

Emergency response Violence in southern Kyrgyzstan



A boy and a girl rehearse a small drama piece based on a fairy tale during an outdoor teambuilding training in Osh (Kyrgyzstan), as part of Save the Children's peacebuilding and conflict-resolution activities. (Photo: Rodrigo Ordóñez/Save the Children)

Six-month update
December 15, 2010



Save the Children

After the violence, shattered lives

Increasing social discontent in Kyrgyzstan led to demonstrations that resulted in the resignation of the country's president on April 7 and the establishment of an interim government. The following two months were marked by protests and violent clashes as various elements struggled for influence in the fragile political environment. The south of the country, traditionally the power base of the deposed president, experienced **escalating violence** between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations. The peak of the violence began on June 10 in the center of the city of Osh, where groups of several thousand armed youths fought. Over the following days, communal violence spread to major areas of the southern provinces of Osh and Jalal-Abad, with reports of mass killings, rape, looting and arson. After June 14, the violence subsided due to a decisive military and police intervention. On June 27, the citizens ratified a draft constitution on a referendum and on October 10 parliamentary elections took place. Since then a level of calm has prevailed, but the loss of trust between the different ethnic communities is evident.

The violence brought about **severe humanitarian consequences for children and their families**. Within a matter of days the violence displaced an estimated 400,000 people. Some 75,000 refugees, 96% of which were women and children, crossed the border into neighboring Uzbekistan until they deemed it safe to return. As of October 27, the official numbers indicate 415 people died during the conflict and more than 4,600 were injured.

The crisis had a devastating effect on trade, agriculture and services, resulting in **severe economic losses**. According to the Ministry of Labor, at least 20,000 people lost their jobs due to the looting and destruction of businesses, and about 40,000 left Kyrgyzstan in search for employment. The disruption of cross-border commercial routes broke down supply chains and inflated the price of basic goods. Before the civil unrest, about 27% of the country's population had **limited access to food**, a problem that escalated when people lost their livelihoods.

Some **1,950 families lost their homes and possessions** in Osh and Jalal-Abad. With the winter quickly approaching, their physical wellbeing and their health were under threat.

The existing **limitations of the healthcare system** in the region were exacerbated by the current crisis. As a consequence of violence, children and adults suffered mental health problems. Mistrust and fear resulted in delays in seeking health care and a higher number of home deliveries. Women and children were affected by a lack of drug supply, medical equipment and skilled health personnel.

After the crisis, it was necessary to provide access to **safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene** in the affected communities. Toilets and bathrooms burnt along with houses and many schools required new latrines. Hygiene practices remained poor and toiletries were not readily available in the market.

Children were vulnerable and in need of protection after being witness to terrible violence. Many experienced feelings of insecurity and endured the loss of their relatives. An estimated 50% of those displaced were children and many had no choice but to remain in the affected areas during the fighting. The conflict shattered traditional community structures, support networks and social services.

The conflict had a **negative effect on education**. Some displaced children dropped out of school, while others were transferred to a different center, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and a lower quality of learning. Many children lacked uniforms, warm clothes, textbooks and learning materials. Some parents were afraid to send their children to school. **Reconciliation is a pressing need**, as the roots of the conflict go back for generations. Youth were actively involved in the violence and are lacking alternatives and leadership skills to be agents of peace.

From June 15 to December 15, 2010, **Save the Children assisted 225,979 people** affected by the conflict, including **119,160 children**, with a comprehensive humanitarian response including shelter, food, small business rehabilitation, child protection initiatives, health, sanitation, education and peacebuilding programs.



The streets of the neighborhood of Kyzyl Kishtak can be seen through the broken window of a building that was destroyed during the violence that broke out in the city of Osh (Kyrgyzstan) in June 2010.

Immediate assistance

Save the Children was already working in Osh before the onset of the violence, which enabled a **fast emergency response**. On June 15, one day after the peak of the violence subsided, Save the Children staff was on the ground to assess the humanitarian situation and needs of the conflict-affected population. When Save the Children staff arrived to the communities they carried and distributed essential relief items to children and their families. At a time when the level of mistrust and fear was high among the people affected by conflict, distributing relief items upon first contact with the communities enabled Save the Children to quickly earn their trust.

Team members walked around affected areas, observed the effects of the violence, interviewed people whose houses and businesses had been destroyed, and shared information with other organizations. Based on the basic humanitarian data collected, Save the Children mobilized resources and focused its response in the **neediest districts**.

During the initial phase of the emergency, Save the Children's primary focus was to **meet the immediate needs of children and their families**, by providing food, temporary shelter, basic household items and protection services.

On June 17, barely **three days after the surge of violence**, Save the Children was distributing supplies to internally-displaced people in Chereomushki, in Osh city, and one day later to those in Begabat camp, in Jalal-Abad province. As the displaced population began to return to their homes by the end of June, Save the Children adapted its distributions and

locations accordingly. Distributions were then carried out in central places in areas of Osh city that were burnt during the violence, and in child-friendly spaces established by Save the Children. The distribution of basic relief items continued through September.

Save the Children reached **more than 3,600 families** (approximately 18,298 people, including 12,099 children) who had lost nearly all of their possessions during the violence and who did not have sufficient savings to purchase basic home supplies. Families received **essential household items** such as cooking and eating utensils, water containers, mattresses, blankets, plastic sheets, sleeping mats and buckets. The **hygiene kits** consisted of towels, sanitary pads, toilet paper, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, diapers, baby wipes and baby powder.

Save the Children also distributed **lightweight tents to serve as temporary shelter** until permanent houses were built.

In addition to meeting the basic relief needs of the affected communities, Save the Children supported conflict-affected population in other sectors, such as livelihoods, shelter and education.

During the emergency, Save the Children participated in the **coordination mechanisms** for the sectors of early recovery, health, protection, shelter, relief items, and logistics and coordinated the coordinated response of humanitarian agencies in the education sector, along with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education.



Muhiddin Nadjimudinov, 52, sits inside an emergency tent in his family home in the area of Kyzyl Kishtak, in Osh (Kyrgyzstan).

Earning a living and bringing food to the table

To restore livelihoods and boost economic exchange in the local markets, Save the Children **supported 129 small-scale entrepreneurs** to get back to business in Osh, by providing them with the basic equipment and supplies they needed to restart their activities. This support contributed to rehabilitate trade and reestablish basic services.

Save the Children **supported vulnerable families** who had lost their business property and assets and needed assistance to restore their livelihoods. As a priority, Save the Children supported those with two or more children, had lost family members due to the violence, had debt or scarce savings, had no other sources of income, had lost their home, or who were single parents. Save the Children also requested businesses to restart activities within three weeks of receiving support.

Save the Children supported **a variety of business sectors**, including seamstresses, bakeries, garages, grocery shops, veterinarians, chicken farms, butcheries, pharmacies, hardware stores, barber salons, bookstores, internet cafés, restaurants, flower shops, computer services, clothing stores, wedding decorators, carpenters, printing services, phone booths, furniture rental, welders and audio recording studios. Business owners **indicated the type of equipment and items they needed** for their specific trade and Save the Children purchased the supplies for them in the local markets.

For one month, Save the Children staff monitored the progress and profitability of the businesses after receiving material aid and **gave technical advice**. Save the Children encouraged businesses to diversify their products and suggested ways to expand their customer base. Business owners expressed their satisfaction with the help they received, which enabled them to restart their activities and support their families.

Because of **limited incomes and scarce availability of food** after the violence, affected families in urban areas skipped meals, reduced the portions and took loans to purchase groceries. To address this problem, Save the Children has distributed to date more than **3,073 metric tons of food to 194,931 people**, including **100,319 children**. In the aftermath of the violence, conflict-affected populations received monthly rations of wheat flour, vegetable oil and yellow split peas, which are the local staple foods and cover about 68% of the daily caloric needs. Save the Children also distributed high-energy biscuits and snacks to children attending child-friendly spaces.

First, Save the Children conducted a **general distribution** from June 28 to August 21, reaching the entire population in the target neighborhoods. Loss of identification documents would have made it difficult or impossible for some of the most vulnerable people to receive food had a targeted food distribution been conducted. After this time, Save the Children distributed food only **to the most vulnerable**, following a set of criteria agreed to with government authorities.

Women participated more actively in the distributions than men, as their husbands and elder sons had left Kyrgyzstan after the violence in search of employment. A large majority of the recipients of food were **satisfied with the distribution process**, information about schedules and the quality of products. A Save the Children survey also confirmed that in most cases beneficiary families used the food for their own consumption and not for resale.

Save the Children **will continue to distribute food**, approximately a total of more than 5,000 metric tons of food to about 200,000 people, until the end of February 2011.



A woman puts bottles of vegetable cooking oil in a bag during a distribution of food donated by the World Food Programme in the neighborhood of Kyzyl Kishtak, in Osh (Kyrgyzstan).

A safe home for the winter

Save the Children supported the **reconstruction of 334 family homes** using permanent materials in the districts of Kyzyl Kishtak (Osh province) and Bazar Korgon (Jalal-Abad province).

Engineers designed a **standard house ready for the winter**, with a central stove for heating and cooking, and resistant to earthquakes, which are common in this area. The houses were built using brick and mortar, the materials typically used in the region, and featured two rooms in a space of 28 square meters, enough to accommodate an average-size family with a minimum of comfort and privacy.

The **mobilization of the community** was a priority throughout the life of the project and key to its success. Save the Children identified families without a living space that were most in need of support in collaboration with representatives from the Kyrgyz government's Department for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation. Save the Children informed the families about the support they would receive and the need for cooperation from the community. Simultaneously, Save the Children staff worked with the government to get identity and property documents for the homeowners, which in many cases had been destroyed along with the house.

The first step was to **remove the rubble** remaining in the families' compounds following the violence. For this task, Save the Children engaged more than three hundred short-term laborers, six excavators and ten tipping trucks. It took the majority of August and September to remove more than 2,000 truckloads of rubble.

Save the Children worked directly with the Government Emergency Services Department to ensure that all the debris was disposed of in government-controlled landfills. Save the Children also arranged for heavy machinery to remove garbage from the streets and unusable foundations from the property.

Construction began immediately after the rubble was removed from the compounds. Save the Children ensured the timely and accurate delivery of materials to affected areas. Beneficiaries helped to unload the trucks and transport the materials to each family's property. Families carried out most of the construction work themselves and received cash grants from Save the Children equivalent to 800 U.S. dollars to hire skilled builders as needed. Following standard house specifications families chose the design with assistance from Save the Children's engineers, who also monitored the construction process to ensure that the work was completed in a timely and technically appropriate manner.

Despite formidable challenges in the local procurement of materials, the homes were **finished by late November**, providing families **a warm home by the winter**.

“Those were the worst days of my life. When we came back, everything was burnt; all my things from 55 years, all gone. Thanks to Save the Children we have a house again for the winter. (Karamatjon, 73)”



Karamatjon Yakubova, 73, talks to visitors at her family's home in Bazar Korgon (Jalal-Abad province, Kyrgyzstan), built by Save the Children, as one of her grandchildren looks in through the window.

Healthier and cleaner

Save the Children worked to restore and improve the health conditions of mothers and children affected by the crisis. **General health information about Kyrgyzstan** was scattered and often outdated. Save the Children's team researched **public health indicators** in collaboration with representatives from the Ministry of Health, and through coordination with other organizations, group discussions and field assessments. According to information collected in the third week of June, the conflict neither influenced the levels of child mortality nor caused major outbreaks of communicable diseases. However, the data highlighted two pre-existing **health problems for women and children** in southern Kyrgyzstan: high rates of **anemia** and **acute respiratory infections**, such as pneumonia. In addition, Save the Children confirmed the communities lacked basic medicines, particularly in primary health care centers in smaller towns and villages.

Save the Children is **supplying appropriate medicines and medical equipment** to treat these diseases: iron and folic acid supplements for the prevention and treatment of anemia among women and children, as well as antibiotics, oxygen concentrators and inhalators for the treatment of pneumonia and other respiratory problems in children.

Save the Children is buying these supplies **through local pharmaceutical companies** and, starting in late December, will deliver medicines and medical equipment directly to health facilities which, in turn, will distribute them to 4,000 women and 6,000 children. Save the Children will monitor the distribution and utilization of the supplies.

In the first stage of the emergency response, Save the Children distributed hygiene kits to families in the areas most affected by conflict. However, **sanitation was an unmet need**, as toilets and bathrooms had been destroyed during the conflict. Therefore, Save the Children is helping families to **build latrines** in their homes. This support is not only reaching the permanent houses constructed by Save the Children, but also those built by other aid organizations.

Save the Children is **building latrines for 540 families**. Half of the latrines will be new ones, with proper ventilation, appropriate to the environment and suitable to the local cultural norms. The other half will be repaired, with work ranging from new doors to the construction of walls and roofs.

Save the Children is following the same approach in building and repairing the latrines as it used to build houses. Save the Children is providing materials, technical assistance and supervision of construction activities and where necessary, families will receive cash grants to hire labor and clear the rubble in their compounds.

In addition, Save the Children is equipping 540 families with **hand washing basins** that can be moved around the house, consisting of a water tank and a sink. Save the Children will also provide soap and will promote better hygiene practices.



7-month-old Ariet (left) and Abdusamad, 1, pose for a photograph with their mothers Mirgul and Nilufar at Children's State Hospital in Osh (Kyrgyzstan). Save the Children is providing this hospital with medicines and medical equipment to treat anemia and respiratory infections.

A safe environment for children

During the summer months, Save the Children used school classrooms to establish **24 spaces** where **5,990 children** were able to express themselves, play, learn and interact with each other in a safe environment. These monitored playgrounds helped children to regain a sense of normalcy as they participated in games, drawing, painting, singing, puppetry, drama and storytelling. The centers offered a large range of activities: support to individual children facing particular psychological stress, support to parents in their care and protection role and sport and recreational activities to increase community cohesion. Save the Children trained 180 monitors to run child-friendly activities, and gave each center a monthly supply of toys, stationary, sports equipment and other materials.

With the beginning of the school year in September, children resumed their regular routines during the weekdays and Save the Children reorganized the locations of the spaces to support the areas that were directly affected by conflict. To date, **16 child-friendly spaces are still operating** with **3,248 children currently attending activities**. Save the Children is also training facilitators and providing materials for the establishment of extracurricular activities requested by children in schools, such as languages, dance and handicrafts.

The overwhelming situations experienced by families during a crisis can often lead to a **lack of appropriate parental care** and result in child protection problems. To ensure the wellbeing of children, Save the Children **trained 880 adults** on key issues such as children's rights, positive discipline in the classroom, responsible parenting, and social inclusion of children with disabilities. Monitors, parents, teachers, community leaders and local government officials learned about the importance of prevention and positive support in the development of children.

Save the Children's response also focused on the **protection of vulnerable children**. Save the Children identified 51 cases of children at risk, who were working, lacked appropriate parental care or were forcibly separated from their parents during the conflict. Currently, 23 cases of child labor have been solved and the children involved have returned to school. The parents of 16 children engaged in child labor received training about the detrimental consequences of work to their children's development. Other cases are being examined by the communities and social services. Save the Children visited 49 orphans, identified their needs, and referred their cases to social services. In child-friendly spaces, staff identified the children whose care situation was most precarious, such as those who had lost their homes or who were living with their extended families, and provided them special support. Children with symptoms and signs of stress reaction caused by the violence received psychological support, in individual or group therapy.

Save the Children **worked with government authorities and social services** to establish a **referral system** for children in need of protection. Since no single organization can provide comprehensive support, Save the Children worked to reinforce networks and improved the capacity of relevant government departments, developing procedures, standards, forms and databases. Social service providers worked together to identify cases of vulnerable children, study their needs, and plan for appropriate action. Together, they mapped their capacity and responsibilities for each type of issue. A local organization trained by Save the Children created a new service to educate parents of vulnerable children referred through this network on responsible parenting and child care. Save the Children also emphasized the need to prevent children from being institutionalized and to place them with their extended families instead.



Ulan (left), 19, and other boys and girls sing a song during the opening ceremony of a child-friendly space supported by Save the Children at Secondary School for the Blind, in Osh (Kyrgyzstan).

Educating children and youth for peace

Since 2008, Save the Children had worked with the national government of Kyrgyzstan to **include children with special needs**, such as hearing or visual impediments, into mainstream education. These children have traditionally been placed into schools for the disabled or were excluded from education altogether. Save the Children trained the commission that decides on these cases and brought 300 children back to primary and secondary school.

During the emergency, Save the Children and UNICEF co-led the education sector cluster, a mechanism to **coordinate education-related work of all humanitarian agencies**. In this role, Save the Children contributed significantly to ensure that education was a **priority in the emergency response**. In this capacity, Save the Children emphasized the need for education supplies, psychosocial support and a safe learning environment for displaced students. Save the Children worked to mobilize donors and get extended funding to support the development of education in Kyrgyzstan.

Due to the violence, many children were afraid to return to school, and many parents were hesitant to send their children to school. Save the Children actively contributed to the multi-agency 'Welcome to school' initiative, which indicated education needs and **supported the return to school after the conflict**. To build trust and encourage reconciliation, Save the Children and the Ministry of Education launched a **television campaign** that aired on national and regional channels on primetime for several days coinciding with the beginning of the school year.

Political and ethnic tensions remain high among young people, and need to be addressed in order to avoid a return to conflict.

Save the Children is working with youth, parents, teachers, and community leaders in **50 conflict-affected schools** to **promote peace and reconciliation**. Through group discussions, workshops and other events, young people from different ethnic backgrounds are working together to fight prejudices in their communities. Save the Children is also offering psychosocial support to help teenagers and their families to deal with post-traumatic stress in their communities.

Approximately 11,000 children, teenagers and youth are learning about their rights, how to resolve conflict and what it takes to be a leader. Using debates, competitions, community events, and campaigns, they are **educating their peers and reaching out to adults**.

Using these schools as a reference point, Save the Children is helping communities to identify common problems and propose a way to solve them. Staff is building their capacity to obtain funding for their projects, and to mobilize work and financial resources within the community. These projects contribute to **foster mutual understanding**, by bringing different ethnic groups together to work on a common goal.



Boys in school uniform pose for a photograph in Mombekova School in Osh (Kyrgyzstan) during the ceremony to mark the 'first bell', or first day of school, on September 1, 2010.

Funding

For this emergency response, Save the Children had a **total budget** of 5,816,288 U.S. dollars.

Save the Children received **contributions** from a large variety of sources:

Institutional grants

Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), through Save the Children Denmark
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), through Save the Children USA
United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), through Save the Children USA
U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), through Save the Children USA

Save the Children

Save the Children Australia
Save the Children Finland
Save the Children Italy
Save the Children Netherlands
Save the Children New Zealand
Save the Children Norway
Save the Children Sweden

Private funds

Anonymous donor, through Save the Children UK
Children's Emergency Fund (CEF), through Save the Children UK
Halaby-Murphy Fund, through Save the Children USA

Planning the next steps

Save the Children has been **working in Kyrgyzstan since 1994** in the relief, disaster preparedness and development sectors. Save the Children is one of four non-governmental organization representatives in the country's Humanitarian Country Team.

Before the current emergency, Save the Children focused on child protection, education, disaster-risk reduction and conflict mitigation programs. Recent work included programs to bring back children with disabilities to mainstream schools, livelihoods development for parents of institutionalized children and distributions of food and cash.

In Osh, Save the Children has worked since 2009 to strengthen the capacity of local communities to be better prepared for and reduce the impact of natural disasters. In close collaboration with the Ministry of Emergency Situations, Save the Children works to improve the knowledge and skills of local authorities, community leaders, teachers and children. Trainings and other activities have continued to run in parallel to the emergency response and will finish at the end of 2010.

After the emergency, Save the Children will support recovery and longer-term development goals in southern Kyrgyzstan.

In 2011, Save the Children is prepared to work in the areas of education, health, child protection and livelihoods, with a particular focus on youth and reconciliation.



Photos: Rodrigo Ordóñez/Save the Children

WE ARE the world's leading independent organisation for children.

OUR VISION is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

OUR MISSION is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

For more information, **contact**

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