700 families are without shelter. Covering these losses will cost approximately US \$11.4 million.” [...] “Commercial and community structures were eliminated. These include 2 clubs, 67 shops, 13 kindergartens, 10 common-service salons, several obstetrician consulting stations, 34 schools and 2 libraries.”

⁸ Interview with Ghamkhori Executive Director, Kurgan Tuppe, Tajikistan on 11.06.02

⁹ Though the term “ethnic group” is not scientifically accurate when discussing people coming from different regions of Tajikistan it is widely applied this way in the country. Thus in this report “ethnic group” will not only refer to Tajiks, Uzbeks, etc., but also to people originally from Kuliob, the Karategin Valley, Leninabad, etc...

NGO facilitators posed the following four questions:

- What kinds of relations exist between ethnic groups?
- Do you invite people from another ethnic group to your celebrations (weddings, funerals)
- Are there inter-ethnic marriages in your community?
- What do you think about inter-marriage between inter-ethnic groups?

The responses received demonstrated the existent of latent conflict between “ethnic groups.” While most adults responded that their relations with ethnically different neighbors had improved since the end of the war, they noted that conflicts over small issues continue to happen. Children in school also tease and quarrel with each other because of their different ethnic identities. Rarely were men of the “opposite” ethnic group invited to weddings, though they were to funerals. While inter-ethnic marriage was common before the war (and even immediately after it), most families choose today to marry within their own group. They felt that mixed ethnic marriages were generally a negative phenomenon. These answers are somewhat surprising considering how successful the peace process is going on the surface.

The questions posed by *Ghamkhori* are relatively straightforward and do not deal with the possible root causes of conflict. Rather they measure attitudes about multi-ethnicity and other ethnic groups, as well the propensity for occasions/symbols (ex: weddings) to serve as dividers or connectors in local communities. This may be the best way to start approaching the highly sensitive issue of inter-ethnic conflict. *Ghamkhori* staff explained that even though they would have liked to ask these questions in its initial assessments in local villages, ultimately it decided to do so a couple of months later, after confidence was built between the NGO and villagers.

Ghamkhori's questionnaire did not gather data on informants' past experiences with people from other ethnic groups, their interests, their access and use of local resources (water, land, electricity, school), or relationships with people from other groups living beyond their village boundaries. Through the data it collected, the NGO could determine whether people lived separately due to ethnicity, but not the cause of this phenomenon, and more specifically whether discrimination existed vis-à-vis one or several groups. Beyond the issue of marriages and celebration, *Ghamkhori* could not easily determine whether other dividers/connectors existed and what their causes may be.

Recommendation: *Ghamkhori* should maintain a conflict sensitive approach to its project planning, monitoring and assessment in accordance with NGO best practices in post-conflict environments. It should carry out conflict assessments at all stages of the project cycle. *Ghamkhori* should broaden its existing questionnaire so that it allows for a deeper study of conflict context and causes, actors and their interests, and conflict dynamics to carry out a comprehensive conflict assessment. When preparing future questionnaires, *Ghamkhori* should pose questions, which will give it a better understanding of local connectors and dividers. Questions about access to resources and services should be included to determine if they are the cause of any grievances vis-à-vis the “other.”

II.b Organization of seminars on conflict resolution and tolerance

Ghamkhori held seminars with women, men, and youth focus groups, as well as teachers and mahalla committees on conflict and tolerance as part of its broader awareness building and information dissemination effort. Inter-active methodology including role-plays were used.

The course on conflict addressed the following issues:

- Types of conflict
- Causes and consequences of conflicts
- Conflict resolution

The course on tolerance focussed on:

- The meaning of tolerance. The difference between tolerance and respect
- The consequences of discrimination (lack of tolerance)
- What Islam says about tolerance

When queried, focus group participants interviewed mentioned conflict resolution and tolerance as topics they learned about during *Ghamkhori's* lessons. They said that *Ghamkhori* helped them understand how to better respond to conflict, in particular to think about the consequences of conflict escalation, focus on determining conflict root causes, and use patient step-by-step mediation to encourage conflicting sides to resolve their differences. All beneficiaries claimed to have applied the lessons learned in *Ghamkhori's* courses in practice when they were faced with conflict situations. Teachers in particular explained how the courses helped them address fights between students – due to ethnicity or other causes – to listen to them and explain the negative consequences their altercations might have if parents became involved and the conflict spread to other parts of the local community.

Recommendation: Ghamkhori's teaching modules are always “works in progress” constantly being improved and updated based on knowledge that the facilitators gain from outside experts and the local communities themselves. The two modules on conflict and tolerance will also be improved. *Ghamkhori* may choose to divide the module on conflict into two: causes of conflicts and ways of resolving conflict. It may also include new material received during the three-day staff training (described below). For example root causes of conflict should be more thoroughly exposed; ethnic conflict analyzed as a consequence of institutional deficiencies, economic inequalities, mentalities and past experiences, rather than a cause in itself. The distinctions between conflict actors' needs, interests and positions should also be described.

II.c *Working directly on inter-ethnic relations: setting up mixed mahalla committee and promoting multi-ethnic activities based on common interests.*

Mahalla staff interviewed appreciated *Ghamkhori* staff's lessons on how to intervene when they see conflict. The NGO developed their communication skills, especially their ability to serve as effective mediators in conflict situations. This included emphasis on being objective and neutral, listening to all persons involved, encouraging dialogue, and in some cases making reference to religious teachings. Mahalla staff intervened primarily to facilitate the resolution of domestic conflict and disputes between families. They did not seem to address broader conflicts between villages for example.

Several mahalla leaders pointed out that *Ghamkhori* training had strengthened their capacities to address local governmental officials, particularly at the Jamoat level.¹⁰ However it is unclear whether or not mahallas communicated concerns about local conflicts to jamoats, or succeeded in lobbying them to address conflict causes such as unequal access to resources. The evaluator was also unable to determine whether any conflict issues had been addressed during district or regional mahalla committee forums held every six months.

Ghamkhori helped transform inter-ethnic relations at the village level through the organization of multi-ethnic initiatives. One of the most effective ways to address conflict is to encourage different groups to work together based on common interests. *Ghamkhori*, and the mahalla committees it helped set up, were successful in this regard. They invited people from different ethnic groups to together implement “village beautifying” efforts,¹¹ attend ceremonies,¹² lobby donors, and carry out community infrastructure improvement projects.¹³ This was part of *Ghamkhori*’s broader effort to support self-reliance and community ownership of projects. Through its community development efforts in mixed villages, *Ghamkhori* bred cooperation and trust between people belonging to different ethnic groups. It helped promote “shared problem definitions” which are powerful incentives for further contact and cooperation.

Recommendation: District and Regional mahalla committee forums should keep being held at least once every six months; forum participants should be encouraged to think about regional level conflicts, conflicts that exist between villages/districts, and how to respond to them. When necessary the forums should define advocacy strategies to prevent or alleviate conflict.

III. Ghamkhori’s impact:

III.a Immediate project impact based on indicators:

When it designed its project, *Ghamkhori* assigned indicators to measure the degree to which it met its object of improving inter-ethnic relations in target communities. According to this:

- In problem villages at least two cases of improved relations and concrete conflict solving should be reported during the eight-month intervention cycle.
- In problem villages, the members of the MC (mahalla committees) should openly discuss the problems relating to ethnic minorities in their meetings, and try to find solutions during the eight-month intervention cycle.
- In problem villages, the mullah should raise the issue of ethnic tensions and call for tolerance and understanding during sermons.
- Representatives of all ethnic groups should be represented fairly in all MCs.

At the end of the project, based on its monitoring, *Ghamkhori* staff concluded that:

- In 10 cases relations between people from different ethnic groups had improved in problem villages.

¹⁰ Jamoat is the lowest level of self-governance in Tajikistan and generally brings together several villages.

¹¹ Such as street and channel cleaning, tree planting, etc...

¹² Weddings, funerals, “Navruz” spring festivities, “village day” ceremonies.

¹³ Including the reconstruction of schools, repair of electricity transformers, and rehabilitation of water systems.

- In 22 cases mahalla committees informed Ghamkhori that they had discussed inter-ethnic tensions. Amongst these cases, the mahalla was sometimes able to contribute to solving a problem, sometimes not.
- In 22 cases the mullah called for tolerance and understanding in his sermons.
- Ghamkhori helped establish 57 mahalla committees. Amongst these 40 were multi-ethnic and 17 were uni-ethnic. In the later case the local population also belonged to only one ethnic group.

These results indicate that *Ghamkhori* largely fulfilled its objective of improving inter-ethnic relations through increased minority representation, and increasing mutual understanding and trust between groups living in the same community. All the indicators for Objective 4 were impressively met. Based on these results it is evident that *Ghamkhori* worked directly on inter-ethnic conflict and strengthened the capacities of local institutions (mahallas committees, mullahs) to discuss and resolve local disputes.

However the indicators themselves are not entirely satisfactory. While the last indicator measured a quantitative output (the number of ethnic minorities in mahallas), the other three were focussed on more difficult to measure qualitative change. How does one measure “improved ethnic relations” or open discussion of minority issues? *Ghamkhori* did not assign numerical/quantitative measures of success for three out of four of its indicators. The NGO is not entirely at fault: this demonstrates the well-known difficulty of measuring impact on highly sensitive and complex political and personal phenomena such as inter-ethnic conflict. *Ghamkhori* should consider developing new indicators, which will more effectively help determine how conflict is evolving in communities, whether the root causes of disputes are being addressed, and connectors between ethnic groups are being strengthened.

Recommendation: *Ghamkhori* should develop new conflict indicators based on thorough conflict assessments of the villages where it will work next. In some instances village specific indicators may have to be devised.

III.b Broader impact:

Through the implementation of the KSMP *Ghamkhori* has had a broad impact on improving inter-ethnic relations which is difficultly measurable, but is based on the NGO’s success in empowering local citizens, regardless of ethnicity or gender.

Ghamkhori played a direct role in promoting contacts within local communities, and building inter-group trust. The *Ghamkhori* Women’s Center was an example of a “space” that provided interaction, and the opportunity for dialogue, in a “civil” environment. Through its community development support activities, the Tajik NGO also re-unified *mahalla* communities that had largely remained dormant since the breakup of the Soviet *kolkhoz* system. Saunders argues that “‘We should fundamentally change how we behave’ [...] That different way of relating is the foundation for a peaceful society (Saunders 1999: 243).” Changing behavior inherently signifies forgiving and accepting the “other”. Ways to change behavior include transforming the language, images, and modes of dialogue employed by post-war societies. Working in mixed villages *Ghamkhori* also encouraged people of different regional backgrounds to meet for the first time since the end of the war. *Ghamkhori* dared to take the first step towards reconciliation;

legitimizing contact and dialogue between different national groups; undermining wartime fears, prejudices, and hatreds; and creating a momentum that other citizens could follow

An institutional analysis of the cause of the Tajik civil war - whereas the conflict was largely seen as the outcome of a competition for control over state institutions/resources after the disintegration of the USSR - underlines the importance of governmental decentralization. Institutions of local self-governance must be shepherded by democratic values, and be politically and socially inclusive, for them to positively effect peace.

Ghamkhori encourages *mahalla* committees to elect their officials rather than acquiesce to their top down appointment. The NGO often succeeded in guaranteeing female and ethnic minorities' participation in the committees. Consequently it enhanced formerly disenfranchised citizens' - women, ethnic minorities -- public participation in local decision-making. Regular mahalla meetings were accompanied by debates on the prioritization of needs and the means to address them. Mahalla members collected small funds from local citizens when necessary to undertake community projects. Several *mahallas* visited successfully provide information on local needs and represent the interests of their communities vis-à-vis domestic authorities and international agencies.

Rather than exacerbating an "ethnicization" of social service provision, *Ghamkhori* counteracted the fragmentation of state assistance. *Ghamkhori* provides services regardless of ethnicity/regional background and purposely seek out persons who had been excluded based on their identity. The NGO also encourages its beneficiaries to have recourse to official institutions regardless of their ethnicity: thus for example *Ghamkhori* bolstered more traditional Garmi women's confidence in themselves and in state institutions, successfully encouraging them to refer to medical and legal professionals to address their problems.

Ghamkhori played a role in increasing local communities' sense of economic and social security. strengthened local coping mechanisms. Based on ties of kinship and territorial proximity, it sustained mutual support networks through which the most severely disenfranchised could make claims on fellow community members for aid. *Mahalla committees* rekindled villagers' sense of control, thus explaining their willingness to contribute to large-scale volunteer actions (*hashar*). In the immediate post-war period, communities who had been unable to control the tide of events as fighting raged, were often passive, distrustful of their ability to effect change. Yet the successful completion of community projects demonstrated to local groups their capacity to succeed and served as a powerful motivator for them to plan additional works.

Most citizens appealed to mahalla committees to mediate in instances of inter-family, inter-neighbor and non-criminal conflicts. Local inhabitants turned to *Ghamkhori* field staff, and the elected *mahalla* leadership, for help and advice. Several persons interviewed responded that *Ghamkhori* provided them with tools to resolve conflicts without addressing higher level authorities (police, jamoat). In Tajikistan there is a cultural predilection to keep problems within the community, based on the belief that conflict is bad and that it will discredit the village if people know about it "outside" the village. However *Ghamkhori* also assisted victims gain retribution through the courts - rather than for example starting family vendettas. Civil society

organizations thus positively effected peace consolidation by encouraging their members and beneficiaries to trust state structures to ensure security and justice.

In certain instances *Ghamkhori* has successfully provided information, and lobbied higher level decision-makers, to make them more conflict sensitive. This has particular been in regards to conflict within the family – where the NGO has encouraged local police, courts, and government authorities to sanction domestic violence. *Ghamkhori* had also begun to contribute to policy formulation on domestic violence and primary health care. *Ghamkhori's* success in this regard suggests that it could take similar steps to address inequity between ethnic groups if it determines in the future that this is an important cause of tension between families and communities. Due to its privileged access to rural populations, and knowledge about their needs, the NGO also serves as a useful information source for state authorities, increasing their awareness, and influencing them to change their responses.

One area, which *Ghamkhori* has not addressed in its activities, is land reform and access to water. Yet access and ownership of land/water is of crucial importance in agriculture-based Khatlon. Equitable and fair land reform is essential to alleviate pressures of greed and grievance, to increase food production, and reduce poverty. Re-organization of state farms has so far tended to increase disparities between land owning and landless farmers – exacerbating grievances rather than reducing them.¹⁴ *Ghamkhori* could consider increasing public awareness of land rights.

IV. *Ghamkhori's* capacities

Ghamkhori provides workplaces for multi-ethnic staff and promotes the message that it works with all groups regardless of ethnicity or regional background. While the Executive Director of *Ghamkhori* is an ethnic Uzbek, other top level management is ethnic Tajik. Staff includes ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks, Ukrainians and Russians, as well as Tajiks originally from Kulyab, Garm, Kurgan Tuppe and other regions. They share feelings of tolerance vis-à-vis people of different backgrounds. *Ghamkhori* counters inter-ethnic tensions by providing a space for people of different backgrounds to interact; maintaining a multi-ethnic staff; and working with all regional or ethnic groups present in the region, in their preferred language

Ghamkhori management and staff openly acknowledges that they are not as competent in addressing inter-ethnic conflicts, as they other issues which they have been working on for a much longer time. However they are eager to develop their capacities in this field, and genuinely believe that inter-ethnic conflicts are a threat that needs to be addressed if *Ghamkhori* is going to satisfy its broader mission of improving conditions in local communities. Due to the nature of its past work and its mission, *Ghamkhori* is more comfortable addressing conflicts within families or between families, rather than higher level ones between villages, districts or beyond..

To build its capacities further, *Ghamkhori* would benefit from building deeper and broader networks with NGOs in the region and beyond working on conflict issues. *Ghamkhori's* access to information and cooperation with local NGOs in Tajikistan and neighboring countries has

¹⁴ According to a survey carried out by MSDSP in 2002 in the Karategin Valley, 8.57% of families were landowners, 36.7% were renting and 98.86% had kitchen gardens. *Land Reform and Land Tenure in the Rasht region*, MSDSP Internal Document, 2002.

improved during the implementation of KSMP, with the assistance of ACT Central Asia (Christian Aid). Nevertheless *Ghamkhori* has generally found it difficult to identify groups working on similar problems, applying a similar methodology. For example, Women Center staff has met with other women's groups over the past years in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, yet so far it has been unsuccessful in developing working links with NGOs working on domestic violence and other conflicts in the family. To cooperate with people applying similar response mechanisms to family conflicts, *Ghamkhori* should consider trying to develop contacts with women's centers in Kazakhstan, Russia, and possible the former Yugoslavia. *Ghamkhori* should also be assisted in its efforts to make contacts with organizations working on inter-ethnic conflict such as International Alert (London, UK), Swisspeace (Bern, Switzerland), and others based in European Union member states.

On 13-16 March 2006 twenty *Ghamkhori* staff members attended training on working on conflict in rural communities led by Dr. Sabine Freizer. The training aimed to increase knowledge of conflict types and causes, conflict assessment methodologies, and third party intervention in support of conflict prevention and resolution (agenda attached in annex). Staff participated in group work and discussion actively, while taking extensive notes during lectures. Staff indicated that the training was the first of its kind that they attended. They judged it to be extremely useful, and said they intended to apply the concepts and methodologies learned in their future work.

Recommendations: *Ghamkhori* staff should receive additional training on designing and carrying out conflict assessments. It should receive new materials on conflict causes and responses to improve its own training modules. It should continue to exchange experiences with local and international NGOs working on conflict.

The staff of the Women Center should benefit from additional training and experience sharing with other psychologists, women's rights activists, lawyers, and social workers working on domestic violence. Contacts with women shelters and centers in Russia should be developed.